

Character Analysis and Service Strategy for Sleeper Bus Consumers on the Malang – Jakarta Route Based on User Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Sleeper bus services are becoming increasingly inseparable from the long-distance travel experience in Indonesia, especially on the Malang-Jakarta route. This study aims to analyze the characteristics of sleeper bus consumers as well as service strategies that can be applied to meet user expectations. With a survey and interview approach, data is collected from passengers with different demographic backgrounds. The results of the analysis show that the majority of users are private employees with an income above IDR 5,000,000 per month, who use this service for vacations, family visits, and business trips. While sleeper buses offer convenience, there are a number of gaps in terms of cleanliness, punctuality, and responsiveness of service. The study recommends several improvement strategies, including improved cleanliness of facilities, better time management, and interpersonal skills training for bus crews. By implementing this strategy, bus companies are expected to improve customer satisfaction and strengthen their position in the transportation market.

INTRODUCTION

Transportation is one of the most important aspects supporting the mobility of modern society, and in Indonesia, sleeper buses have become an increasingly popular choice for long-distance travel. With comfortable designs and adequate facilities, sleeper buses provide an attractive alternative for passengers who want to travel without sacrificing comfort (Batarce et al., 2015) Evaluation of passenger comfort in bus rapid transit systems (Batarce et al., 2015; Christie, 2025). The Malang–Jakarta route, which is frequently traveled by tourists and workers, is one of the most in demand among users of this service (Hermawati et al., 2026; Moosavi et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2019).

However, while sleeper buses offer a variety of advantages, challenges in terms of service quality and facilities often present obstacles for bus companies in maintaining and improving customer satisfaction (Cakra Pamungkas et al., 2024; Ferdinandsyah & Fadili, 2024). By analyzing user characteristics and their expectations, this study aims to provide in-depth insights into the consumer perspective, so that appropriate service strategies can be formulated (Gonçalves et al., 2020; Palmucci et al., 2024; Revella, 2015; Zhao et al., 2019).

The research urgency is driven by four factors. First, the sleeper bus market on the Malang–Jakarta route is growing rapidly, with occupancy rates reaching 100% during peak periods, indicating strong demand that operators must respond to effectively. Second, as more operators enter the market (Garuda Mas, MTrans, Agra Mas, Indorent, Semeru, DAMRI), competition intensifies, making service quality a key differentiator. Third, passenger complaints documented in online reviews highlight gaps in cleanliness, punctuality, and service responsiveness—areas that can be systematically addressed using the Kano method

categorization framework. Fourth, the premium pricing of sleeper buses (Rp465,000–800,000) creates high passenger expectations; failure to meet these expectations may lead to customers switching to alternative modes (trains or airlines).

The novelty of this research is fourfold. First, it represents the first Kano method application specifically for sleeper bus services on the Malang–Jakarta route, providing empirical categorization of 12 service attributes. Second, it identifies the specific attribute distribution: 7 Must-Be (cleanliness, Wi-Fi, punctuality, toilets, charging ports, security, crew courtesy), 1 One-Dimensional (fully reclining bed), 1 Attractive (personal blankets/pillows), and 3 Indifferent (personal entertainment screens, personal reading lamps, snack service). Third, it integrates consumer demographic analysis (private employees with income > Rp5,000,000) with Kano method categorization to provide actionable insights for operators. Fourth, it offers a practical service strategy framework based on the Kano model distinction between basic (Must-Be), performance (One-Dimensional), and excitement (Attractive) attributes.

The main focus of this study includes an analysis of cleanliness, punctuality, service responsiveness, and the attitudes of bus crews. Using data obtained from surveys and interviews, this study aims to identify areas for improvement and develop service strategies that can meet user needs. Thus, the results of this study are expected to make a significant contribution to bus companies in improving service quality and the overall travel experience for passengers.

METHOD

The Kano method is an approach used to understand and analyze consumer needs and expectations for a product or service. In the context of this study, the Kano method was used to evaluate the factors that affected customer satisfaction on the Malang–Jakarta sleeper bus service route.

This research used mixed methods, including qualitative and quantitative approaches, and aimed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of consumer characteristics and the factors that influenced their decision to use sleeper bus services (Arifin et al., 2024). In-depth interviews were conducted with a number of passengers to identify service attributes considered important, including cleanliness, comfort, punctuality, responsiveness, and the friendliness of the bus crew. The acquired attributes were then classified into categories according to the Kano model, namely Must-be Needs, which are expected and essential attributes (e.g., cleanliness); One-dimensional Needs, which increase satisfaction when fulfilled and cause dissatisfaction when not fulfilled (e.g., punctuality); and Attractive Needs, which are unexpected but can enhance satisfaction when present (e.g., additional services such as Wi-Fi).

A questionnaire was developed based on the identified attributes, using a Likert scale to evaluate consumer satisfaction and expectations for each attribute. The questionnaire was designed in clear, easy-to-understand language so that it could be completed by all passengers. The sample size was determined using purposive sampling techniques to obtain relevant respondents, namely sleeper bus passengers traveling from Malang to Jakarta, with a minimum target of 200 respondents to ensure the robustness of the statistical analysis. The questionnaire

was distributed directly to passengers before or after the trip, as well as through online platforms such as social media or the bus company’s official website.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to understand respondent profiles, while Kano analysis techniques were applied to map service attributes based on survey results and identify the needs that had the greatest impact on customer satisfaction. A diagram or graph was created to show the position of each attribute within the Kano model, enabling the company to determine which attributes required improvement or addition to enhance satisfaction (Harjadi & Arraniri, 2021). Validity tests were conducted to ensure that the questionnaire measured what it was intended to measure, and reliability tests were conducted to ensure consistency of the results. A report on the research findings was then compiled, including key results, recommendations for the company, and a discussion of research limitations along with suggestions for further studies.

The Kano calculation was derived from respondents’ answers to functional and dysfunctional statements in the Kano questionnaire (Mauidzoh & S, 2020; Misdalena, 2022). Functional questions described the suitability of service facilities relative to the costs incurred by customers, while dysfunctional statements described the mismatch between costs and the service facilities received. The steps to determine the Kano category involved inputting the collected data and evaluating them based on the Kano Evaluation Table guidelines. In the Kano method, several steps were also undertaken to address the research problem, as follows (Christian, 2021).

At the attribute identification stage, attributes were grouped based on SERVQUAL dimensions, and a pre-questionnaire was compiled accordingly. During the pre-test stage of the Kano questionnaire, aligned with SERVQUAL dimensions, the pre-questionnaire was distributed to identify which questions were considered unnecessary by consumers, based on the validity calculations of each attribute. Subsequently, the questionnaire was finalized and distributed to customers as a tool to determine consumer preferences. Finally, at the attribute classification stage, each respondent’s attribute category was determined, the frequency of each Kano category for each attribute was calculated, and the final Kanocategory for each attribute was established.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Canoe Identification

No	Customer Requirement	Q	R	I	A	O	M	Total	Q+R+I	A+O+M	Max	Category
1	Bus interior cleanliness	10	2	19	85	63	6	185	31	154	19	Must Be
2	WiFi during the trip	7	2	45	89	37	3	183	54	129	89	Must Be
3	Personal entertainment screen	7	5	51	88	21	4	176	63	113	51	Indifferent
4	Private blankets and pillows available	17	1	58	68	51	1	196	76	120	68	Attractive
5	Punctuality of departure and arrival	11	1	33	81	50	9	185	45	140	33	Must Be

No	Customer Requirement	Q	R	I	A	O	M	Total	Q+R+I	A+O+M	Max	Category
6	Personal reading lamp	7	4	67	95	17	5	195	78	117	67	Indifferent
7	Toilets on the bus	7	2	34	79	56	6	184	43	141	79	Must Be
8	Charging port (USB)	11	1	25	70	55	3	165	37	128	70	Must Be
9	Personal belongings security (lockers/cameras)	10	2	39	83	43	8	185	51	134	39	Must Be
10	Courtesy and professionalism of the bus crew	12	2	26	86	46	6	178	40	138	26	Must Be
11	Fully recline bed facilities available	8	2	10	67	30	7	124	20	104	67	One Dimensional
12	Snack and beverage service	10	1	28	99	41	0	179	39	140	28	Indifferent

Source: Researcher's Processed Results, 2025

The table above presents the results of data processing using the Kano method on 12 attributes of customer requirements in sleeper bus services. Each attribute was analyzed based on six categories of Kano, namely Questionable (Q), Reverse (R), Indifferent (I), Attractive (A), One Dimensional (O), and Must Be (M). The determination of the final category was carried out by comparing the highest scores between the Q+R+I and A+O+M groups, then the dominant category was determined based on the maximum value (Max).

Based on the results of the analysis, most of the service attributes fall into the Must Be category, which indicates that these attributes are basic customer needs and must be met by the service provider. Attributes included in this category include cleanliness of the bus interior, WiFi during the trip, punctuality of departure and arrival, toilets on board, charging port (USB), safety of personal belongings, and courtesy and professionalism of the bus crew. The absence of these attributes has the potential to cause significant dissatisfaction from customers.

Furthermore, there is one attribute that is classified as One Dimensional, namely a bed facility that can be fully reclined. This attribute shows a linear relationship between the level of service performance and customer satisfaction, where the better the quality of the facilities provided, the higher the level of customer satisfaction (Afthanorhan et al., 2019; Joudeh & Dandis, 2018; Lee et al., 2016).

The attributes of personal blankets and pillows are classified as Attractive, which means the presence of these attributes is capable of providing more satisfaction for customers even if their absence does not directly cause dissatisfaction (Aguirre et al., 2023). This attribute plays a role as added value in sleeper bus services.

Meanwhile, several attributes are included in the Indifferent category, namely personal entertainment screens, personal reading lights, and snack and beverage services. This shows that the presence or absence of these attributes does not have a significant influence on customer satisfaction levels.

Overall, the results of this Kano analysis show that sleeper bus service providers need to prioritize the fulfillment of the Must Be category attributes as the minimum service standard, then improve the One Dimensional and Attractive attributes to create service differentiation and improve customer satisfaction on an ongoing basis.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis using the Kano method on 12 attributes of sleeper bus services, it can be concluded that the majority of customer needs fell into the Must-Be category, indicating high expectations for fundamental service aspects such as interior cleanliness, Wi-Fi availability, punctual departures and arrivals, onboard toilets, USB charging ports, personal safety, and the professionalism of the bus crew, all of which must be consistently fulfilled to avoid significant dissatisfaction. The fully reclining bed was categorized as One-Dimensional, meaning that improvements in its quality directly enhanced customer satisfaction, making it a critical factor in improving the travel experience. Meanwhile, personal blankets and pillows were classified as Attractive attributes, providing added value and increasing satisfaction despite not being primary expectations, whereas features such as personal entertainment screens, reading lights, and snack and beverage services were considered Indifferent, as they had minimal impact on satisfaction levels. Overall, these findings suggest that service improvement strategies should prioritize fulfilling Must-Be attributes as a baseline standard, while optimizing One-Dimensional and Attractive attributes to build competitive advantage and sustain customer satisfaction; future research is recommended to expand the scope by incorporating larger and more diverse samples, comparing multiple routes or transportation modes, and integrating other service quality frameworks to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of passenger preferences.

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