

Pilgrim Tourism: Tourist Experience in Accommodation Using Content Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study is to understand and examine the tourist experience of the pilgrims during their hotel accommodation towards their Pilgrim Tourism especially the religious places of Southern India.

Design/Methodology: Grounded Theory of Qualitative research approach was applied in the study to examine the perception of the pilgrim tourists in accommodation during their pilgrim tourism in Southern India studied for a period between August 2022 through December 2022. The 76 respondents belonged to Southern States of India namely, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. Thematic Content Analysis & Cohen's Kappa Coefficient were conducted in MAXQDA & MS Excel respectively.

Key Findings: Cleanliness, Hotel Staff, and Location of the Accommodation are the key factors or themes influencing the tourism experience of the tourists during their Pilgrim Tourism in Southern parts of India. It can be inferred that the two categories of tourists (Male & Female) had "Substantial" level of agreement in tourism experience towards cleanliness, "Substantial" level of agreement towards staff interaction, and "Near perfect" level of agreement towards the location of their hotel accommodation.

Implications: A visitor spends roughly 70% of his or her vacation budget on travel and accommodation, the majority of which is paid in advance in the traveller's home country as poor sanitation and hygiene have a greater impact on the tourists. A tourist's visit must include cleanliness and sanitation. Management of concerned religious shrines must focus on ensuring cleanliness, and sanitation improvement in consultation with local government.

Key Words: Thematic Content Analysis, Pilgrim Tourism, Experience, & Hotel Industry

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most lucrative industries is hospitality, which employs over 8% of the labour force and has generated an estimated 15 million new employment (Rhou & Singal, 2020) in recent years. It is one of the top industries in the nation luring FDI, or Foreign Direct Investment Creating a positive client experience is the aim of the hotel sector. It is vital to concentrate on each and every guest, whether that satisfaction comes from a fulfilling dinner, unwinding in a luxurious spa, or getting a good night's sleep while travelling. This area of the service sector that deals with lodging for guests is known as the hotel business (Kapoor & Kapoor, 2021).

Religious tourism refers to travel for the purpose of visiting or pilgrimage to places that are considered holy or significant to a particular religious faith. This can include visits to holy cities, shrines, temples, churches, and other religious sites, as well as participation in religious festivals and ceremonies. It is the substructure of Indian society and the hierarchy of religious values that underpins management, development, and policy goals. In India, each Pilgrimage is another well-known aspect of India's ancient culture. When people visit religious locations, they often have unique experiences that are

primarily made possible by psychological and emotional shifts in these settings. Additionally, religion significantly affects pleasure and life satisfaction (Shinde & Olsen, 2020).

Hotels are a type of accommodation that provides guests with a place to stay for a short period of time, typically for a fee. They typically offer guests a range of room options, including standard rooms, suites, and rooms with special features such as views or additional space. They play a key role in the travel and tourism industry, providing accommodation for travellers and tourists visiting a new location. They are often located in popular tourist destinations and are frequently used by business travellers as well (Headey et al., 2010).

The rise of pilgrimage tourism in India is hampered by a number of key obstacles, such as inadequate infrastructure, political instability, hygienic problems, misinformation of visitors, poor maintenance, availability of rooms, cost of hotel accommodation, location, quality of hotels, cultural differences, and a lack of sustainable development (Verma & Sarangi, 2019). The visitor experience at sacred sites, site management, sustainability concerns, issues important to various stakeholders, the significance of a religious journey, values, narratives, geographical and methodological issues, and the pilgrim experience topics are unexplored (Kim & Kim, 2019). Therefore, **RQ1**: What are the expectations and factors influencing the pilgrims towards hotel accommodation during their participation in religious tourism in India?

1.2 Hotel Industry & Pilgrim Experience

Brand image, Service quality, Trust, and price are the key factors influencing the determinants of Customer Loyalty towards hotel industry in Malaysia. In addition to traditional hotels, there are many alternative accommodation options available, such as bed and breakfasts, hostels, vacation rentals, and others. These options offer travellers more flexibility and a more personalized experience, and are becoming increasingly popular as travellers seek unique and authentic travel experiences (Parvez et al., 2018). Online Customer satisfaction with hotels is demonstrated by internet reviews. The comparison between pre-purchase expectations and perceived quality of goods and services after consumption, in accordance with expectation-confirmation theory, serves as the generation process of consumer satisfaction (Van & Nawijn, 2021).

Hospitality businesses often use the technical analytics of internet reviews to develop forecasts regarding factors like review usefulness (Ma et al., 2018), customer conversion rates (Ludwig et al., 2013), and hotel performance (Blal and Sturman, 2014). Gao et al. (2018) asserted that online textual evaluations of restaurants are rich sources of opinions, and they employed sentiment analysis to extract comparative relationships from such reviews in order to help restaurants discover their rivals and improve their competitiveness (Sivakumar et al., 2019). "Pilgrim Experience" is the journey and spiritual transformation of a person who embarks on a pilgrimage. The experience of a pilgrimage can be different for each person, but it often involves physical challenges, spiritual reflection, and a sense of community with fellow travellers. Pilgrims may also engage in rituals, such as praying at shrines or lighting candles, that have personal significance for them (Chang et al., 2020).

The pilgrimage is a time of introspection and self-discovery, and the journey can result in a profound transformation of one's beliefs, values, and perspective on life. The destination may also be seen as a symbol of hope, inspiration, and renewal, and the pilgrimage can provide a sense of closure or resolution to the pilgrim. Overall, the pilgrim experience is a deeply personal and meaningful journey that can have a lasting impact on an individual's life (Jacob, 2018). In a hotel, the three most important expectations of guests are cleanliness, communication, and comfort. Customer satisfaction is dependent on effective communication and ensuring that your rooms and amenities provide guests with the comfort they expect (Jyotsna & Prakash, 2022).

1.3 Indian Hotel Industry, Customer Experience & Customer Satisfaction

Tourism is regarded as a boon to the economy. It is a multi-segment market. While assessing the positive economic effects of tourism, we look at its contribution to national income generation, job creation, tax revenue growth, and foreign exchange generation (Khan et al., 2022). It provides numerous opportunities for emerging and developing economies. It generates jobs, strengthens the local economy, aids in the development of local infrastructure, and can aid in the conservation of the natural environment, cultural assets, and traditions, as well as the reduction of poverty and inequality (Shinde, 2022).

India is a country which witnesses a lot of diversity pertaining to its ecology, mythology, history, its geographical diversity in terms of mountains, plains and plateaus and also the medicinal diversity teaching us the Science of Life

(Ayurveda). India showcases a variety of tourism options which includes Ecological Tourism, Pilgrimage Tourism, Historical Tourism, Adventure Tourism, Medical Tourism and an upcoming Ayurveda Tourism (Peshave, & Gupta, 2017). India has a rich mythological heritage and is also known as the Land of Gods and Goddesses. Since ancient times, India, the most culturally developed country and the birthplace of many saints, poets, and philosophers, has seen an increase in Pilgrimage Tourism. Pilgrimage tourism attractions include Kedarnath, Badrinath, Amarnath, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Dwarka, Dargahs and Masjids in Delhi and Ajmer, and churches and temples in Goa (Collins-Kreiner, 2018). Indian air travel and advanced technological development in India's tourism society contribute to the expansion of the Indian hotel industry. The growth and development of the Indian hotel industry has coincided with the growth and development of Human Resource Management and their practises in Indian hotels, paving the way for improved performance (Padave & Kanekar, 2021).

Tourism destinations are increasingly providing experiential services to promote the development of their competitive advantage. The dimensions of customer engagement have different effects on customer experience (Mehta et.al., 2023). and identification, which in turn affect behavioural intention towards destinations (Hwang & Seo, 2016). A refined new metric scale for categorising customer satisfaction (Paulose & Shakeel, 2022) as determined by sentiment analysis. Topic modelling was used to better understand the various topics most frequently discussed by customers. The main reasons for dissatisfaction are the staff, service, room, cleanliness, slow booking, and hotel's pandemic response (Rather, 2020).

The VADER sentiment analysis algorithm was used by the authors to assess the sentiment of four key restaurant attributes: food, service, atmosphere, and value. Logistic Regression was applied to test the relationships between these attributes, assisting to help owners and managers of all types of restaurants better understand customer experience and suggest relevant and data-driven recommendations for them. Business intelligence and big data analytics techniques such as data mining, text analytics, sentiment analysis, and regression analysis were implemented in examining the relationship between affective evaluations (i.e., positive affect and negative affect) and customer satisfaction (Lee et.al., 2019). The study also discovered a negative effect of reviewer cognitive effort on satisfaction rating (Mathayomchan & Taecharungroj, 2020).

1.4 Perception of Pilgrims on the Hotel Accommodation

Spiritual tourism is a relatively new term in marketing, sociology, and business research. The significance of foreign tourists (Wang, 2015) to any destination is why this term was coined. Tourists reported that variables related to the perception of accommodation facilities, such as comfort and peace, safety and security, staff attitude and behaviour, and sanitation and hygiene are the key factors influencing their experience of stay in the hotels (Vidhya & Selvam, 2019).

A systematic content analysis of an online petition platform to explore public opinion on COVID-19 in the tourism context and the actions undertaken by the national government of China. The findings show that trip cancellations and postponements are the most common source of tourist concern, closely related to the issue of refunds. Ineffective communication about how to cancel and process refunds causes growing dissatisfaction with the service provided, resulting in a flood of complaints (Zha et.al, 2022).

One of the most important identities in new age hotel marketing is the website (Assiri & Shamsudeen, 2019). Potential and current customers, as well as members of the general public, scan detailed information on hotel products, services, special offers, contact numbers, location, and special assistance using Model of Internet Commerce Adoption (eMICA). Content analysis was used to systematically examine the themes in Asian tourism video advertisements using the hierarchy of luxury travel needs as a lens. To investigate the elements of luxury travel found in YouTube video advertisements uploaded by various National Tourism Offices from 19 Asian countries during the Covid-19 pandemic (Salem et.al., 2022).

Tirumala Tirupati's destination image as one of the most popular pilgrimage sites in India was examined using three Tourism Destination Image (TDI) components: cognitive, affective, and conative. Netnography was chosen as a research method, with data collected online via a Google Review website. Due to the religious nature of the site, visitors rated the overall experience as highly positive on an affective level (Nayak et.al., 2023).

The term "content analysis" refers to a group of analytic approaches that range from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses. The specific type of content analysis approach chosen by a researcher depends on the researcher's theoretical and substantive interests as well as the problem being studied.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researchers implemented Grounded Theory of Qualitative research approach in the study to examine the perception of the pilgrim tourists in accommodation during their pilgrim tourism in Southern India studied for a period between August 2022 through December 2022 as this duration consists of vacation to Schools, Colleges, and workforce in terms of Dussehra holidays & Christmas vacations among the respondents. The respondents belonged to Southern States of India namely, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala.

Qualitative Data collection method was applied to collect the responses from 80 tourists participating in Pilgrim Tourism in the form of Personal Interview and Telephonic Interview using Open-Ended Questions, where the transcripts of their responses were recorded and converted into text using Google Translate & Google Speech to Text. Thematic Content Analysis was conducted in MAXQDA with a pre-coding scheme was developed based on the Conventional Content Analysis mechanism of coding categories are derived directly from the text data. Cohen's Kappa was applied to measure inter-rater reliability in qualitative items.

Phase 1: Contextualizing

This phase comprises of De-contextualization necessitates fragmenting the data; in qualitative content analysis, this is accomplished by dividing the original text into meaning units and condensing and coding those units. The researcher selected the hotel accommodation reviews of the tourists participating in Pilgrim tourism to be analysed depending on their expectations and factors influencing their tourism experience.

Phase 2: Abstraction & Interpretation

This phase of methodology involves Selecting measuring units, Condensing & coding, creating categories & themes. Each paragraph (review) from the tourist was considered as the unit of the current study. The reviews collected from the tourists were categorized into "male" and "female" tourist. Deductive coding mechanism was applied by the researcher, where the researcher created a codebook with initial set of codes under the umbrella of the chosen themes based on an existing research framework or theory. The broader themes involve Cleanliness, Comfort & Facilities, Food, Internet, Location, Staff, Value for money to analyze the text in the reviews.

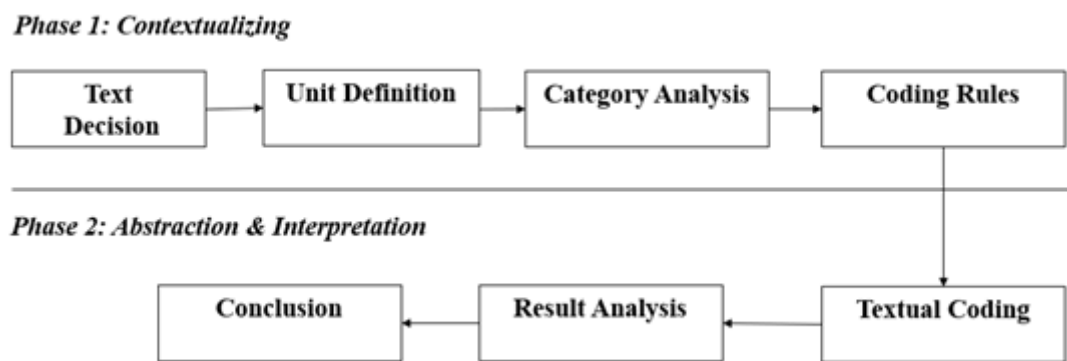


Fig 1: Qualitative Research Methodology

Words, characters, themes, paragraphs, concepts, items, and semantics are the seven major elements considered when performing content analysis. It is critical to collect the necessary information for the content analysis so that there is enough data for the intended content analysis. Table 1 illustrates the summary of code themes considered for the study.

Table 1: Summary of Code Themes

Codes	Conceptual Definition	Source
Amenities	An amenity is defined as "a desirable or useful feature or facility of a building or place".	Verma & Thakur, 2022
Clean	It refers to the hygiene and sanitation standards in hotel rooms.	Tiong et.al., 2021
Comfortable	It makes guests feel physically relaxed when one spends time in the hotel rooms/accommodation.	Rusmingsih et.al., 2021
Convenient	Tourist convenience is any element of tourist experience that saves the time and effort.	Teng et.al., 2022
Staff	Any person employed who offer the services to the guests and facilitate in smooth operations of the hotel.	Tunio et.al., 2021
Location	Geographical position of the hotel premises in terms of distance of accessibility.	Fang et.al., 2019

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Code System in hotel reviews of the pilgrim tourists reflected those amenities appeared three times (3.9 per cent), cleanliness fifteen times (19.7 per cent), comfortable nine times (11.8 per cent), convenient six times (7.9 per cent), staff twenty-four times (31.6 times), and location nineteen times (25 per cent) among the reviews collected from the tourists of their hotel accommodation during their pilgrim tourism experience. Table 2 describes the descriptive summary of the reviews.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Code System in Hotel Reviews

Codes	Frequency	Percentage	Code Coverage Percent
Amenities	3	3.9	6
Cleanliness	15	19.7	18
Comfortable	9	11.8	20
Convenient	6	7.9	12
Staff	24	31.6	26
Location	19	25	33
Total	76	100	100

Figure 2 illustrates the code matrix from the reviews collected from the tourists concerned with their tourism experience during hotel accommodation. The coding matrix portrays visual demonstration of the code themes which are compared against all the codes in the document. The codes pertaining to Clean, location and Staff are maximum in size respectively when compared to others. The other codes namely, comfortable, convenient, and amenities are least in size in the matrix indicating the least in appearances of the reviews.



Figure 2: Code Matrix in Hotel Reviews

Word Explorer Analysis among the hotel reviews collected from the pilgrim tourists depicted in figure 3 shows that the theme, “Staff” is the appearing maximum in the reviews describing the friendly nature, helpful, kind behaviour of the human resource of these pilgrim-based hotel accommodation.

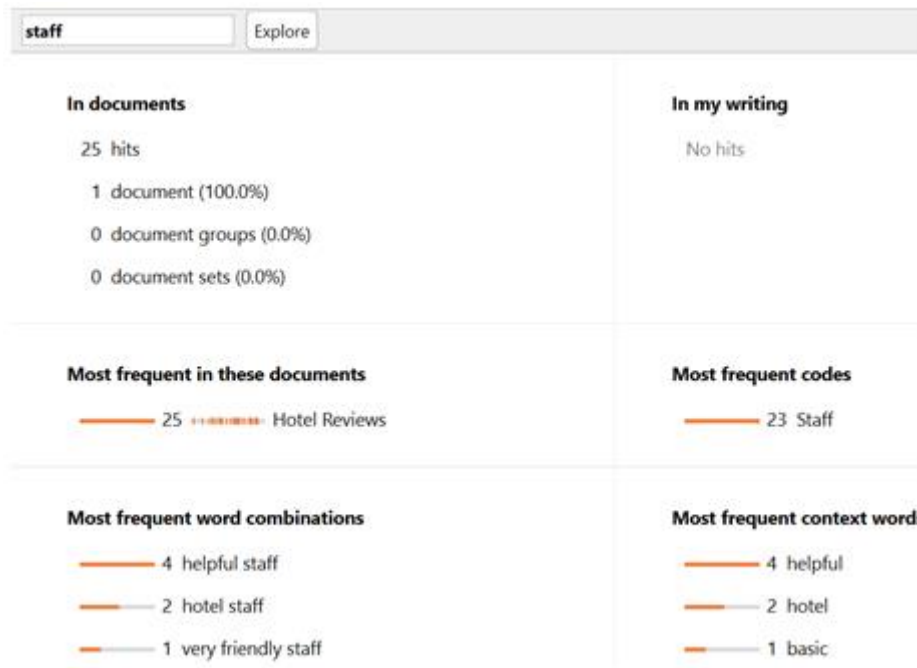


Figure 3: Word Explorer in Hotel Reviews

The process of systematically categorising excerpts from qualitative data in order to find themes and patterns is known as qualitative coding. It allows one to structure unstructured or semi-structured data like transcripts from in-depth interviews or focus groups into themes and patterns for analysis as shown in figure 4.

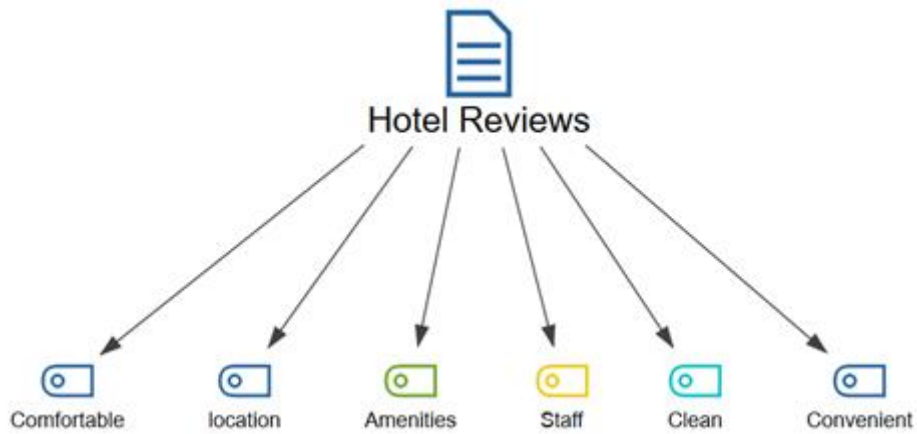


Figure 4: Code Hierarchy Model

Coding is the process of labelling and organising qualitative data in order to identify different themes and their relationships. These labels can be words, phrases, or numbers, but they prefer words or short phrases because they are easier to remember, skim, and organise. Figure 5 shows the Single case code model visually illustrating the number of times each code appeared in the tourist reviews.

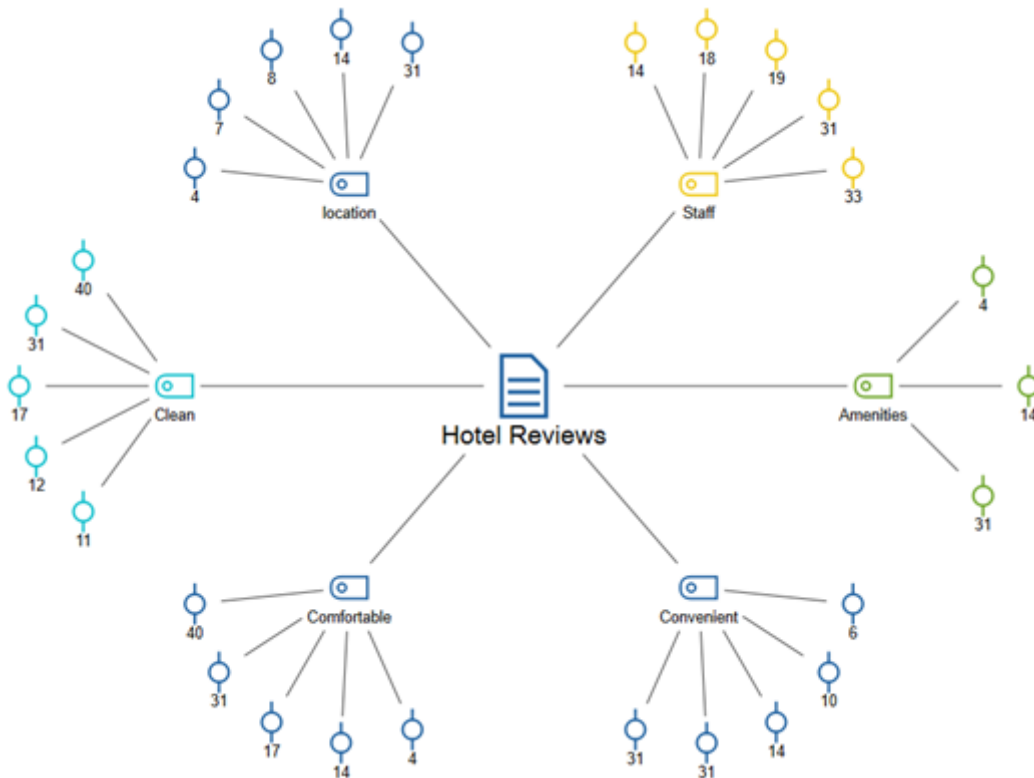


Figure 5: Single Case Code Model

Cohen's kappa coefficient is a statistic used to assess inter-rater reliability in qualitative items. It is generally regarded as a more robust measure than a simple percent agreement calculation because it considers the possibility of the agreement occurring by chance. In the study, the researchers approached two categories (male & female) of respondents to classify and rate the items mutually exclusive categories. Each category of gender was equally divided into 38 tourists from the total chosen sample for the study under Cohen Kappa.

Considering the descriptive analysis coding mechanism resulting “clean”, “Staff”, and “Location” as the most influencing factors of theme in considering the hotel accommodation among the pilgrim tourists, out of the total 76 tourist

respondents, the researchers investigated further by requesting the male and female tourists to rate themes as the prime factors in pilgrim tourism experience. Table 3 illustrates the 2X2 matrix of tourist categories for the three factors namely, Cleanliness, Staff, and Location respectively.

Table 3: Rating Table between Male & Female Tourists

Factor 1: Cleanliness		
Tourists	Male	
Female	Yes	No
Yes	30	8
No	6	32
Factor 2: Location		
Tourists	Male	
Female	Yes	No
Yes	36	2
No	5	33
Factor 3: Staff		
Tourists	Male	
Female	Yes	No
Yes	29	9
No	7	31

Table 4 demonstrates the relative agreement between the tourists was computed proportionately of the total ratings that the both category of raters said “Yes”, or both said “No”

$$p_0 = (y + n)/(tr)$$

Where both said “Yes” is denoted as “y”, both said “No”, denoted as “n”, total ratings from both the categories are denoted as “tr”. Tourists of both the categories are defined as raters on the basis of the key factors.

Table 4: Relative Agreement

Factors	Relative Agreement (p₀)
Cleanliness	.815
Staff	.857
Location	.985

The probability that the tourists could have agreed purely by chance is calculated by considering the total number of times Female said "Yes" divided by total number of responses multiplied by total number of times Male said "Yes" divided by total number of responses added to total number of times Female said "No" multiplied by total number of times Male said "No" multiplied by total number of times Male said "No".

$$p_e = p_y + p_n$$

Where p_e is the sum, p_y is the probability of raters said "Yes", and p_n is the probability of raters said "No". Table 5 reflects the probability of chance agreement between the two categories of the tourists.

Table 5: Hypothetical probability

Factors	Cleanliness	Staff	Location
p_y	.237	.237	.269
p_n	.236	.236	.230
p_e	.500	.500	.500

Cohen’s Kappa Statistic of the three factors, cleanliness, staff, and location is illustrated as below in table 6.

$$k = (p_0 - p_e)/(1 - p_e)$$

The notation indicates that, p_0 : Relative observed agreement among the raters, p_e : Hypothetical probability of chance agreement. Cohen's Kappa is always between 0 and 1, with "0" indicating no agreement and "1" indicating perfect agreement between the two raters as it attempts to account for the fact that raters may express their rating purely by chance at times.

Table 6: Cohen Kappa’s Statistic of Agreement

Statistic	Cleanliness	Staff	Location
k	.631	.714	.971
Interpretation	Substantial	Substantial	Near Perfect

Cohen’s Kappa Statistic (Sargent et.al., 2016) are observed in table 6 for the theme cleanliness resulted as substantial agreement ($0.80 \leq k \leq 0.60$), staff reflected substantial agreement ($0.80 \leq k \leq 0.60$) among the tourists towards and location projected near perfect agreement ($0.99 \leq k \leq 0.81$). It can be inferred that the two categories of tourists had "Substantial" level of agreement in tourism experience towards cleanliness, "Substantial" level of agreement towards staff interaction, and "Near perfect" level of agreement towards the location of their hotel accommodation.

3.1 Theoretical Implications of the Study

Pilgrimage tourism has grown in popularity and attention in India as a result of its significant deliverables, which include employment, national integration, and foreign exchange earnings. There are many challenges faced by the hotel industry, including increased competition, changing consumer preferences, the need for sustainable and eco-friendly practices, and the rise of alternative accommodation options, such as vacation rentals and home-sharing.

3.2 Managerial Implications of the Study

It is often associated with common issues with wear and tear, building damage, noise disturbance, and litter, and a more recent study looked into the issues of pilgrimage tourists. Drinking water is a significant issue for pilgrims. The pilgrims do not have enough drinking water. Startups that are innovative should be encouraged. Access to finance and

government support for ideation are required. The Indian tourism and hospitality industry has emerged as a key driver of growth in India's services sector.

3.3 Practical Implications of the Study

Pilgrimage tourism is a type of tourism that completely or strongly motivates tourists to achieve religious attitudes and practises. It can be classified as one of the oldest types of tourist attractions and a global experience in ancient times of spiritual growth. Tourists expect the location of their hotel accommodation to be within the vicinity of the sacred shrine or place they travel with religious devotion. Today's tourism is about more than just visiting and seeing sights. It is more about feeling and internalising a place. According to estimates, a visitor spends roughly 70% of his or her vacation budget on travel and accommodation, the majority of which is paid in advance in the traveller's home country as poor sanitation and hygiene have a greater impact on the tourists. A tourist's visit must include cleanliness and sanitation. They also decide not to visit an unsanitary location for fear of contracting infections and becoming ill.

3.4 Scope for Further Research

The aspiring researchers are welcome to focus on the emerging trends in pilgrim tourism in the areas of considering their motivational levels towards visiting scared places, challenges encountered, environmental feasibility study in temple cities like Uttarakhand, Amarnath, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Vaishnavi Devi especially when middle aged and senior citizens travel through the hardship due to extreme weather conditions and natural calamities.

4. CONCLUSION

Religious tourism is a form of cultural tourism and can be an important aspect of a person's spiritual journey, as well as a means of connecting with a community of fellow believers. Many of the world's major religions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, have important religious sites that attract millions of tourists each year. They have a significant impact on local economies, creating jobs and generating revenue for local businesses. However, it can also put a strain on local resources, such as housing and transportation, and can lead to overcrowding and environmental degradation in some areas.

Despite these challenges, the hotel industry continues to evolve and adapt, with many hotels investing in technology, such as online booking systems and mobile apps, to improve the guest experience and stay competitive. The industry also continues to focus on providing high-quality services, including personalized experiences and unique amenities, to attract and retain guests.

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