Exploring Female Travellers' Satisfaction in North Indian Destinations: an Empirical Study

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Abstract: This empirical study delves into the levels of satisfaction among female travellers visiting North Indian destinations. In an era characterized by increasing female empowerment and a growing trend of solo and group travel by women, understanding their satisfaction levels assumes critical importance. The research adopts a quantitative approach, incorporating surveys with female travellers exploring various facets of North Indian destinations. Findings reveal nuanced dimensions of satisfaction specific to female travellers, shedding light on their unique preferences and concerns. While safety perceptions, facilities at the destinations, value of money and hygiene standards, emerge as key determinants of satisfaction. The implications of this study extend to the tourism industry, policy makers, and destination managers, emphasizing the importance of tailoring services and amenities to cater to the evolving needs and preferences of female travellers. By enhancing female travellers' satisfaction, North Indian destinations can attract and retain this growing demographic, ultimately contributing to the region's tourism industry's sustainable growth.

Keywords: Female Travellers, Satisfaction, North Indian Destinations, Destination Management, Tourism Industry.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism, as one of the fastest-growing global industries, is experiencing a significant shift in traveller demographics and preferences. An integral part of this transformation is the rising prominence of female travellers. Over the past decade, women have increasingly asserted their presence in the world of travel, embarking on journeys both solo and in groups, and

reshaping the tourism landscape. This demographic shift not only reflects evolving gender roles but also underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of female travellers' experiences, expectations, and satisfaction. The Indian subcontinent, with its rich cultural tapestry, historical landmarks, and diverse natural landscapes, has become an enticing destination for travellers worldwide. Among the various regions within India, North India stands out as a captivating and diverse destination that offers a myriad of experiences, from the serene Himalayan mountains to the vibrant cities of Delhi and Jaipur. However, while North India boasts a treasure trove of attractions, understanding the specific factors influencing the satisfaction of female travellers in this region remains an underexplored area of research. This empirical study primary seeks to address this gap by assess the overall satisfaction levels of female travellers exploring North Indian destinations. Secondary, this study aims to identify the key factors influencing female traveller satisfaction. The research recognizes that the preferences and experiences of female travellers can differ significantly from their male counterparts due to a myriad of social, cultural, and safety-related factors. Thus, investigating female travellers' satisfaction becomes not only an essential aspect of catering to a growing market but also an imperative for promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism practices.

Literature Review

Tourism has become a cornerstone of many economies worldwide, emphasizing the importance of understanding and managing visitor satisfaction to maintain destination competitiveness. The comprehensive assessment of a traveller's journey, referred to as tourist satisfaction, is a multidimensional concept influenced by various factors, including service quality, destination characteristics, individual expectations, and prior experiences (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Several theoretical frameworks aid in comprehending tourist pleasure. Among these are the assimilation-contrast theory (Anderson, 1973), the disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980), and the expectancy-disconfirmation theory. These models elucidate how visitors establish expectations, compare them with actual experiences, and subsequently assess their satisfaction.

Service quality emerges as a central determinant of tourist satisfaction. Parasuraman et al. (1988) emphasize the importance of service elements like dependability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles in shaping the overall service experience. Additionally, the characteristics of the destination itself significantly influence tourists' perceptions and satisfaction. Factors such as the environment, cultural heritage, infrastructure, safety, and cleanliness have been identified as crucial in influencing how a destination is perceived (Chi & Qu, 2008). Individual traits such as age, gender, nationality, and travel motivation, as noted by Kim et al. (2000), have been shown to affect satisfaction levels. These traits lead to distinct expectations and perspectives, influenced by personal histories and trip objectives. Furthermore, emotional experiences, including happiness, enthusiasm, and relaxation, are closely associated with higher levels of satisfaction (Kim et al., 2000). Interactions with locals, the overall mood at the destination, and the general ambiance of the trip can also significantly influence female travelers' satisfaction.

The perception of receiving value for money spent plays a critical role in tourist satisfaction. Female travelers, like their counterparts, evaluate the relationship between actual expenses and the perceived value of their experience (Bigne, Sanchez, & Andreu, 2005). Positive interactions and recommendations from friends, family, or online sources have been identified as significant factors in enhancing satisfaction levels (Litvin et al., 2008). Conversely, negative experiences and interactions can lead to discontent, which may disproportionately affect female travelers. Loyalty to a destination is closely intertwined with tourist satisfaction. Satisfied female travelers are more likely to return to North Indian destinations, share positive experiences, and engage in favorable behaviors such as repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth (Chi & Qu, 2008). Valle (2006) explored the relationship between travel satisfaction and destination loyalty intention, confirming that higher levels of satisfaction lead to increased likelihood of repeat visits and recommendations. Environmental, sociocultural, and institutional sustainability are crucial aspects that require thorough planning and monitoring in the development of sustainable tourism (Jasrotia et al., 2021). A destination's cultural heritage, tourists' emotions can be influenced by factors such as cheating, begging, unclean conditions, and safety concerns (Chaudhary, 2000). Cleanliness, hygiene, and safety have been identified as crucial factors in destination selection (Kumaran et al., 2022), and addressing these issues is paramount in ensuring female travelers' satisfaction.

Aktaş, A., Çevirgen, A., & Toker, B., (2010) found significant relationships among destination attributes, tourist satisfaction, and behavioral intensions. The most influential factor in predicting tourist satisfaction was found to be the dimension of accommodation services, followed by incoming travel agency services and the facilities offered in Alanya. Lenggogeni, S., Chaira, A. (2021) found that emotional values, halal physical values, and quality values influence the destination experiences of female Muslim travelers in non-OIC countries. Kim, J. H. (2010) highlighted that memorable tourist experiences, including hedonism, novelty, local culture experience, refreshment, meaningfulness, and involvement, influence women tourists' desire to revisit tourism destinations. Wang (2022) explored the travel experiences of girlfriend getaways and their impact on satisfaction and the intention to revisit. The research identified key dimensions, including happiness, escapism, personal enrichment, leisurely experiences, and a sense of connection, all of which were found to have a significant influence on satisfaction and the intention to return among female travelers. Thomas (2018) explored the perceptions of safety among foreign solo female travelers in India, highlighting the normalization of unsafety and questioning the impact on gendered power structures. Kharisma et al. (2019) found the primary factors that significantly influence the satisfaction of female business travelers with the considered hotel attributes are the facility's safety and security, as well as the quality of the rooms.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a self-administered questionnaire consisting of two sections. The first section required participating tourists to express their satisfaction levels regarding various aspects. Respondents asked to answer on a five-point scale, with options ranging from 1

("very dissatisfied") to 5 ("very satisfied"). The third part of the questionnaire collected participants' demographic information, including gender, age, frequency of visits, expenditure, home country, and length of stay. To ensure the questionnaire's effectiveness and accuracy, a pilot test was conducted to identify and correct any potential issues or errors. The internal consistency of the questionnaire items was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α), with a reliability threshold set at an alpha value greater than 0.7 to ensure the robustness of the variables. Random sampling was employed to select the participants for this study. Questionnaires were distributed to the female tourist by share on social media tool, Travel Group, and Travel Agents etc. A total of 529 responses have been collected. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, median were employed. Principal component factor analysis was conducted to exclude indicator items with low loadings. Indicator items with communalities below 0.5 were removed from the analysis. A Varimax rotation technique was applied, and items with factor loadings of 0.50 or higher were retained for inclusion in a factor.

3. RESULT

3.1 Demographic Characteristics
The majority of the respondents (78.6%) are Indian nationals, while 21.4% are international respondents. This suggests that the study primarily includes participants from India but also has a small international representation.A significant proportion (83.9%) of the respondents reside in urban areas, while 16.1% come from rural areas. This indicates that the sample is predominantly urban, which aligns with the urbanization trend in India.The age distribution shows that the majority of respondents fall within the age groups of 18 to 25 (45%) and 26 to 40 (48.6%), suggesting a relatively young and working-age population in the study.A diverse educational background is observed among the respondents, with the highest proportion having completed post-graduation or higher (52%), followed by graduation (38%). This indicates a well-educated sample.The majority of respondents are single (56.1%), while 42% are married. A smaller percentage is divorced/separated or chose not to disclose their marital status.A significant portion of respondents are engaged in private service (48%), followed by students (32.1%). This highlights the presence of a working population and students in the sample.The income distribution shows that a considerable number of respondents (51%) have an annual income of up to 3 lakhs, while 19.7% report an income above 7 lakhs. This suggests income diversity within the sample.

Table I: Characteristics of Respondents			
Variables		**N (529)**	**%**
Nationality	Indian	416	78.6
	International	113	21.4
Residential Area	Urban	444	83.9
	Rural	85	16.1
Age	18 to 25	238	45.0
	26 to 40	257	48.6
	41 to 60	34	6.4

Education	Up to 10	11	2.1
	10th to 12th	42	7.9
	Graduation	201	38.0
	Post Graduation & above	275	52.0
Marital Status	Single	297	56.1
	Married	222	42.0
	Divorced/Separated	6	1.1
	Not prefer to say	4	.8
Occupation	Govt Service	33	6.2
	Private service	254	48.0
	Business	25	4.7
	Student	170	32.1
	Housewife	47	8.9
Annual Income	Upto 3 lacs	270	51.0
	3.1 to 5 lacs	97	18.3
	5.1 to 7 lacs	58	11.0
	Above 7 lacs	104	19.7

Nearly half of the respondents (49.3%) engage in short-duration trips of 1-3 days, while a substantial portion (31.2%) opt for 4–6-day trips. This suggests a preference for relatively brief travel experiences among a majority of participants.The data indicates that travel frequency varies, with a significant portion traveling once a year (29.7%) and others traveling more frequently, such as once in 3 months (22.9%) or once in 6 months (26.3%). This shows a diverse range of travel habits within the sample.The majority of respondents (63.7%) prefer to travel with their families, while a substantial number (23.4%) travel with friends. A smaller percentage travels solo (11.7%), highlighting varied travel patterns among participants.

Table II: Travel Pattern of Respondents			
Variables		**N (529)**	**%**
Duration of travel time	1-3 days	261	49.3
	4-6 days	165	31.2
	7-10 days	48	9.1
	Above	55	10.4
How often do you travel?	Once in month	112	21.2
	Once in 3 months	121	22.9
	Once in 6 months	139	26.3
	Once in a year	157	29.7
Travel Pattern	Solo	62	11.7
	Family	337	63.7
	Friends	124	23.4
	Travel Group	6	1.1

3.2 Descriptive Analysis of Satisfaction Levels of Female Travellers in Selected North Indian Destinations

The table III presents the descriptive statistics of various service quality items and their mean and standard deviation values, which are responsible for female traveller satisfaction. The mean values indicate the average score given by the female travellers for each service quality item on a 5-point scale, where 1 represents 'extremely dissatisfied' and 5 represents 'extremely satisfied.' The standard deviation values show the amount of variation or dispersion in the data. According to the table III, the highest mean value is for "shopping facilities at destination" (M = 4.02), followed by "availability of food outlets" (M = 4.03), suggesting that female travellers in these destinations found shopping and dining options to be particularly satisfactory.Similarly, "Accommodation options" (M = 3.93), "Entertainment facilities" (M = 3.95), and "Overall experience" (M = 3.92) received relatively high mean scores, indicating favorable perceptions of these aspects of the travel experience.

Conversely, the lowest mean satisfaction score was recorded for "Public washroom hygiene & sanitation at destination" (M = 3.03), suggesting that there may be significant room for improvement in this area. "Hygiene standard in transport services" (M = 3.27) and "Women reserved Parking facilities" (M = 3.30) also received comparatively lower mean scores, indicating potential concerns regarding hygiene and parking options.Furthermore, "Variety in food" (M = 3.89), "Availability of transport facilities for destination" (M = 3.89), and "Availability of tourist information centre" (M = 3.73) scored relatively high, reflecting positive aspects of the travel experience. Overall, this analysis highlights that female travelers in selected North Indian destinations tend to be satisfied with accommodation, entertainment, shopping, and dining options. However, there is a need for improvement in areas related to hygiene, sanitation, and security. These findings can inform efforts to enhance the travel experience for female travelers in these destinations.

Table III: Descriptive Analysis of satisfaction levels of female travellers in selected North Indian destinations		
Variables	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Accommodation options	3.93	0.74
Accessibility options	3.84	0.71
Entertainment facilities	3.95	0.75
Overall experience	3.92	0.69
Availability of tourist information centre	3.73	0.87
Signage & information	3.74	0.81
Guide service	3.69	0.81
Availability of boarding & lodging services	3.92	0.78
Facilities at lodging	3.85	0.74
Over all experience at lodging	3.85	0.76
Public washroom hygiene & sanitation at destination	3.03	1.31
Cleaning & Hygiene standard are followed at hotels	3.69	0.97

Cleaning & hygiene at food outlets	3.51	0.98
Hygiene standard in transport services	3.27	1.09
Overall Hygiene standards at destination	3.48	0.99
Shopping facilities at destination	4.02	0.67
Availability of food outlets	4.03	0.65
Availability of health & medical facilities	3.78	0.86
Internet facility	3.67	0.87
Banking/ATM facility	3.85	0.84
Entertainment facilities	3.92	0.74
Women reserved Parking facilities	3.30	1.03
Price of the accommodation	3.73	0.83
Price of the transport	3.67	0.79
Price of food	3.71	0.83
Quality of food according to the price	3.58	0.89
Visiting to this destination is value for money for female travellers	3.71	0.80
Availability of transport facilities for destination	3.89	0.68
Options in transportation according to budget	3.73	0.77
Reservations for female in transportation	3.60	0.90
Frequency of transport service	3.68	0.83
Variety in food	3.89	0.72
Quality of food	3.76	0.77
Taste of the food	3.77	0.73
Security at destination	3.62	0.87
Security system at hotels	3.83	0.81
Tourist police station help when required	3.64	0.86

The standard deviation values vary across service quality items, with the highest value for public washroom hygiene & sanitation at destination (1.31), followed by hygiene standard in transport services (1.09), women reserved parking facilities (1.03), and cleaning & hygiene at food outlets (0.98). This indicates that there is a high amount of variation or dispersion in the data for these service quality items, and the responses are not consistent among the female travellers. Overall, the standard deviation values suggest that the responses are relatively consistent across the other service quality items.

3.3 Factors Affecting Satisfaction of Female Travellers
The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was found to be 0.947, indicating that the data was highly suitable for factor analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 13674.450$, df = 666, p < 0.001), indicating that there were significant correlations between the variables. Therefore, we can conclude that the data is suitable for factor analysis.

Table IV: KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.947
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	13674.450
	df	666
	Sig.	.000

To find out the dimensions of service quality which are responsible for female traveller satisfaction, "Principal Component Factor Analysis" and "Varimax Rotation" was used to identify the dimensions after collecting data from respondents. The measurement scale consisted of 37 items which are responsible for female traveller satisfaction. First, the factor analysis was performed on the items to identify the underlying the factors of female traveller satisfaction with latent root criterion, Eigen value more than 1.0 (Pett et al., 2003), and a factor loading of 0.50 as a threshold for inclusion items in a factor. Factors having Eigen values (latent root criterion) higher than one would be treated as significant (Hair et al., 2006). As shown in Table IV, the latent root criterion outcomes demonstrated that thirty-seven items were submitted for factor analysis in which seven dimensions were extracted. Three items were extracted as their loaded value assess under 0.5. The thirty-four items explained 67.88% of the variation in the data.

Table V: Rotated Component Matrix[a]			
Variables	**Loadings**	**% of Variance (67.88)**	**No. of Items (34)**
Factor1: Facilities at the Destinations			
1 Entertainment facilities	.750	41.97	6
2 Banking/ATM facility	.730		
3 Internet facility	.666		
4 Shopping facilities at destination	.660		
5 Availability of health & medical facilities	.658		
6 Availability of food outlets	.643		
Dimension 2: Value of Money			
1 Price of food	.740	7.10	6
2 Visiting to this destination is value for money for female travellers	.688		
3 Price of the accommodation	.682		
4 Price of the transport	.665		
5 Quality of food according to the price	.642		
6 Options in transportation according to budget	.560		
Factor3: Hygiene Standards			
1 Hygiene standard in transport services	.804	5.17	5
2 Public washroom hygiene & sanitation at destination	.745		
3 Overall Hygiene standards at destination	.743		

4	Cleaning & hygiene at food outlets	.734		
5	Cleaning & Hygiene standard are followed at hotels	.668		
Factor4: Lodging Facilities				
1	Over all experience at lodging	.757		
2	Facilities at lodging	.748		
3	Availability of boarding & lodging services	.689	4.25	6
4	Guide service	.665		
5	Availability of tourist information centre	.623		
6	Signage & information	.606		
Factor 5: Accessibility and Accommodation				
1	Accessibility options	.764		
2	Overall experience	.705	3.48	4
3	Accommodation options	.701		
4	Entertainment Facilities	.632		
Factor6: Food Experience				
1	Quality of food	.699		
2	Taste of the food	.671	3.10	3
3	Variety in food	.647		
Factor7: Transportation and Security				
1	Tourist police station help when required	.666		
2	Reservations for female in transportation	.552	2.80	4
3	Security at destination	.542		
4	Frequency of transport service	.518		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 11 iterations.

Factor1: Facilities at the Destinations
In this dimension, it has been found that six items exist having factor loading. These items are, "Entertainment facilities" (.750), "Banking/ATM facility" (.730), "Internet facility" (.666), "Shopping facilities at destination" (.660), "Availability of health & medical facilities" (.658),"Availability of food outlets" (.643). The total variance explained by the dimension is 41.97%.Female travellers' satisfaction may be heavily influenced by the availability of these facilities.

Factor 2: Value of Money
This factor represents the "Value of Money" and explains 7.10% of the variance with siz items loading. These items are, "Price of food" (.740), "Visiting to this destination is value for money for female travellers" (.688), "Price of the accommodation" (.682), "Price of the transport" (.665), "Quality of food according to the price" (.642), and "Options in transportation according to budget" (.560). Travelers' perception of value for money, especially regarding food and overall expenses, is likely to impact their satisfaction.

Factor3: Hygiene Standards
This factor relates to "Hygiene Standards" and explains 5.17% of the variance.Key variables contributing to this factor include, "Hygiene standard in transport services" (.804), "Overall Hygiene standards at destination" (.743), "Public washroom hygiene & sanitation at destination" (.745), "Cleaning & hygiene at food outlets" (.734), and "Cleaning & Hygiene standard are followed at hotels" (.668). This suggests that female travellers prioritize hygiene and cleanliness standards at different places they visit.

Factor 4: Lodging Facilities
This factor represents "Lodging Facilities" and explains 4.25% of the variance. Important variables include, "Over all experience at lodging" (.757), "Facilities at lodging" (.748), "Availability of boarding & lodging services" (.689), "Guide service" (.665), "Availability of tourist information centre" (.623), and "Signage & information" (.606). The quality and availability of lodging services, along with related amenities, are likely factors influencing satisfaction.

Factor 5: Accessibility and Accommodation
This factor is related to "Accessibility and Accommodation" and explains 3.48% of the variance. Key variables include, "Accessibility options" (.764), "Overall experience" (.705), "Accommodation options" (.701), and "Entertainment facilities" (.632). The ease of accessibility to destinations and the overall travel experience, including accommodation choices, are important factors.

Factor6: Food Experience
This factor represents "Food Experience" and explains 3.10% of the variance. Key variables include, "Quality of food" (.699), "Taste of the food" (.671), and "Variety in food" (.647). The quality, taste, and variety of food offerings are likely to impact satisfaction with the culinary experience

Factor7: Transportation and Security
This factor relates to "Transportation and Security" and explains 2.80% of the variance.Variables such as, "Tourist police station help when required" (.666), "Reservations for female in transportation" (.552), "Security at destination" (.542), and "Frequency of transport service" (.518)are significant contributors.Aspects related to transportation services and security measures may affect female travellers' satisfaction.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Previous research has been useful in examining visitor satisfaction; however, studies focusing on female travelers to north Indian sites have been scarce. Consequently, research done elsewhere may not accurately represent the experiences of those who traveled to northern India. This study adds bricks to generalize the tourist satisfaction and by selecting female traveller who visited north Indian destinations during the study period. Furthermore, the results of this study may provide valuable insights for destination managers and tourism

planners seeking to comprehend the significance of visitor pleasure in driving repeat visits to north Indian attractions. This empirical study reveals that female travellers' satisfaction in selected North Indian destinations is influenced by a range of factors. These factors are "Facilities at the Destinations," "Value of Money," "Hygiene Standards," "Lodging Facilities," "Accessibility and Accommodation," "Food Experience," and "Transportation and Security."

While assessing the satisfaction level aspects such as shopping, dining options, and lodging facilities receive high satisfaction level. Specifically, maintaining high hygiene and sanitation standards, particularly in public washrooms, should be a priority for destination authorities. Additionally, continued efforts to enhance transportation services and security measures are essential to ensure the safety and convenience of female travellers. These findings provide valuable insights for stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry, including destination managers, hoteliers, and transportation providers. By focusing on these dimensions and addressing safety concerns and promoting a secure environment, they can work toward enhancing the overall travel experience for female travellers. This, in turn, can contribute to the growth of tourism in North Indian destinations and help create a more inclusive and satisfying travel environment for all.

Several limitations also associated with the study. Sampling bias may restrict the generalizability of results, as the sample might not fully represent the diverse population of female travellers. Language barriers, despite translation efforts, could have influenced responses. Additionally, external factors that can impact satisfaction were not included in the study's scope.
To build on this research, future studies could adopt a longitudinal approach to explore the evolving dynamics of female travellers' satisfaction. Incorporating qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus groups can provide deeper insights into the nuanced aspects of their experiences. Comparative studies with other regions in India or international destinations can shed light on the unique factors influencing satisfaction. Further exploration of specific cultural elements within North Indian destinations and their impact on female travellers' satisfaction is warranted. Additionally, analyzing the influence of external factors like global events, economic conditions, and political stability on satisfaction can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the tourism landscape. These future directions will advance our knowledge and guide efforts to enhance the travel experiences of female tourists in North Indian destinations.

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