

SUMMARY FINDING CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

CHAPTER VI

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7.1 Introduction

Darjeeling is known as the queen of hills because of its strategic location and natural beauty. Darjeeling is located at an altitude of approximately 6,700 feet in the lap of great Himalayan peaks. This destination has been a well-known tourist and has attracted numerous visitors over the generations. Darjeeling is famous for its exquisite varieties of rhododendrons, the snow-white magnolias, very rare species of orchids The legendary toy train as well as lush green tea gardens spreading all over Darjeeling are the major attractions to the tourists.

Plate: 7.1

Kanchenjunga Towering Over Darjeeling



Source: www.darjeeling-tourism.com

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The West Bengal Interim Report identified Darjeeling district as “the most highly frequented tourist destination in all of West Bengal”, with over 5, 00,000 domestic and Around 50,000 premium class foreign tourists, near 10% of total arrival, contribute lion's share to the rupee volume of tourism business in Darjeeling. The major flow of tourists begins in October and ends before Christmas (economic times report, June 2010). The phenomenal growth of the tourism industry has its an impact on the demand-supply gap for hotel rooms during the peak season and as a result of this, stakeholders have started to think of alternative forms of tourism. Rural tourism in the form of homestays and in some cases the tea tourism is getting popular in this region (Das & Roy, 2016). The concept of homestay in the pristine rural area is becoming a major attraction to the tourists who are mostly nature lovers and prefer to stay in rural areas.

The main objective of the tourism policy of the government of India is to promote tourism as an important driver of economic growth to alleviate poverty and generate alternative livelihood for the people living in the rural areas by alternative tourism initiatives. This modest study is to relate different perceptual constructs for drawing meaningful conclusions.

7.2 Research Design and Framework

The study has adopted a causal research design procedure and the study is based on a cross-sectional study for testing a conceptual model considering the prior studies in the field of tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The hypotheses have been formed keeping in view the systematic procedure followed in SEM. The causal relationship among the constructs is also established based on the model. The structured and open-ended questionnaire is developed to collect the data from the field survey. The study is conducted from 2017 to 2019 covering both peak and slack season.

The questionnaires are designed considering similar studies in this area and pre-tested using a small sample of twenty tourists and five homestay operators to purify the items that are not very specific

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and not clear to the respondents. The questionnaire items are designed to measure the service quality, accessibility, destination image, safety & security, and satisfaction of the visitors. SEM technique is applied to establish the causal relationship among the constructs mentioned above. Another questionnaire is framed to study the viability of homestays run by the new generation entrepreneurs.

The homestays are dispersed all over the hill and there is no sampling frame available to the researcher as such, the snowball technique has been resorted to select the homestay operators. After getting the support of homestay operators, the data have been gathered from the respondents using a systematic random sampling technique. The data have been collected after a lot of persuasions and visiting the homestays on several locations to have an adequate sample size for applying the SEM procedure.

The socio-demographic characteristics of tourists' visiting homestays in Darjeeling hills have been collected to have an understanding of the typology of tourists who prefer to stay in homestays. From the survey result, it is evident that the majority of tourists come from different places of the country and around twelve percent of the tourists are foreign nationals. So far as the male and female visitors are considered around fifty-five percent are males and the rest are females. The maximum number of tourists is in the age group of thirty-six to fifty years. The majority of the tourists are service holders followed by self-employed persons. The tourists usually contact tour operators for their stay in homestays and a large section of tourists book their accommodation through destination marketing organizations. A substantial percentage of tourists visit homestays following the recommendations of friends and relatives. It is also observed that the majority of the tourists stay in a particular homestay for less than two days and around thirty percent of the tourists prefer to stay for three to four days.

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7.3 EFA and CFA Findings

It is to be reiterated that EFA has been applied to understand the latent dimensions in the data set for the constructs that have been considered in the study. An orthogonal rotation (varimax) has identified six latent factors with eigenvalues more than one. The results indicate that KMO value is higher than 0.6 which can be considered the adequacy of the sample size is sufficient for drawing inferences. In the subsequent analysis, CFA has been applied to a data set to establish the factor structure. From the CFA results, it is observed that six major dimensions appear distinct, and no miss-loading and split loadings have been noticed. As discussed in detail earlier that all the factor loadings are found to be more than 0.5 which can be considered quite acceptable.

7.4 Testing of Normality, Reliability, and Validity

The skewness and kurtosis of all the variables are also reported to test the departure from normality. It is found in the study that the skewness of most of the variables in the data is under the threshold limit of 3 and kurtosis of less than the cut-off limit of 8. Therefore, the data in the study do not violate the assumption of univariate normality. Furthermore, the Mardia's coefficient (multivariate kurtosis) of 4.572 and the critical ratio of 1.125 are also reported and found less than the threshold limit of 5 and 1.96 respectively. Therefore, the multivariate normality is established. So far as reliability of the scales is concerned, Cronbach's alpha is found to be more than 0.7 which may be considered as the threshold value.

To establish content validity, the inter-item correlation must not be too high. The study has observed the highest correlation coefficient of 0.59 which is less than the threshold limit of 0.90. Hence, the content validity is established. In this study, the loadings of the items in their respective constructs are more than 0.5 as a prescribed limit. The Composite reliability of all the constructs

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taken into the study is found to be more than the cut-off limit of 0.70. Therefore, it can be inferred that construct validity is established in the study.

The result of the study shows that all the items in the study are perfectly loaded in the relevant constructs and the t-value associated with each item in the constructs is significant at 0.05 levels. Furthermore, the AVE of all the latent constructs exceeded the minimum cut-off limit of 0.50 which measures the amount of variance for the specific indicators captured by the latent constructs. It implies that the constructs are sufficiently explained by the respective indicators. Above all, the squared multiple correlations of the individual items also exceeded the minimum cut-off limit of 0.3. Therefore, the convergent validity of the scale is established.

It is observed in the study that all the square root of AVE estimates of each construct are greater than the corresponding inter construct correlation estimates. Therefore, the test of discriminant validity is established in the CFA. Furthermore, the Maximum Shared variance (MSV) and Average Shared Variance (ASV) have also been reported to test discriminant validity. It has been found that the AVE of each construct is greater than MSV and ASV and hence, discriminant validity is established.

7.5 Model adopted in the study

The SEM model has been re-specified by taking into consideration the covariance between safety & security and destination image, accessibility and safety & security, and covariance between accessibility and destination image to get a better result of different fit indices. As a result of re-specification, the relative chi-square has become 1.730 compared to the value of 2.055 in the proposed model. Similarly, the GFI value is increased from 0.882 in the proposed model to 0.901 in the re-specified model. As it is mandatory that the GFI value is to be greater than or equal to 0.90. In the same way, the value of CFI has increased from 0.924 in the proposed model to 0.948 in the re-specified model. Again, the value of RMSEA has been reduced to 0.047 in the re-specified

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model from 0.057 in the proposed model. Due to the improvement in the model by incorporating co-variances the model specification is more appropriate so far its validity is concerned.

7.6 Major Hypotheses of the study

The results of SEM using AMOS are used to test the hypothesis. The z statistic associated with the estimated parameter coefficient is used to test the hypotheses. The model has tested whether service quality affects the satisfaction of tourists and it is observed that there is a positive influence of quality of service provided by homestays on tourists' overall satisfaction. It is also further tested the impact of service quality on the behavioral intention of tourists and the results indicate that service quality is a dominant factor influencing the behavioral intention of the tourists to a considerable extent. Again it is evident from the hypothesis testing results that accessibility to the destination directly influences the tourists' satisfaction. In order to assess the relationship between accessibility and tourists' behavioral intention, it is found that these two constructs are positively associated. However, the relationship is not found to be significant. So far as the safety and security of tourists are concerned, it has been observed that there is a strong positive association between satisfaction and perceived safety & security. It is noteworthy to infer that the image of the destination and tourists' satisfaction are significantly associated. It is therefore concluded that the destination image is a good predictor of tourists' overall satisfaction. Also, the image of the destination is supposed to have a strong association with the behavioral intention of the tourists. However, in this study, it is observed that the relationship is positive but not significant. Lastly, it is also observed that behavioral intention and tourists' satisfaction are significantly associated.

7.7 The Mediation Effects

It is observed from the study that both the conditions of mediation effect as formulated by Baron and Kenny (1986) are satisfied since the independent variable service quality is significantly impacted the dependent variable which is behavioral intention. Furthermore, the independent

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variable service quality significantly affects the mediating variable which is overall satisfaction. As such it can be concluded that satisfaction cannot totally explain the cause of the relationship that exists between service quality and behavioral intention. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that satisfaction operates as a partial mediator in a model.

Considering the independent variable safety & security with the dependent variable behavioral intention without a mediating variable overall satisfaction, it has established a significant positive relationship between the constructs. Furthermore, the relationship is still significant after mediating variable which that is overall satisfaction incorporating into the model. It has signified that the overall satisfaction has not fully explained the relationship between safety & security with behavioral intention. Therefore, overall satisfaction plays the role of a partial mediator in the model.

Again, there is a significant association between independent variable destination images with the dependent variable behavioral intention without a mediating variable overall satisfaction in the model. However, the relationship among them is not significant after incorporating mediating variable which is overall satisfaction. As such, it can be inferred that the mediating variable overall satisfaction fully explains the cause of the relationship between destination image and behavioral intention. Therefore, satisfaction acts as a full mediator in the model.

Similarly, there is a significant relationship of independent variable accessibility to dependent variable behavioral intention. Once the mediating variable overall satisfaction is incorporated in the model, the relationship between them becomes insignificant. It can be concluded that the mediating variable overall satisfaction does fully explain the relationship between accessibility and behavioral intention. Hence, overall satisfaction plays the role of a full mediator.

7.8 SWOT and TOWS Findings

A modest attempt study has been made for measuring the viability of homestays using both SWOT and TOWS analysis which is to some extent qualitative in nature but findings sometimes give an

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insight of the performance of firms. From the IFE matrix, it is clear that natural ambiance is the most important strength for homestay operators. It is also observed that unique culture, favorable climatic condition, and organic farming are also important to promote a homestay venture.

From the EFE matrix, it is evident that the promotion of culture is an important opportunity for the homestay operators. It is to be mentioned that employment opportunities of local people and opportunities for promoting pristine areas may also be considered vital opportunities for the homestay venture.

From the analysis of TOWS, four distinct strategies are suggested in the study. It has been observed that visitors like to explore the pristine place to enjoy the beauty, serenity, and tranquillity surrounding the destination. It is also observed that the local folks get themselves involved in various activities associated with homestay services.

Indiscriminate growth of homestays may harm the environment where the local government is supposed to take steps so that the environment is not degraded. It is also observed from the informal discussions with homestay operators that the road condition and connectivity are two major hindrances to promote homestay business. There is a dearth of marketing avenues to promote the homestays and attract a large number of tourists without depending on the local tour operators which charge a hefty commission for sending the tourists. It is also revealed during the course of data collection that the infrastructure of the homestay is to be improved to attract tourists to visit the destination where the homestay is located.

7.9 Managerial Implications

In this study, different perceptual variables have been incorporated with the objective of relating these variables with the tourist the satisfaction which is the dependent variable. Overall, tourist satisfaction is associated with regard to the quality of service provided, the destination image, the accessibility factor, and safety & security The findings of the study has revealed that one of the

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main concerns at the homestays is the condition of roads linking this homestay. The road is not properly maintained which adversely affects the behavioral intention which is the most important factor for generating positive word of mouth. The development of infrastructure thus is very important and the local government must take initiative to develop the road condition to generate livelihood opportunities of the rural homestay owners who do not have adequate opportunities to generate additional income to sustain throughout the year. There is a need to involve local authorities and community members to put pressure on the local Government to improve the road condition and transportation facilities to make the destination more attractive and to improve the sustainability of homestays operating in a pristine environment and support a large section of vulnerable people who have ventured into this profession.

The results of this study also reveal that there is a definite relationship between the quality of services provided and tourist satisfaction and it has been observed that quality of service significantly affects the tourists' overall satisfaction. It must be pointed out that the homestay operators do not have the proper training to run their tiny businesses. It is evident from the survey that most of the operators are first-generation entrepreneurs and do not have any formal training as how to run the venture to improve the satisfaction of the guest which is very important for generating positive word of mouth. The concept of homestay has become very popular particularly in underdeveloped and developing countries since it can provide more employment opportunities to the local people and communities as well (.Praveen & Kumara, 2020). Local government and NGOs can organize training programme to impart training to run the homestays efficiently to satisfy the basic requirements of the guests.

To create satisfaction for service recipients in which the homestay business operators are to consider building homestays in an atmosphere that is likely to attract tourists due to the image of the destination. Homestay services must develop a good image in the eyes of customers which will generate positive word of mouth and advertising cost can altogether be avoided (Muangmee, 2020)

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Tourists who visit the homestays covered in this study mostly have expressed satisfaction with the destination image, accessibility, safety & security, and service quality. The visitors are to be convinced about the safety & security aspects through tangible physical evidence as this aspect is considered most important to affect overall satisfaction. Similarly, the frontline staffs involved in providing service is required to instill a sense of confidence among the visitors. As such, there is a need to provide training to the staff to maintain the desired level of service quality to meet the expectation of the visitors (Dzulkifli, 2020)

In the perspective of homestay tourism, visitors' satisfaction is a vital factor since it has a tremendous influence on the loyalty of tourists which popularises the tourism destination. Olorunniwo et al., (2006) have opined that the direct influence of overall quality of service provided significantly impacts the behavioral intention, on the other side, the indirect effect of satisfaction as a mediating role is a robust driving force for the behavioral intention in the context of service delivery. Hence, loyalty is mainly influenced by satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). The degree of visitors 'loyalty signifies the positive preferences of tourists' which influences the degree of overall satisfaction. It can be easily inferred that a higher level of tourist satisfaction may generate higher profits as well as higher revenues for the homestay service providers. The perceived level of visitors' satisfaction has significant implications for the homestay tourism stakeholders. Homestay operators must understand the significance of tourists' satisfaction that leads to destination loyalty, repeated visits, spreading a positive word of mouth, and propensity to pay higher prices (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Bigne *et al.*, 2005; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

7.10 Limitations and Scope for further study

This study has got several limitations that must be addressed at this stage to the inquisitive readers. The one limitation of the study is that the researcher has failed to cover the entire Darjeeling hills due to constraints of time and financial resources. As such, the findings of the study may not be generalized

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for all types of homestays operating in India. The second limitation of the study is that, due to the non-availability of a proper sampling frame, the researcher is compelled to adopt a snowball technique to select the homestays. The other limitation of the study is that a few antecedents of satisfaction are considered for developing a model. In this study, the role of women in running the homestay has not been considered that is also a limitation of the study.

The study has been conducted using some popular constructs that are reported in different literature. A robust study can be undertaken taking into consideration a large number of antecedents variables that affect the tourists' satisfaction. For example, entrepreneurship ability, managerial capabilities, nightlife entertainment facilities, and similar other variables can be incorporated for measuring the satisfaction of the visitors. Future studies may be undertaken to discern whether the gender differences influence the satisfaction of visitors'. In particular, in the hilly region, it requires a lot of physical stamina to roam around nearby places that may not be feasible for the women visiting a destination. As such, the level of satisfaction for the two segments of visitors may differ to a considerable extent if the gender variable is incorporated.

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