



Understanding the Variables Driving India's Tourism: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract: Tourism significantly contributes to India's economic growth, employment generation, and cultural exchange. This study explores the key factors influencing the development of India's tourism industry, using secondary data and qualitative analysis. It evaluates socio-economic, infrastructural, policy-related, and environmental elements affecting domestic and international tourist inflow. The impact of government initiatives such as "Incredible India" and "Dekho Apna Desh," increased digital access, improved transport and hospitality infrastructure, and India's rich cultural and natural heritage are examined. External factors like global economic trends and geopolitical stability are also considered. The study employs a descriptive and analytical approach, with findings based on data collected from 106 randomly selected respondents between July 2023 and January 2024—87.7% of whom were Indian. Using Chi-square tests and cross-tabulations, the research assesses the impact of demographic variables such as gender, age, education, socio-professional status, marital status, and nationality on future travel intentions. Among these, only age significantly influenced the likelihood of exploring India, offering useful insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders.

Keywords: Indian Tourism • Inbound tourism • Demographic factors • Chi square test.

Introduction

Early Tourism Development in India: The development of tourism in India began with a significant step in 1945, when the Government of India established a committee under the leadership of Sir John Sargent, then Educational Adviser to the government. This initiative marked the first formal and structured effort toward promoting tourism in the country. A more strategic and planned approach was incorporated during the Second Five-Year Plan (1956), with the concept of tourism development progressing through the Second and Third Five-Year Plans via the planning of unit complexes.

Tourism received a major boost with the implementation of the Sixth Five-Year Plan, wherein it was officially recognized as a catalyst for economic development and social integration. This ushered in a new chapter for Indian tourism, elevating it as an essential component of national growth.

Despite these early efforts, it wasn't until the 1980s that India's tourism industry began to gain real momentum. The government introduced key measures, most notably the National Tourism Policy in 1982. In 1988, a comprehensive master plan was developed by the National Committee on Tourism to foster sustainable growth. This was followed by the



formulation of the National Action Plan in 1992, and the introduction of a national strategy for tourism promotion in 1996.

A turning point came with the New Tourism Policy of 1997, which clearly defined the roles of the Central and State governments, public sector enterprises, and the private sector in tourism development. Additionally, it was decided that local governance structures such as Panchayati Raj institutions, along with NGOs and youth groups, would actively participate in the development of tourism infrastructure and services.

Present State and Attributes of Tourism in India: Today, tourism is the largest service industry in India and a key contributor to foreign exchange earnings, having generated US\$6.73 billion in 2010. The country witnesses an influx of over 5 million foreign tourists and 562 million domestic tourists annually. With a growth rate exceeding 9.4%, the industry was projected to surpass US\$275.5 billion by 2018, compared to US\$100 billion in 2008.

The Ministry of Tourism, which spearheads initiatives like the “Incredible India” campaign, is the apex body responsible for regulating and promoting tourism across the country. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, India holds immense potential for tourism growth over a ten-year horizon and is poised to become a top global destination between 2009 and 2018.

India's global tourism ranking has improved, climbing three spots in the World Economic Forum's 2009 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report. It ranked 11th in the Asia-Pacific region and 62nd globally. With several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, a rich biodiversity, and vibrant cultural traditions, India ranked 14th for natural resources and 24th for cultural resources. Its air transport infrastructure was ranked 37th.

The Country Brand Index (CBI) survey by Future Brand recognized India as the top “value-for-money” destination and the second-

most historically significant. It was also ranked among the top five in authenticity, arts, and culture, and listed as the fourth most promising emerging destination for business travel. In the “Rising Stars” category—highlighting nations likely to become leading destinations within five years—India appeared alongside the UAE, China, and Vietnam.

India is internationally renowned for its exceptional hospitality, welcoming travelers from around the world with warmth and generosity. The country's cultural diversity, festive traditions, and inclusive values offer a wealth of unique experiences. Tourist attractions range from science museums and tech parks supporting science-based tourism, to spiritual sites, pilgrimage centers, and pristine natural landscapes. India is also a haven for eco-tourists, adventure seekers, and heritage travelers, offering experiences like trekking, river rafting, wildlife safaris, heritage trains, and historical monuments.

The country has also become a major hub for wellness tourism, attracting visitors to yoga retreats, Ayurvedic centers, and health resorts in scenic hill stations. Tourists frequently purchase traditional Indian handicrafts—including jewelry, carpets, leather goods, ivory items, and brassware—which account for over 40% of tourist expenditure.

India's prominence in medical tourism continues to grow rapidly. Despite economic challenges, the medical tourism sector remains one of the fastest-growing segments, driven by cost-effective, high-quality treatments and comprehensive medical services.

Efforts to support tourism have been ongoing for decades. During the 1970s, metropolitan planning bodies were established in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai to manage urban growth. In more recent years, the government has introduced numerous incentives to attract tourists and private investors. These measures include granting travel industry export house status, interest rate subsidies, reduced import duties, and tax



exemptions. Hospitality and tourism have also been designated high-priority sectors for foreign direct investment, allowing up to 51% automatic foreign equity participation and full rights for non-resident Indian investors. Regulations for licensing tour operators, travel agencies, and tourist transport services have been relaxed to promote ease of business.

India celebrated its first Tourism Day on January 25, 1998. In 1999, the “Explore India Millennium Year” campaign was launched, featuring major events such as the India Tourism Expo in New Delhi and Khajuraho, and a dedicated cultural float in the Republic Day Parade. The “Visit India Year 2009” campaign was introduced at the International Tourism Exchange in Berlin to position India as a leading vacation destination. From April to December 2009, collaborative promotional efforts were made involving airlines, hotels, and tour operators.

Future Outlook: India’s tourism sector is projected to maintain strong growth. According to a joint study by the World Travel and Tourism Council and Oxford Economics through the Tourism Satellite Accounting (TSA) model in March 2009:

- By 2019, the sector is expected to employ 40 million people, ranking it as the world’s second-largest employer.
- The tourism demand in India is predicted to grow by 8.2% annually from 2010 to 2019, placing it third globally.
- Capital investment in the travel and tourism sector is projected to grow by 8.8% annually during the same period.
- India is estimated to attract US\$94.5 billion in tourism-related capital investment by 2019.

Hypotheses

H1: Gender of tourists impacts significantly on their willingness to explore India in the future.

H2: The willingness to explore India tourism in the future is significantly influenced by the tourist's age.

H3: Marital status impacts significantly on the willingness to explore India in the future.

H4: Socio-professional status reflects significantly on the willingness to explore India in the future

H5: Educational level depends significantly on the willingness to explore India in the future.

H6: Nationality plays a significant role in the willingness to explore India in the future.

Literature review

Most study on tourism was directed towards tourism sector of various nations (Valle et al 2006 ; Swarbrooke & Horner 2007; Hung & Hung, K 2011 ; Masiero & Nicolau 2012; Chen et al 2014 ; Petrick & Durko 2015; Yousefi & Marzuki 2015 ; Lohmann & Netto 2016; khan et al 2020; Boukhedimi 2024; Lee & Kim 2023).

Tourism, the most desirable human activity, can reshape the global socio-cultural, economic, and environmental environment (Hire & Ran 2023). Hemmati et al. (2013) describe that tourism is identified as the third largest economy due to the stimulus it provides for the economic growth of nations and regions that do not have complementary activity to the primary sector, such as small cities and rural areas. Individuals are naturally curious about new locations and love to travel. The word "tourist" was first recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1811. Traveling means a journey in a circuit which has a return to a point of departure (Leiper 1983). The travel and tourism industry creates employment in the tourist industry and makes a huge contribution to the world Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Obadić & Marić 2009).

Long-distance travel, cross-country tourism, health and wellness vacations, medical tourism, country and culture tourism, ecotourism, spirituality tourism, sports and adventure travel, and beach vacationing are all emerging tourist destinations, based on global trends. In addition, foreign tourists are getting



progressively younger, which means that more inexperienced tourists are taking vacations in order to revitalize themselves. The pandemic of the coronavirus has brought about a public health emergency, general worry and fear, and interruptions in economic and social life. The tourism and hospitality sectors experienced substantial financial setbacks due to pandemic-driven shifts in consumer behavior (Yadav et al., 2021). The uncertainty and fear surrounding the global outbreak were reflected in the reactions of equity markets (Mahdikhani, 2022). To understand public sentiment during the crisis, researchers employed social-mediated crisis communication models (Ghosh & Sanyal, 2021; Obembe et al., 2021).

The pandemic also brought about a significant surge in remote work and had a notable impact on employment rates (Koch et al., 2021). International travel saw a dramatic drop, with the number of international travelers plummeting from 1,461 million in 2019 to just 381 million in 2020—representing a 74% decrease and a loss of approximately 1,080 million passengers compared to the previous year. This downturn in global tourism and hospitality catalyzed digital advancements in the sector. The integration of technology has provided unparalleled opportunities for transformation within travel and hospitality (Sharma et al., 2021). Innovations in digital tools have significantly reshaped how organizations and consumers interact (Saheb et al., 2021). Virtual tourism, in particular, has emerged as a popular alternative to traditional travel. It allows users to explore landmarks and destinations through immersive previews, offering an engaging experience from afar (Peštek & Sarvan, 2020). This approach holds great potential for redefining tourism's value proposition. Virtual reality (VR), which enables lifelike and interactive simulations of destinations, is opening new avenues for the travel industry (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021),

changing how people discover and connect with travel experiences.

As virtual tourism continues to evolve, a deeper exploration of current research and future possibilities is essential. It presents a cost-effective and innovative way to engage travelers. Previous studies have emphasized that technological integration will be central to future tourism trends (Bowen & Whalen, 2017), and the pandemic has only accelerated the adoption of these digital solutions (Korstanje & Clayton, 2012). Additionally, international travel companies are expected to adopt technology-driven strategies to expand their footprint in developing markets (Sanjeev & Birdie, 2019). The research currently coming out emphasizes how technology is facilitating tourism in numerous ways, and social media consumer feedback has become a strong force that affects tourist choices (Sahoo et al 2017; Kitsios et al 2022).

Future trends are also influenced by virtual and augmented reality (Mohanty et al 2020). Although past studies focused on technology, particularly virtual tours, as the dominant force promoting tourism in the future, an exhaustive study incorporating science performance mapping as well as intellectual structure analysis has not been carried out. In-depth reviews establish the climate for upcoming research by giving a sense of the past and current state of the research theme (Chandra et al 2022). The limited review narrows the field of virtual tourism research. The current research aims to fill this gap by revealing the past, present, and future of virtual tourism and revealing new directions for research. Leaving aside their hassle, global tourism has various advantages. Thus, Darıcı et al (2023) mentioned that International tourism is a key economic growth strategy, adding to the diversity of the economy of most developing countries. Inbound tourism is, however, critical in enhancing tourism reputation.



Fig. 1. Map of India (Source: <https://www.vectorstock.com/2025>)

Table 1: Number of internationals tourist arrivals (ITAs) in India from 2019 to 2022

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of ITAs	17.91	6.33	7.00	14.33

Source: Bureau of Immigration, Govt. of India

According to figures collected by the Indian Bureau of Immigration, Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India increased from 7 million in 2021 to 14.33 million in 2022 (51.15% growth). However, it should be noted that the Corvid 19 outbreak has had a considerable influence on tourism mobility in India (6.33 million in 2020 versus 17.91 million in 2019).

India attracts tourists for a variety of reasons, including its climate, nature, and historical significance. So, it is critical to examine inbound tourists from various countries. According to data from 2014 and 2015, the United States is the leading source of tourists to India. For the rest of the years, Bangladesh surpassed the United States as the leading contender. The United Kingdom has a continuous third place on this ranking. The remaining spots are mostly filled by countries such as Canada, Sri Lanka, Australia, Malaysia, Russia, Germany, Japan, and so on.

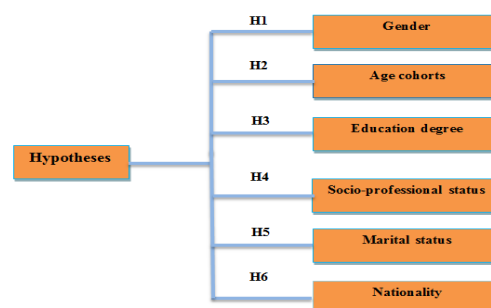


Fig. 2. Study hypothesizes

Methods

Simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample respondents. Moreover, the research study is descriptive and analytical. It is descriptive in the sense of the present and it includes facts and findings. It is analytical in the sense of collected data and information. The data was collected from **106** sample respondents in the study during July 9, 2023, to January 26, 2024 through online questionnaires. This article experimentally investigated the effect of different factors on the willingness to explore India. Because intention and behavior are the core components of this study, it was vital to investigate the theory of planned behavior (TPB), which is regarded as one of the finest



fundamental theory-driven models for describing entrepreneurial intention. Statistically, it is vital to note that the data were analyzed using SPSS software (Version 26), and the Chi-square test was used to assess the study hypotheses. The final sample size (n) was 106, and the findings could be extrapolated throughout the population (N), because the central limit theorem (CLT) shows that the sample is representative once the number.

Results and discussion

The study sample is predominantly comprised of men (59.4%). The most representative age group is respondents aged between 18-25 years old (58.5%), followed by those between 26 and 35 years old (23.6%). Concerning Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Variables	Frequency (n)	Rate (%)
Gender	106	100 %
Men	63	59.4 %
Women	43	40.6 %
Age	106	100 %
18-25 years (Generation Z)	62	58.5 %
26-35 years (Generation Y)	26	23.6 %
36-46 years (Generation Y)	18	15.1 %
47 years and above (Generation X)	03	2.8%
Education degree	106	100 %
Undergraduate and graduate	47	44.4%
Ph.D. / post-graduate	59	55.6%
Socio-professional status	106	100 %
Employed	40	37.7%
Seeking opportunity	66	62.3%
Marital status	106	100 %
Married	34	32.1 %
Unmarried	72	67.8 %
Nationality	106	100 %
Indian	93	87.7%
Non-Indian	13	12.3%

Source: Survey data

Reliability test

The first part of the study result belongs to its reliability. In this sense (Wahyudi 2016) stated that when the value of Cronbach alpha is between 0.6 and 0.8, it is considered reliable.

educational level, the majority hold a postgraduate degree (55.6%), while a small portion completed undergraduate and graduate studies (44.4%). Regarding socio-professional status, the largest proportion of participants seeks an opportunity (62.3%). The distribution of marital status isn't balanced because 67.8 % of the respondents aren't married. Moreover, it is important to note that 87.7% of the study sample is from India.

For instance, the prevalence of men and generation Z category predominant with high educational and low economic attainments may have some impact on the results of this study. These nuances must be taken into account to ensure a comprehensive and contextualized interpretation of the data.

However, a value which is superior to 0.5 is also acceptable (Zaigham 2021). The Cronbach alpha value obtained in this study is 0.707 for 15 items, which confirm the reliability of the survey.



Table 3: Hypotheses results

Hypothesis	Variables	p-value	Results of study
H1	Gender	0.224	There is not significant difference
H2	Age	0.352	There is not significant difference
H3	Education degree	0.614	There is not significant difference
H4	Socio-professional status	0.197	There is not significant difference
H5	Marital status	0.144	There is not significant difference
H6	Nationality	0.707	There is not significant difference

Source: Survey data

According to the table above, the results are not significant ($\alpha > 0.05$). As a result, all characteristics investigated show no significant variations in willingness to visit India in the future. Thus, tourism is one of the primary driving forces in this area.

Conclusion

This paper investigates the effect of demographic and socioeconomic variables on tourism intentions in India. As a result, it has been determined that both men and women participate in tourism. The conclusions of this study are valuable. While size (N=106) may be considered as a limitation, (CLT) confirms that a sample size of 30 or more numbers is significant (Chang et al 2006; Polya 1920 ; Johnson 2004 ; Berenson et al 2012; Bajpai N 2009; ElSherif 2021 ; Boukhedimi et al 2023 ; Sriram 2023).

Another limit is that the survey was conducted electronically, and incorporating it with a face-to-face study could produce more meaningful results. Furthermore, participants demonstrated higher concentration than several characteristics (for example, unmarried, unemployed, and particularly respondents aged 18-25 years old). Other researchers are encouraged to consider these ideas.

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