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A Study of Tourist Satisfaction Level Towards Religious Tourism: A Case of Katra Town

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to outline the way in which customer satisfaction can be measured in the Religious Town of Katra (J&K UT) as regards to the Jammu and Kashmir tourism industry and the means by which this could be developed further to provide a measure of satisfaction with other destination in the State. The tourism industry is made up of a number of different sectors including the travel, hospitality and visitor services sector. Within each of these sectors there are a number of individual enterprises that can be utilized to measure customer satisfaction as part of their quality assurance programs. This has become more common as the industry recognizes the importance of quality issues in an increasingly competitive environment.

This paper outlines some of the satisfaction level parameters that can be used to measures and develop an enterprise level framework. It also proposes the idea that it may be useful to extend satisfaction measurement from a focus on the enterprise to that of the destination. This is a much more complex task that at the individual enterprise level but may be worth the effort as destinations compete for market share.

Keywords : *Satisfaction measurement, tourism, destinations, religious tourism, tourists.*

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to explore the rationale for, and difficulties of operationalizing, the measurement of tourists' satisfaction with their experiences in particular destinations. It suggests that the on-going systematic measurement of satisfaction with destinations is a valuable exercise that will have tangible benefits, but acknowledges the difficulties of doing this in a meaningful manner. The principal argument presented is that the measurement of tourists' satisfaction with a particular destination involves more than simply measuring the level of satisfaction with the services delivered by individual enterprises. There needs to be a much broader, more encompassing means of measuring satisfaction, one that relates closely to the motivations which tourists have for visiting the destination in the first place.

The tourism industry consists of a number of different sectors including the travel, hospitality and visitor services sector. Within each of these sectors there are a number of individual enterprises that provide a range of services to people who are travelling away from their home environment. This travel could be for a variety of reasons including for pleasure, to visit friends and relatives, to work on a short term basis, to attend conferences, to participate in business activities, or any of a number of specific reasons. While the industry distinguishes between the various groups according to their purpose for travel, convention has it that all these short-term travelers are defined as "tourists". Likewise, the industry distinguishes between various 'markets' according to their place of origin (international, domestic, intra-state, interstate, etc). These distinctions are not relevant to this paper which is concerned with all these forms of tourism.

Tourists visit destinations and engage in various activities while there. These destinations can be classified in various ways and at various scales of analysis. For example, Katra the holy town could be regarded as a destination for national as well as international visitors while Reasi based shrines could be one for people from either local or national tourists. At a different scale, a city or even a region could be regarded as a destination. This paper is concerned with all these levels. It is not concerned with individual enterprises which exist within certain destinations. As noted below, there appears to be adequate analysis of tourism satisfaction at the individual enterprise level. What is missing is a broader view that looks at the way tourists respond to the totality of their experiences in a particular destination irrespective of the particular activities that they engage in.

2. Katra based Religious Tourism impact on economy of J&K State

The Katra town is located 52 Kms from Jammu. It is one of the most popular pilgrim destinations for Hindus the world over as it is the base camp for the pilgrimage to the Holy shrine of Shri Mata Vaishnodevi ji in the famed Trikuta Mountains in the Shivalik Range. Visited by nearly 8 million pilgrims the Holy cave of Mata Vaishno Devi is at a distance of 13 kms from Katra. Katra can be approached by the pilgrims from Jammu Railway Station as well as the Jammu airport by taxies, private buses and buses run by the State Road Transport Corporation. Helicopter Services also operate between Jammu to Katra and Katra to Sanjhi Chhat daily. It takes up to 1½ hours of driving through the lower Shivalik hills to reach Katra from Jammu.

Jammu and Kashmir's economy is predominantly dependent on agriculture and allied activities, but tourism has been equally dominant in the State. Though before the insurgency intensified in 1989, tourism formed an important part of the Kashmiri economy and dominated the tourist influx in the State, but after insurgency conditions and unfavorable tourist environment in the valley, the tourism economy in the Kashmir valley was worst hit. However, the holy shrines of Jammu and the Buddhist monasteries of Ladakh continue to remain popular pilgrimage and tourism destinations. Every year, thousands of Hindu pilgrims visit holy shrines of Vaishno Devi and Amarnath which has had significant impact on the state's economy. The Vaishno Devi yatra alone contributes Rs. 475 crore to the local economy annually.

Even though the tourism in the Kashmir valley has rebounded in recent years and in 2009, the state became one of the top tourist destinations of India, still the tourist inflow as regard to religious tourism towards Katra has increases in leaps and bounds and has been continuously contributing toward the economy of the State.

"The income from the annual pilgrimage to the holy cave-shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi on Trikuta Hills touched to Rs. 72.28 lakhs in 2009 and is expected to reach at Rs 86 lakhs in 2015, against 69.05 lakhs visits. The pilgrimage has emerged as an economic boon for Katra, the base camp of the pilgrimage, generating an income of Rs 474.36 crores per annum, providing employment to about 27,000 people. The sum excludes the amount received by SMVDSB as offerings or donations as also the amount spent in Jammu, Patnitop or Kashmir", this has been projected in a study conducted by Dr. S.K. Jain, Principal Investigator, Department of Management Studies, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. The report / study of Dr. S.K.Jain also stated that "öf the Rs 474.36 crores being injected into Katra's economy, commercial establishments account for Rs 283. 66 crores; they are followed by the hospitality sector (comprised of hotels and lodging) which accounts for Rs 72. 15 crores; transport accounts for Rs 69.23 crores, pony-wallas account for Rs 33.15 crores and pithus account for Rs 16.15 crores. Commercial establishments provide jobs to 7,781 people followed by the hospitality sector which employs 4,950 and the transport sector which employs 1,500. The pithus number 8,000 and the pony-wallas number 4,747 persons. According to the study, pilgrims prefer to throng the holy shrine in groups. Over 60% of the pilgrims arrive in groups of two to five. The average duration of stay of 46.4% pilgrims is 1 to 2 days; 36.4% stay up to 4 days; in other words, about 82.8% of the pilgrims stay for 1-4 days. More than 50% of the pilgrims stay in hotels. About 65% of the pilgrims prefer to visit the shrine from March to June. Over 75% prefer to visit the shrine during winter / summer vacations. About 40% and 30% of the pilgrims visit Jammu and Patnitop, respectively, while visiting the holy shrine. 65% of the pilgrims stay for about 1-2 days whereas about 27% of the pilgrims stay for an extended period of 3-4 days. As for the mode of transportation, the study reveals that about 42% of the pilgrims travel by train, 34% by bus and about 15% use their own vehicles. Similarly, 8% of the pilgrims use the pony, 3% use pithus, 2.7% use pithus and just 1% use palki while going up and coming down. Over 57% of the pilgrims spend Rs. 200-500 on pithus / palkis per head. The study says that 82% of the pilgrims purchase pooja material near the holy shrine. The average expenditure on pooja material is Rs. 136.52. Over 49% of the pilgrims donate less than Rs. 100/- to the Shrine Board and about 40% donate between Rs. 100-500. About 80% of the pilgrims donate less than Rs. 100/- to other temples, etc. Pilgrims prefer to purchase dry fruits (26.7%), religious items (16.3%), gift items (13.4%), souvenirs (7.3%), clothes (7.3%), woolens (7.6%) and toys (4%). The average daily revenue of the commercial establishments from pilgrims is Rs. 9,468/- during the lean season, Rs. 2,036.88 during the average season and Rs. 3,471.28 during the peak season. The average value of sale of J&K-produced items during the lean, average and peak seasons is Rs. 1,046.45, 2,314.54 and Rs. 3,480.496 respectively. The average number of employees in a shop is 3 and the wages of a worker in a commercial establishment is Rs. 1,075.8. The average capacity utilization of a hotel per year is 52.44%. In case of the hotel industry, the average number of persons in the administration department is 3 and in other departments, it is 12. The average turnover of a hotel is Rs. 13.52 lakhs per year. On an average, the monthly gross revenue of an auto operator is Rs. 8,401 and the net revenue is Rs. 2,388.33. About 59% of the pony-wallas make about 8 trips a week from Katra to the holy shrine. About 52% of the pony-wallas earn Rs. 375/- per day while the gross revenue per pony is Rs. 359.02 and the average expenditure per day on feeding a pony is Rs. 80.03. The average monthly income of a pithu is Rs. 3,722.50. Shrine-related tourism provides employment to 6,299 registered and 1,709 unregistered pithus and potters. Only about 39% of the pithus are employed for more than 200 days. The annual revenue generated by the pithus and potters is about Rs. 16.15 crores. About 4,743 registered ponies operate from Katra to the shrine. Also the annual income generation is Rs. 3.16 crore". The above data clearly depicts the relevance of this study and the significant effect that religious tourism of Katra has on the States economy.

3. Measurement Instruments used for Tourists Satisfaction Levels

Despite the large body of literature available on satisfaction research in general, only a few academic studies have focused directly on customer satisfaction amongst tourists. Of these, an even more limited number have been undertaken in for Religious Tourism that too in India. The major studies include Fick and Ritchie (1991), Reisinger and Waryszak (1994), Arnould and Price (1993), Crompton and Love (1995), Geva and Goldman (1991), Maddox (1985) and Ryan (1995). Because of the limited material available in the academic literature, a detailed survey was conducted for scanning and short listing the hotels in Katra township in order to have a large respondents base that may then be investigated for tourist satisfaction.

Given the broad focus of the paper, no attempt was made to look at individual tourism enterprises (hotels) measuring the satisfaction level of clients as part of their quality service assurance programs. The current data was collected using a structured questionnaire that was left in individual hotel rooms in Katra township through the hotel management. The questions vary from single response questions to sophisticated instruments designed to elicit quite detailed responses from guests. Most of these were diagnostic in the sense that they are aimed at identifying specific measures that can be taken to improve the service. Some items were specifically designed to enquire about customer's perceptions of the service's value for money. Moreover in most of the instances for analysis purposes, particularly amongst 4 and 5 Star Hotel Chains, these were used for benchmarking or as performance indicators.

Drawing on the consumer literature, it is too easy to assume that the outcomes of the tourist activity are solely the creation of the tourist operators/industry. However, it is perhaps more enlightening to adopt a 'transactional perspective' outlined in the recreation literature. Here, the tourist "actively creates the recreation (tourist) experience, through a transaction with the physical and social setting, including what the recreationist (tourist) brings to the process in terms of history, perceptions, companions, skills, equipment, identities, hopes and dreams" (Williams, 1988 : 432). With this perspective, more emphasis is placed on the behavior of the individual and their role in creating the experience. Not all the responsibility for creating high levels of satisfaction rests with the service deliverer.

When the objective is to measure satisfaction with a holiday in a particular destination, it will be important to note this distinction and ensure that both aspects need to be included in the assessment. The attempt of this paper is to be reasonably good at assessing tourists' perceptions of the quality of opportunity but largely ignored the question of quality of experience. A further perspective that could be of relevance here is that of Herzberg (1966). While his work mainly focused on the workplace, his theory of motivation has relevance to the expenditure of discretionary time such as going on a holiday. Herzberg (1966) suggests that all aspects of an experience can be classified as either a motivational or a hygienic factor. Motivational factors are those that positively encourage people to do something. For example, a desire to make new friends may motivate people to go on an organized tour rather than travel alone. On the other hand, hygienic factors are those things which would not encourage one to travel, but their absence would discourage such travel. A good example is the availability of clean drinking water. Having this available is unlikely to motivate someone to travel, while its absence could cause someone to not choose a particular destination. According to Roger James & Associates (1996) "the absence of motivational factors does not lead to 'dissatisfaction' but rather to 'un-satisfaction' a sense of emptiness rather than a sense of anger or disappointment. On the other hand, the absence of a hygienic factor will lead to dissatisfaction. The presence of such a factor will not lead to 'satisfaction' but rather to 'satisfying', that is, a passive (albeit benign) feeling" (Roger James & Associates, 1996 : 34).

Space does not permit an exhaustive examination of the extensive literature outlining the various models used as the basis for measuring customer satisfaction (see Parasuraman, Zeithaml et al., 1994; Rust and Oliver, 1994; Yi, 1991). However, a review of this literature has uncovered a model that could be developed to provide a satisfactory method of evaluating tourists' satisfaction at the level of the destination. This model has been developed by Fornell and associates at the University of Michigan and has become the basis of extensive work at the national and international level as on date. This group has developed a an index that is used to evaluate the performance of firms, industries, economic sectors and national economies on an on-going basis (Fornell, Johnson et al., 1996). The index provides a cumulative evaluation of a sector's market offering rather than a person's evaluation of a specific transaction. Called the 'Customer Satisfaction Index/Barometer', it has been introduced in Sweden, Germany and the United States of America (Fornell, 1992; American Society for Quality Control 1995; Fornell, Johnson et al., 1996). Taiwan and New Zealand are also in the process of introducing a similar national satisfaction indicator. Data is collected on an annual basis by sampling customers of a representative sample of each country's largest firms in a range of different industries. The data collected is intended to be comparable across firms, industries, sectors and nations. The model behind the index uses a multiple indicator approach to measure overall customer satisfaction as a latent variable (see Figure-1). Moreover, the model involves a chain of relationships running from antecedents of overall customer satisfaction (expectations, perceived quality and value) to the consequences of overall customer satisfaction (customer complaints and customer loyalty) (National Quality Research Centre, 1995).

It is proposed that this model could be modified to accommodate the current paper ideas as detailed in the next section 4 given below (see Figure-2) which could become the basis of a "tourism satisfaction index". In particular, customer expectations should be modified to introduce measures of customer needs and desires.

While much work still needs to be done, the framework provided by the Fornell model provides a good starting point. It should be possible to make the necessary changes required to produce a useful index that will contribute to the on-going development of this important industry in the State of Jammu & Kashmir.
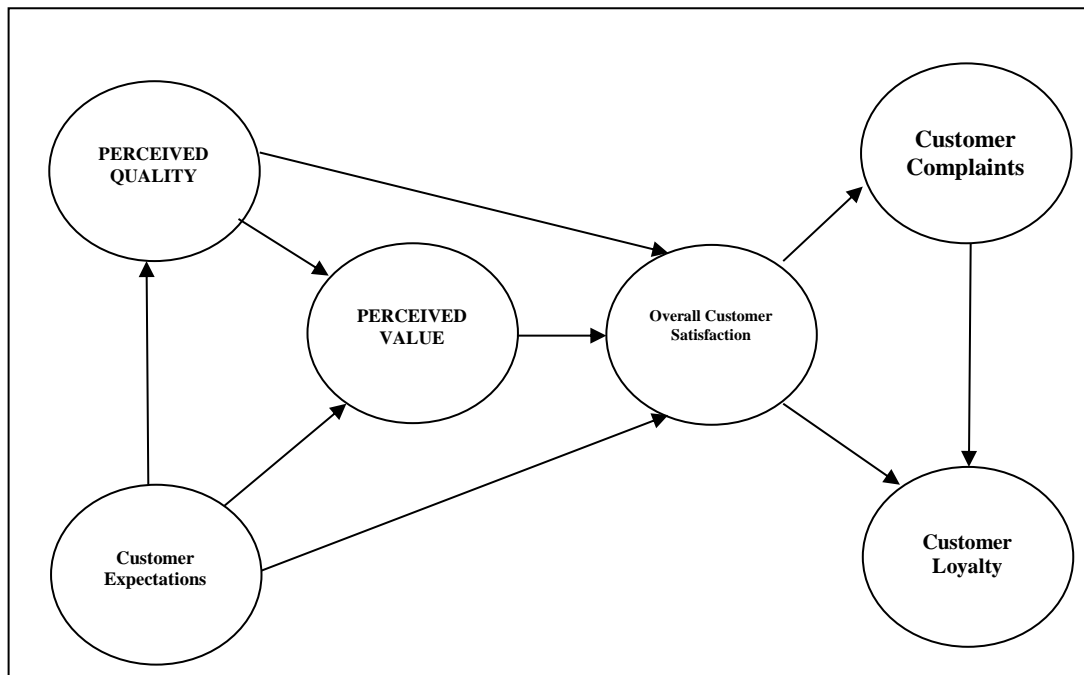
Figure-1 : The Customer Satisfaction Index Model [Fornell, et. al. (1996)]

4. Data Collection and Interpretation

This research paper is based on the primary data. A structured questionnaire was prepared & survey has been conducted to collect the data as already discussed in section-3 above. After collecting the data the data was entered into SPSS 19.0 and analysis was performed with the help of tables to present the same in an understandable form.

4.1 Sampling Design

For the purpose of research, an Exploratory cum Descriptive study was carried out among a limited sample of 150 respondents, 127 Indians & 23 Foreigners (7 British and 16 Americans) at ten hotels in Katra, namely: Country Inn & Suits; Hotel The White; New Ashoka; Subhash International; Hotel Mount View; Shanker Palace; Durga Hotel; Nek Palace; Malti Palace and Tara Deluxe. The samples were collected during the months of June-2022, August-2022, October-2022 and December-2022.

4.2 Objectives and proposed Hypothesis Model

The research work is an attempt to study the Tourists satisfaction level towards Katra township based hotels and restaurants. For this purpose, following two objectives have been considered:

Objective – 1: To study tourists satisfaction towards the services offered at selected hotels and restaurants in Katra township;

Objective – 2: To study the effect of Tourist Satisfaction level on Loyalty.

The following is the proposed model considering Good Service Encounter, Performance of the Service Staff and the Level to which the tourists expectations are justified as the variables contributing in the tourists satisfaction and it results into loyalty towards the destination loyalty and the Intention to return as well as willingness to recommend the destination are the indicators of Loyalty which in turn is the indicator of Tourists satisfaction. This relation is supported by earlier studies as discussed above in section-3 of this paper.
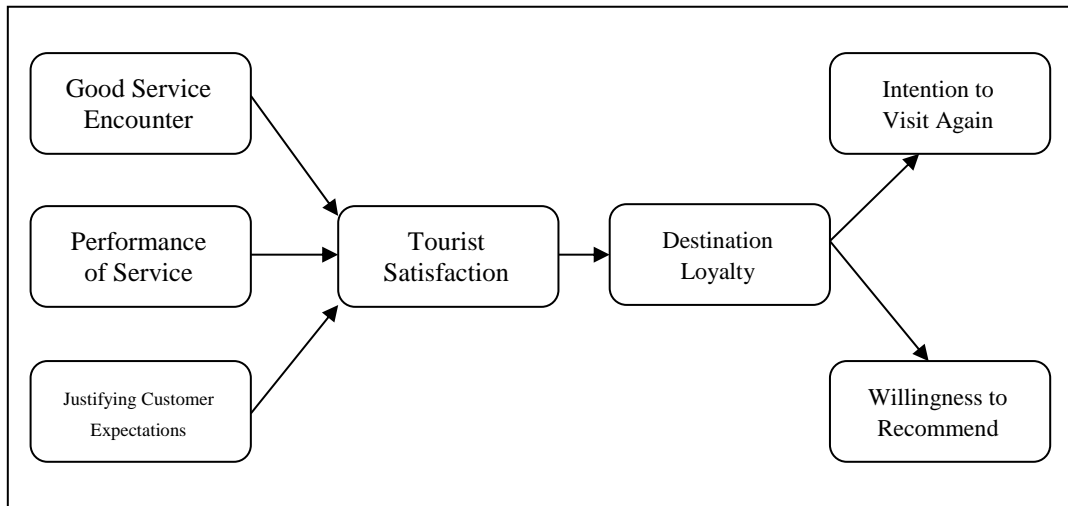
Figure-2 : Proposed Hypothesis Model for the Current Study

On the basis of the above considerations the following research hypothesis are formulated:

H_1 : Tourists satisfaction level has a positive impact on the loyalty of the tourists

H_2 : Satisfied Tourists are more likely to return.

4.3 Descriptive Results and Interpretations

(A) Profile of Respondents:

The following descriptive statistics was obtained –

Characteristics		% age of Respondents
Tourists Gender	Male	79%
	Female	21%
Tourist Age	25 yrs to 30 yrs	52%
	30 yrs to 35 yrs	28%
	35 yrs to 40 yrs	13%
	40 yrs and above	7%
Tourists Nationality	Indian	84.66%
	Foreigner	15.33%
Tourists Occupation	Businessman	68.9%
	In Private Service	3.6%
	In Government Service	6.3%
	Others	21.2%

(B) Travel Details of Respondents:

The descriptive statistics obtained is tabulated in the table below, which clearly depicts that most of the respondents got the information from their friends followed by enquiry mode. Surprisingly in this electronic media age, only 2.1% of the respondents found the information from internet. Moreover, most of the respondents used lodging facility along with food and only 9% tourists used the tourist facility at Katra for catering towards their hunger. Also the analysis revealed that most of the tourists visited the Katra town with a motive of religious tour and only 9% of the tourists were found to visit Katra for vacation purpose. Furthermore, most of the tourists preferred to stay in the town for more than one day followed by more than three days halt at the town. It was observed that most of the tourists (75%) visited the holy town by means of public transport system.

Characteristics		% age of Respondents
Main Source of Information	Through Enquiry	10.8%
	Through Advertisement	6.3%
	Through Friends	80.8%
	Other Sources, such as Internet	2.1%
Type of Facility used	Lodging	91%
	Food only	9%
Motivation to visit Katra	Only Religious purpose	79%

	Religious cum Business purpose	12%
	As a vacation	9%
Length of Stay	One day halt	1%
	Two day halt	67%
	Three day halt	22%
	More than three day halt	10%
Mode of Transportation used	Personal Car	4%
	Hired a Taxi	21%
	Used a Public Transport, such as a bus	75%

(C) Respondents Ratings on various Service factors:

The descriptive statistics obtained is as tabulated in the table below. The descriptive statistics clearly indicates that most of the tourists rated the service factors as good (26.81%) while a significant tourists showed their dissatisfaction towards the service factors (18.51%), which is a matter of concern. On further observation of the descriptive it is revealed that Open Environment and Hospitality accounts to major reasons of dissatisfaction among the tourists in Katra town.

Service Factors	Responses (%age of responses entered in brackets)					Total
	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Dissatisfactory	
Food	38 (25.33)	18 (12)	40 (26.66)	34 (22.66)	20 (13.33)	*150*
Lodging	23 (15.33)	16 (10.66)	56(37.33)	26(17.33)	29 (19.33)	*150*
Hospitality	14 (9.33)	23 (15.33)	29(19.33)	34 (22.66)	50 (33.33)	*150*
Open Environment	8 (5.33)	14 (9.33)	21(14)	23 (15.33)	84 (56)	*150*
Shopping Area	21 (14)	39 (26)	44(29.33)	29 (19.33)	17 (11.33)	*150*
Sanitation	26 (17.33)	21 (14)	49 (32.66)	32 (21.33)	22 (14.66)	*150*
Cleanliness	24 (16)	36 (24)	34 (22.66)	49 (32.66)	7 (4.66)	*150*
Ambience	49 (32.66)	26 (17.33)	57 (38)	13 (8.66)	5 (3.33)	*150*
Other Facilities	19 (12.66)	24 (16)	32 (21.33)	59 (39.33)	16 (10.66)	*150*
Total	**222 (16.44)**	**217 (16.07)**	**362 (26.81)**	**299 (22.14)**	**250 (18.51)**	1350

(D) Respondents Ratings on factors related to Satisfaction Level:

The following descriptive statistics was obtained, which clearly indicates that a significant number of tourists (42.66%) have responded as good for their experience as regards to overall service they received, where as the data also reveals this area to be improved from the fact that 20.66% tourists were only satisfied with their experience of the services they encountered. Furthermore almost similar results have been obtained as regards to the performance of service staff which accounts to 39.33% as good and 16.66% as satisfactory, which clearly means that these areas need improvement as regards to the training of the staff for handling hospitality issues more effectively and efficiently.

Furthermore, 58% of the tourists were satisfied with the price of the food as well as lodging which is clear from their response, whereas only 13 tourists out of the sample of 150 accounting to (8.66%) responded negatively on this parameter, that is, they were of the opinion that the cost of lodging and food were much higher as regards to the facility provided by the tourists facilities.

Service Factors	Responses (%age of responses entered in brackets)					Total
	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Dissatisfactory	
Service Encounter	19 (12.66)	23 (15.33)	64 (42.66)	31 (20.66)	13 (8.66)	*150*
Performance of the Service Staff	26 (17.33)	39 (26)	59 (39.33)	25 (16.66)	1 (0.33)	*150*
Total	*45 (15)*	*62 (20.66)*	*123 (41)*	*56 (18.66)*	*14 (4.66)*	300
	YES	NO				
Do you feel that you received value for the money spent by you for the service	87 (58)	13 (8.66)				

(E) Respondents response on factors related to Loyalty:

The following descriptive statistics was obtained which clearly shows that 58% of the tourists wished to return to the same tourist facility whereas a significant number of tourists responded negatively (55.33%) regarding their recommendation for the particular tourist facility, which is matter of concern.

Loyalty Factors	Responses (%age of responses entered in brackets)			Total
	YES	NO	May Be	
Would you like to come to this tourist facility again	87 (58)	29 (19.33)	34 (22.66)	*150*
Would you recommend this tourist facility to others	41 (27.33)	26 (17.33)	83 (55.33)	*150*
Total	*128 (42.66)*	*55 (18.33)*	*117 (39)*	*300*

5. Conclusion

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in India. Jammu & Kashmir is fortunate to have an infrastructure quite suitable to promote religious tourism (as Jammu is also called as City of Temples). Though Jammu & Kashmir Tourism Department has been practiced so many innovative policies & strategies which have been proved successful in attracting Tourists in the State thereby contributing to the States income, but unfortunately religious tourism is not promoted in the State. So it is the right time that the Tourism Department should start focusing on this sector of tourism as well.

If we look at the tourists satisfaction level it is quite satisfactory. Although J&K State religious tourist spots face sever environmental conditions but the same can be overcome by building better and all seasoned infrastructure.

Thus, it can be concluded that, Jammu& Kashmir in general and religious tourism of Katra has immense possibility of growth in the Tourism sector with its varied attractions. The State aims at harnessing the direct and multiplier effects of tourism in employment generation, poverty alleviation and women empowerment in an environmentally sustainable manner. Efforts need to be made to create congenial environment for private sector investment in the tourism sector in the State.

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