

ECO-FRIENDLY PRACTICES AND TOURIST SATISFACTION TOWARDS ACCOMMODATION AT SHRI MATA VAISHNO DEVI SHRINE IN INDIA

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Abstract: The current research endeavours to investigate the implementation of eco-friendly practices within accommodation establishments and its correlation with guest satisfaction at the Vaishno Devi shrine in India. With eco-friendliness increasingly becoming a pivotal marketing concern, its impact on tourist satisfaction is of paramount importance. A self-structured questionnaire was administered to a randomly selected sample of 227 hotel guests within the study area to gather data. This study explicitly delves into various eco-friendly practices adopted by accommodation units, encompassing water conservation, food quality, energy conservation, waste management, air quality, and noise pollution. Among these practices, food quality, energy conservation, air quality, and noise pollution were identified as significantly influencing customer satisfaction. The findings underscore the presence of several eco-friendly initiatives among the selected accommodation firms, underscoring their association with customer satisfaction. This suggests a pressing need for tourism and hospitality managers to prioritize the adoption of suitable eco-friendly practices to enhance customer satisfaction and foster sustainable development. While the study sheds light on significant insights, it is not without limitations. Future research endeavours may benefit from addressing these limitations and further exploring the implications of eco-friendly practices in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Keywords: Eco-friendly practices; Tourist satisfaction; Accommodation; Sustainable development.

PRÁTICAS ECOLÓGICAS E SATISFAÇÃO DO TURISTA EM RELAÇÃO À ACOMODAÇÃO NO SANTUÁRIO SHRI MATA VAISHNO DEVI NA ÍNDIA

Resumo: A presente investigação procura investigar a implementação de práticas ecológicas nos estabelecimentos de alojamento e a sua correlação com a satisfação dos hóspedes no santuário Vaishno Devi, na Índia. Com a ecologia tornando-se cada vez mais uma preocupação central do marketing, o seu impacto na satisfação dos turistas é de suma importância. Um questionário autoestruturado foi aplicado a uma amostra selecionada aleatoriamente de 227 hóspedes de hotéis na área de estudo para coletar dados. Este estudo investiga explicitamente várias práticas ecológicas adotadas pelas unidades de alojamento, abrangendo a conservação da água, a qualidade dos alimentos, a conservação de energia, a gestão de resíduos, a qualidade do ar e a poluição sonora. Entre essas práticas, a qualidade dos alimentos, a conservação de energia, a qualidade do ar e a poluição sonora foram identificadas como influenciando significativamente a satisfação do cliente. As conclusões sublinham a presença de diversas iniciativas ecológicas entre as empresas de alojamento selecionadas, sublinhando a sua associação com a satisfação do cliente. Isto sugere uma necessidade premente para que os gestores de turismo e hotelaria priorizem a adoção de práticas ecológicas adequadas para aumentar a satisfação do cliente e promover o desenvolvimento sustentável. Embora o estudo esclareça insights significativos, não é isento de limitações. Futuros esforços de investigação podem beneficiar da abordagem destas limitações e da exploração mais aprofundada das implicações das práticas ecológicas no setor do turismo e da hospitalidade.

Palavras-chave: Práticas ecologicamente corretas; Satisfação do turista; Alojamento; Desenvolvimento sustentável.

PRÁCTICAS ECOLÓGICAS Y SATISFACCIÓN TURÍSTICA HACIA EL ALOJAMIENTO EN EL SANTUARIO SHRI MATA VAISHNO DEVI EN INDIA

Abstracto: La presente investigación pretende investigar la implementación de prácticas ecológicas en los establecimientos de alojamiento y su correlación con la satisfacción de los huéspedes en el santuario Vaishno Devi en India. Dado que el respeto al medio ambiente se está convirtiendo cada vez más en una preocupación fundamental del marketing, su impacto en la satisfacción del turista es de suma importancia. Se administró un cuestionario autoestructurado a una muestra seleccionada al azar de 227 huéspedes de un hotel dentro del área de estudio para recopilar datos. Este estudio profundiza explícitamente en diversas prácticas ecológicas adoptadas por las unidades de alojamiento, que abarcan la conservación del agua, la calidad de los alimentos, la conservación de la energía, la gestión de residuos, la calidad del aire y la contaminación acústica. Entre estas prácticas, se identificó que la calidad de los alimentos, la conservación de la energía, la calidad del aire y la contaminación acústica influyen significativamente en la satisfacción del cliente. Los hallazgos subrayan la presencia de varias iniciativas ecológicas entre las empresas de alojamiento seleccionadas, subrayando su asociación con la satisfacción del cliente. Esto sugiere una necesidad preminente de que los administradores de turismo y hotelaría prioricen la adopción de prácticas ecológicas adecuadas para mejorar la satisfacción del cliente y fomentar el desarrollo sostenible. Si bien el estudio arroja luz sobre ideas importantes, no está exento de limitaciones. Los esfuerzos de investigación futuros pueden beneficiarse al abordar estas limitaciones y explorar más a fondo las implicaciones de las prácticas ecológicas en el sector del turismo y la hostelería.

Palabras clave: Prácticas ecológicas; Satisfacción turística; Alojamento; Desarrollo sostenible.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The contemporary consumer landscape reflects a growing sensitivity towards environmental issues, prompting businesses to align their offerings with eco-friendly practices (Han, Hsu & Sheu, 2010). This shift necessitates businesses to strategically cater to consumer demands while ensuring sustainability (Gitobu & Njoroge, 2015; Kularatne, 2019; Zepeda Hernández, 2021; Marchese et al., 2021).

The tourism business has recently been gaining importance globally and in the context of religious tourism, pilgrimages have also been understood, for centuries, as a spiritual journey to satisfy inner needs by making a physical effort across environmental paths. This emerging perspective is somewhat contributing to the enhancement of ecological aspects. Within the tourism sector, religious pilgrimages, long seen as spiritual endeavours, are now being scrutinized for their ecological impact (Cohen, 2002; Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Despite the attention to religious tourism, scant research exists on how accommodation consumption affects environmental dynamics at pilgrimage sites.

This scenario has raised an environmental concern among tourist authorities due to the rapid increase of religious travelers in current times (Pan et al., 2018). These concerns threaten the local communities from tourist activities and increased consumption of different services giving a hike to environmental threats (Koli & George, 2022). Religious tourism has received rising attention from scholars (Hall, 2014) and more specifically travelers' accommodation consumption must also be taken into account to realize how relevant religious travelers' visits are to the environment of religious sites.

Previous research highlights the substantial environmental footprint of the hospitality sector, emphasizing the need for eco-friendly practices (Ashrafi et al., 2013; Ali, 2012). Thus, recent researches (Hall et al., 2016; Dedeoğlu, Aydin & Boğan, 2018; Gauna Ruiz de León, & Gómez Delgado, 2021; Mir, 2021) noticed accommodation firms are looking prospectively looking to invest in means and measures of internalizing environmental costs in the short-term and reducing environmental impact in the long term.

It has also become increasingly clear that the accommodation industry is striving to provide quality service which is essential for customers as the quality of service is an antecedent of customer satisfaction (Caruana, 2002; Han & Ryu, 2009; Dedeoğlu, Aydin & Boğan, 2018). Environment-friendly practices in the accommodation industry could be seen as an opportunity and a good marketing strategy that can yield a competitive advantage for accommodation companies (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Kularatne, 2019) especially when it positively impacts customer satisfaction.

This caused a dual aspect approach to managing the environment as well as customer satisfaction at the same time. Resultantly, environment-friendly practices in the accommodation sector have become an important issue in terms of marketing, image, and customer satisfaction (Graci & Dodds, 2008). Thus, the sole idea of constructing religious tourism sustainable for the environment is rising. These issues led to the identification and

formulation of the problem statement for this research. But, besides its importance, very little (except a few such as Olivier, David & Pascal, 2015) has been done to implement environment-friendly practices within this field.

However, the intersection of environmental concerns and customer satisfaction within religious tourism remains underexplored (Forozan, 2017; Ramirez & Fernandez, 2018). Current literature often overlooks the simultaneous consideration of these aspects, missing the opportunity to understand their intertwined nature (Kaya & Turan, 2005). Yet, there's evidence suggesting that religious tourism should encompass environmental stewardship alongside visitor experience (Gupta, 1999; Ramirez & Fernandez, 2018).

This study aims to address this gap by examining how eco-friendly practices in accommodation establishments influence customer satisfaction at the Vaishno Devi shrine in India. By integrating environmental concerns and customer satisfaction, this research seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping religious tourism experiences. Through empirical investigation, this study aims to contribute insights into sustainable practices within the accommodation sector, facilitating a more holistic approach to religious tourism management.

In general, the objective of this research is to examine the impact of environment-friendly practices on customer satisfaction in selected accommodation units in Vaishno Devi Shrine in India. The specific research questions are:

1. What are the environment-friendly practices followed by accommodation units to ensure customer satisfaction in Vaishno Devi shrine?
2. What is the relative significance of the dimensions of environment-friendly practices on customer satisfaction?

The study starts with an introduction to customers' demand for environment-friendly products in the contemporary period followed by the weightage of eco-friendly practices adopted by different accommodation units, particularly at religious and pilgrimage tourism sites. Furthermore, the study covers an extensive review of literature, followed by the formulation of the theoretical framework and hypotheses development. The next section deals with the material and methods applied by the researcher in the study. The last section covers a description of the analysis of the result, followed by a discussion of major findings, implications, and limitations of future research direction.

2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Religious Tourism and Environment

The concept of religious tourism is recognized all around the world and a large number of people travel to holy places (Tala & Padurean, 2008). For instance, in 2012, the pilgrimage journey to Mecca for Hajj is around 3.16 million (Jafari & Scot, 2014), and religious tourism in India estimates at around 170 million visits (NCAER, 2003; Singh, 2002; UNWTO, 2011). Considering heavy footfalls at religious destinations, a few studies observe dramatic changes in the

economic potential along with environmental issues in pilgrimage sites (Shackley, 2001; Shinde, 2007; Woodward, 2004).

Although few researchers (like Forozan, 2017) empirically indicating rising religious tourism visits resulted in environmental improvement, it is limited to those areas immediately surrounding the shrine, and this improvement does not extend to the whole city. Therefore, it is reported that the negative attitude of residents residing in areas outside of the boundaries of the shrine regarding the environmental impact. Hence, it has become essential to understand the environmental impact of this form of tourism comprehensively.

Available literature from an Indian perspective (Vijay, 2016; Dadakalandar & Sujatha (2018) found that the pilgrims during peak seasons of pilgrimage have an increase in overcrowding, overloaded Infrastructure, pollution, environmental degradation, etc.

Ghimire (2013) in his study found that due to the negligence of the environmental issues related to the pilgrimage had created pollution hazards in India. The pilgrimage and religious tourism sites were reporting increased deterioration of the environment, water systems, sewage, and sanitation. MacCannell (2013) in his study focusing on religious events cited from the MahaKumbh festival of India in 2001, the city of Prayagraj experienced a large gathering (60 Million approx.) had a substantial impact on the environment such as water, air, energy resources, sanitation, and waste disposal.

Vohar and Kashyap (2014) in study investigated the aspect of the unhygienic environment created by devotees and visitors around religious and pilgrimage sites in Kangra valley in Himachal Pradesh. Sharma and Raina (2014) identified that the waste disposal scenario in the places which experiences a higher influx of tourists becomes worse at the time of pilgrimage and becomes a major threat to the air, water, land, and also for the scenic beauty of the pilgrimage sites.

Shinde (2018) during a study found that the immensity of pilgrims to the pilgrimage sites caused an effect on the environment to become drastic and sacred places are contaminated with garbage, which even increases the contamination of local areas, the threat to the environment.

Abundant research exists on residents' attitudes toward the impact of religious tourism in Indian scenario (Grimshaw, 2013; Sharpley, 2014; Ghimire, 2013; MacCannell, 2013; Vohar&Kashyap, 2014; Sharma & Raina, 2014; Shinde, 2018), but no specific study measure the impact of religious tourism to a particular segment of tourism. Thus, it creates a menace, and current researcher focus to understand the environmental aspect concerning accommodation services at religious tourism destinations.

2.2 Accommodation and Eco-Friendly Practices

The contemporary religious tourism industry has largely evolved from its roots and is driven by providing tourist services and other amenities at pilgrimage destinations. Therefore, in the case of religious tourism, high significance is the concern that holy sites encourage an increase in the supply of accommodation and other amenities (Shackley, 2001; Henderson, 2011).

From this perspective, it has been observed that while traveling to religious destinations, tourists consume certain services such as accommodation which is well acknowledged by several researchers (McGehee & Andereck, 2004) and it has been noticed an undue pressure on the environment at religious sites in which material and tangible service like accommodation are involved.

In the case of religious tourism, it is also been discovered that hotels are affecting the environments at religious destinations in different ways, such as air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, etc that changed the face of these areas in the last few years (Patange, Srinithiviahshini&Mahajan, 2013).

Ali (2012) in a study on pilgrimage tourism destinations in Mashad measured environmental performance and reported a lack of using solar, wind, biomass, and nuclear sources of energy and an increase in the usage of fossil fuels as the critical points from an environmental perspective. During this time, problems such as the accumulation of huge amounts of non-biodegradable waste (plastic and glass cups, polythene, etc.), water pollution (due to inadequate sewerage facilities), harvesting of firewood, and noise pollution.

However, the environmental dimension of tourism at religious sites the tourism products consumption (such as accommodation) stressed natural resources by putting more pollution, waste, and garbage (Kim, Kim & Kim, 2013). In this context, literature (Hardy, Beeton, & Pearson, 2002) on environmental concerns more specifically, air pollution, traffic congestion, water scarcity, and a lack of green spaces and for redesigning the landscape need to be complemented through its application to an associated segment of religious tourism such as accommodation.

Some researchers (such as Cavus&Tanrisevdi 2003) urged living longer in a particular place cause more unfavorable attitudes supported by espoused high degree of dissatisfaction about the environmental cost of religious tourism at the destination. Thus, at this stage, if policymakers plan to rejuvenate the system, more efforts, and attention are needed to improve environmental issues in religious tourism sites.

In this approach, a clear understanding exists in the literature that the accommodation segment of tourism destinations is known as "the silent destroyer of the environment" at tourist sites (Shackley, 2001; Punitha, Aziz & Rahman, 2016; Akhtar & Najar,2020). Yet, there are several environmental problems and disturbances in religious site environs, but often, it depends on strategic measures adopted by different accommodation organizations (Shackley, 2001; Woodward, 2004).

Myung, McClaren, and Li (2012) also suggest that the concept of environment-friendly practices in the hotel industry is a crucial practice to manage the environment, but it is still at its development stage, necessitating an expansion of literature and theory (Smerecnik & Andersen, 2011).

However, to some extent, few studies (such as, Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Han et al.,2018; Akhtar Najar,2020), indicated environment-friendly practices adopted by hotels and other accommodation players are noticed as the conservation of water and energy and the reducing solid waste at the destination. Tzschentke, Kirk, and Lynch (2004) also noted that the benchmark

for environment-friendly hotels to be successful is the application of the 3Rs which are to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. This has been adopted by certain hotels around the world in their quest to become environment-friendly.

Environmental management has attracted managers and owners of accommodation units and caused the realization that environmental exercises adopted in accommodations can measure by focussing on recycling, water efficiency, waste reduction, education, energy efficiency, social responsibility, and hotel managers' sensitivity and behavior toward the way to environmental management (Kattara, 2003; Mayaka, 2007; Kasim, 2006; Balaji, Jiang & Jha, 2019; Valenzuela-Fernández et al., 2022).

Several studies have mentioned that the customer's quest for ecological products and services has stimulated the growth of environment-friendly and responsible accommodation businesses (Baker, Davis & Weaver, 2014; Yusof, Awang, & Jusoff, 2017). As suggested by Bansal and Roth (2000) the environment-friendly products in hotels are triggering changes to business processes, establishing effective environments to satisfy consumers.

Existing literature (Erdogan & Baris, 2007; Mensah, 2014; Rosa & Silva, 2017; Dedeoğlu, Aydin & Boğan, 2018) described the accommodation industry as an area that required attention to environment-friendly practices such as waste recycling, waste management, clean air, energy and water conservation, environmental health, maintenance of permits like building permits and compliance with legislation, purchasing policy and environmental education in a very comprehensive phase to preserve the environment more sustainably.

Thus, the current researcher discovered several environment-friendly strategies that have been identified by researchers that help to manage the environment and please customers to ensure business success (Han, Hsu & Sheu 2010; Severo et al., 2021), these practices, also ensure the environment is protected and give customers some sense of satisfaction.

2.3 Eco-Friendly Practices and Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is significant to all businesses and scholars have studied the influence of various business practices on client gratification (Lhendup & Panda, 2020). Moreover, the concept of environment-friendly practices has largely not been studied to determine its impact on customer satisfaction (Mensah & Blankson, 2013).

However, some of the studies (such as, Mensah, 2006; Yusof Awang, & Jusoff, 2017; Martínez García de Leaniz, Herrero Crespo, & Gómez López, 2018; Jayasinghe & Weerasekara, 2021) investigated the environmental management practices, and also the level of customer agreement that improves their service performance and ultimately brings satisfaction from accommodation services.

The concept of environment-friendly practices has also caught the attention of scholars in religious tourism. For instance, Nega (2019) investigated that religious tourism is responsible for a satisfactory

experience for tourists through its strategies to deal with environmental aspects at a religious tourism destination. However, not much attention has been paid to this phenomenon, particularly in the study area, this creates a research gap, and hence, the business owners of different accommodation units are receptive to the implementation of environment-friendly practices in their operations to please their customers.

2.3 Framework and Hypothesis Development

The current researcher discovered that the extant literature indicates that ecological marketing practices and customer satisfaction concepts are fairly new concepts in developing countries which factored into the formation of the rationale behind this study. That's, to assess the impact of environment-friendly practices on customer satisfaction. Environment-friendly practices are a new concept and most of the studies on this phenomenon are conceptual (Cherian & Jacob, 2012; Polonsky, 2008; Soni, Hussain, & Kareem, 2022).

It is therefore important to empirically test environment-friendly practices to ascertain their impact on customer satisfaction. Consequently, the researcher has recognized the investigation niche that exists in this theory and seeks to concentrate on the gap through this research by investigating the impact of environment-friendly practices on customer satisfaction. Having this framework and key concepts of environment-friendly practices and customer satisfaction for accommodation services at religious destinations, the current research turns to the study of the Vaishno Devi shrine in India.

The research from the theoretical structure has identified two main components, environment-friendly practices (EFP) and customer satisfaction (CS) to be investigated in the study. Chikita (2012) indicated that the environment-friendly practices adopted by accommodation firms affect the satisfaction levels of their customers.

Literature further adds that guest(s) are happy to use environment-friendly products while staying on accommodation premises and more specifically for the accommodation service (see Ham & Choi, 2012; Lee & Oh, 2014; Nilashi et al., 2019). Thus, after reviewing of extant literature, the study assumed a relationship between environment-friendly practices adopted by the accommodation sector and customer satisfaction, thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1₀: There is no significant relationship between environment-friendly practices and customer satisfaction towards accommodation in Vaishno Devi shrine in India.

H1_a: There is a significant relationship between environment-friendly practices and customer satisfaction towards accommodation in Vaishno Devi shrine in India.

3 METHODOLOGY

The research instrument utilized in this study was meticulously constructed to align with key theoretical categories and concepts derived from the literature review, facilitating a robust analysis of eco-friendly practices and customer satisfaction within the accommodation sector at the Vaishno Devi shrine in India.

Drawing upon existing literature on eco-friendly practices in the hospitality sector (Mensah, 2006; Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Ali, 2012; Punitha, Aziz, & Rahman, 2016), the questionnaire was designed to capture six constructs related to environment-friendly practices in accommodation units: water conservation, food quality, energy conservation, waste management, air quality, and noise pollution. These constructs served as the foundational pillars of the questionnaire, guiding the formulation of specific items aimed at gauging respondents' opinions and perceptions.

Furthermore, the literature on customer satisfaction towards green practices adopted by the accommodation sector (Caruana, 2002; Han & Ryu, 2009; Chikita, 2012) informed the design of items related to measuring customer satisfaction in the context of eco-friendly practices. Three-item statements were crafted to assess respondents' satisfaction levels, focusing on positive feelings, happiness, and overall satisfaction during their stay at the accommodation unit.

To ensure clarity and comprehensibility, a 5-point Likert scale was adopted for recording respondents' opinions regarding eco-friendly practices and satisfaction, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). This scale was chosen based on its simplicity and ease of comprehension, aligning with recommendations from existing literature (Zikmund et al., 2012).

For data analysis, descriptive and inferential techniques were employed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive analysis, including frequency distribution and percentage analysis, provided an overview of respondents' demographic characteristics and the performance of each statement regarding eco-friendly practices and customer satisfaction. Mean and standard deviation calculations offered insights into the respondents' perceptions of eco-friendly practices and satisfaction levels.

Inferential analysis, particularly correlation coefficient computation, aimed to uncover significant relationships between the two constructs: environment-friendly practices and customer satisfaction within the accommodation units at the Vaishno Devi shrine. This statistical approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the interplay between eco-friendly initiatives and guest satisfaction.

From an ethical standpoint, measures were taken to ensure transparency and confidentiality throughout the research process. Respondents were informed in advance about the research's purpose and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Their voluntary participation was sought, and their willingness to contribute to the study was respected.

However, despite these efforts, the study encountered several limitations. The cross-sectional nature of the study restricted the assessment to a specific timeframe, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings. Additionally, the reliance on self-administered questionnaires may have introduced response biases, and the sample size, although considerable, may not fully represent the diversity of guests at the Vaishno Devi shrine. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the study's findings and implications.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Based on the empirical data analysis conducted in this study, several key findings emerged regarding the relationship between eco-friendly practices and customer satisfaction within accommodation units at the Vaishno Devi shrine in India. These findings shed light on the practical implications of theoretical constructs outlined in the literature review, offering insights into how environment-friendly initiatives impact guest satisfaction in religious tourism destinations.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Firstly, the demographic profile of respondents revealed interesting trends. The majority of participants were in the age range of 31-40, indicating a relatively younger demographic. Moreover, males constituted a larger proportion of respondents, and most participants had graduate or higher education levels, suggesting a well-educated sample with a strong understanding of eco-friendly practices and consumer satisfaction. Additionally, a significant portion of respondents had a monthly income of 50000 INR and above, indicating a higher purchasing power among guests at the Vaishno Devi shrine. These demographic characteristics provide valuable context for interpreting the study's findings.

Table 1. Demographic Variable.

| Demographic Variable | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Age (in years) | | |
| 18-30 | 55 | 24.2 |
| 31-40 | 62 | 27.3 |
| 41-50 | 46 | 20.3 |
| 51-60 | 44 | 19.4 |
| Above 60 | 20 | 8.8 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 142 | 62.6 |
| Female | 85 | 37.4 |
| Educational Level | | |
| High School | 4 | 1.8 |
| Intermediate | 34 | 15.0 |
| Graduate | 189 | 83.3 |
| Monthly Income (in INR) | | |
| Below 10000 | 38 | 16.8 |
| 10001-30000 | 34 | 15.0 |
| 30001-50000 | 43 | 18.9 |
| Above 50000 | 112 | 49.3 |
| Nationality | | |
| Foreigner | 83 | 36.6 |
| Indian | 144 | 63.4 |

(INR ≤ 10000=US\$ ≤ 120, INR 10001-30000=US\$ 121-360, INR 30001-50000= US\$ 361-600, INR ≥ 50000= US\$ ≥ 600)

Source: Own elaboration.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics highlighted varying levels of agreement with environment-friendly practices among respondents. While the highest mean was observed for informing guests about eco-friendly practices through in-room TV and leaflets, the lowest mean was recorded for clear signage indicating toxic substance/danger zones. This suggests that guests may prioritize certain eco-friendly initiatives over others, potentially influencing their overall satisfaction with accommodation units.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of variables.

| Items | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|--|------|-----------|
| Water Conservation | | |
| This hotel has a deliberate strategy to conserve water | 3.41 | .872 |
| This accommodation unit reuses towels and bed linens to conserve water | 3.42 | .890 |
| This accommodation unit uses treated wastewater in garden irrigation | 3.43 | 1.31 |
| This accommodation unit uses water-smart landscapes to reduce the water needed for irrigation | 3.45 | 1.32 |
| This accommodation unit makes use of low-flow toilets, faucets, sinks, and showerheads | 3.47 | 1.30 |
| Food Quality | | |
| This accommodation unit provides organic meals | 3.68 | 1.17 |
| This accommodation unit provides natural fruit drinks | 3.72 | 1.18 |
| This accommodation unit provides less fatty foods | 3.68 | 1.15 |
| This accommodation unit provides adequate information about their food and beverage | 3.70 | .741 |
| Energy Conservation | | |
| This accommodation unit uses automatic lighting sensors in corridors and lobby | 3.75 | .713 |
| This accommodation unit uses sensors in the rooms to control lighting, air conditioning, and other equipment | 3.78 | .718 |
| This accommodation unit uses in-room TV and leaflets to inform guests in the accommodation unit about their environment-friendly practices | 3.88 | .779 |
| This accommodation unit uses various means to encourage guests to consume less electricity | 3.75 | .714 |
| This accommodation unit uses key-card systems that control lights | 3.73 | .701 |
| This accommodation unit uses solar-powered systems | 3.84 | .731 |
| Waste Management | | |
| This accommodation unit provides waste bins in guest's rooms | 3.54 | .815 |
| This accommodation unit provides waste bins in the lobby | 3.56 | .821 |
| This accommodation unit provides clear signage indicating toxic substances/danger zones | 3.37 | .890 |
| This accommodation unit provides refillable soap and cream dispensers in their restroom | 3.53 | .816 |
| This accommodation unit provides individually packaged pieces of soap in guest's bathrooms | 3.57 | .808 |
| Air Quality | | |
| This accommodation unit has a clear designation of smoking and non-smoking areas | 3.44 | .882 |
| This accommodation unit has facilities for monitoring and maintaining good air quality | 3.37 | .892 |
| This accommodation unit has good ventilation in the rooms, lobby, and restaurant | 3.45 | .873 |
| Noise Control | | |
| This accommodation unit has an acceptable level of noise | 3.49 | .830 |
| This accommodation unit has clear directions to control noise levels | 3.49 | .892 |
| This accommodation unit has the mechanism to maintain soundproof noise levels | 3.47 | .811 |
| Customer Satisfaction | | |
| I have a positive feeling about staying in this accommodation unit | 4.35 | .637 |
| I am happy staying in this accommodation unit | 4.44 | .602 |
| I am satisfied staying in this accommodation unit | 4.35 | .637 |

Source: Own elaboration.

4.3 Eco-Friendly Practices and Satisfaction

This subsection is organized around the six dimensions of environment-friendly practices variables in this present study, which include water conservation, food quality, energy conservation, waste management, air quality, and noise pollution, and compares it with findings from previous literature investigated.

The study sought to test the practices which best fit religious tourists in Vaishno Devi shrine understanding of environment-friendly practices and also facilitate accommodation units' consciousness to construct high adequate and competent ecological practices. Previous studies (Yusof, Awang, & Jusoff, 2017) suggest that customers preferred tangible practices when it comes to environment-friendly practices.

They also favor practices in which they can participate, for instance, practices such as energy and waste practices like reutilizing platforms, beddings, and towel re-use programs, using natural cleaning products, power-efficiency systems, and key card systems (Millar, Mayer & Baloglu, 2012).

The effect of water management in terms of the practices to conserve water through the treatment of water for reuse is very crucial in the accommodation industry. For instance, using wastewater for irrigation

or gardening, the use of low-flow toilets and showerheads, and the use of faucets, and sinks help the accommodation units to conserve water.

One will expect that these practices will affect the level of satisfaction of the guest, but the results of this study proved otherwise. This study does not conform to studies that have advocated for the adoption of water conservation methods (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007). It can be argued that this environment-friendly practice may lead to other positive outcomes for an organization such as reducing the cost of purchasing water for accommodation unit use.

However as mentioned earlier, water conservation did not have statistical significance to customer satisfaction. This may be because water conservation is not a matter of concern to this sample as compared to food quality, energy conservation, air quality, and noise pollution.

Furthermore, the effect of food quality on customer satisfaction in accommodation units found that there is a positive and significant relationship between these variables. This indicates that customers of accommodation units perceive the provision of organic meals, less fatty foods as well as the provision of natural fruit drinks as a means of preventing health issues related to diet.

Customers also see the provision of adequate information about food and beverage as a necessity.

This is in agreement with (Pullman, Maloni & Carter, 2009) who says, the ability of an accommodation unit to ensure the quality of food and beverage could reduce the cost of operation due to the elimination of the waste that could be generated. The customer satisfaction as a result of this environment-friendly practice could be a result of the fact that accommodation units do not need to pay much in terms of waste and therefore relieving guests from paying for the waste.

Concerning energy conservation, the study found that the importance of energy conservation practices in ensuring customers are satisfied cannot be overemphasized. This assertion has also been confirmed by other studies which argued that the ability of an organization to maintain good energy practices will result in positive organizational outcomes (Sen & Bhattacharya 2001).

It can, therefore, be argued that accommodation units that have in place good energy conservation practices in the form of using automatic sensors, information to educate the guest on energy-saving tips, and the adoption of renewable energy sources such as solar are likely to enhance their reputation and customer satisfaction.

The next environment-friendly variable which is waste management was found not to support the hypothesis that it has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction. From the literature, studies posit that waste management as an environment-friendly practice makes consumers satisfied with the services of accommodation units (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007).

In the context of the religious tourism destination of Vaishno Devi shrine, the study found that there is a negative relationship between waste management and customer satisfaction. This result could be explained by the fact that the guests in the accommodation units did not want to be bothered about how the accommodation unit manages their waste products but was only comfortable seeing the accommodation unit clean. More so, the customers of the accommodation unit might see waste management as the sole business of the accommodation units and not the customers.

Again, the research sought to determine the relationship between air quality as an environment-friendly practice and customer satisfaction. The study found that there is a positive and significant relationship between air quality and customer satisfaction. This finding is in line with other studies that propose that an organization's ability to ensure a clean and safe environment is crucial in providing better services to customers (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007; Ottman, Stafford, & Hartman, 2006).

In the environment-friendly of accommodation units, the emphasis is therefore on the ability of the accommodation unit to keep a clear designated area for smoking and non-smoking areas, availability of good ventilation in rooms, and mechanisms for monitoring and maintaining good air quality. From the study, it is clear that keeping quality air is very crucial in delivering acceptable customer service in the accommodation unit industry.

Likewise, with regards to noise pollution, the study found that there is a significant relationship between noise pollution and customer. This implies that the users of accommodation units included in the

study view noise management practices by accommodation unit management as very necessary leading to their satisfaction.

This confirms that the accommodation units understudied have in place an acceptable level of noise, clear directions to control noise, and mechanisms are put in place to keep sound using soundproof devices. These practices are very crucial in keeping a serene and relaxing environment in an accommodation unit setting which is one of the most important issues any customer of an accommodation unit will consider in rating their level of satisfaction.

4.4 Relationship Between Eco-Friendly Practices and Customer Satisfaction

Table 3. Correlation values.

| Variables | Correlation | Customer satisfaction |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Customer satisfaction | Pearson Correlation | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | |
| Water Conservation | Pearson Correlation | 0.022 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.062 |
| Food Quality | Pearson Correlation | 0.712** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |
| Energy Conservation | Pearson Correlation | 0.654** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |
| Waste Management | Pearson Correlation | 0.018 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.070 |
| Air Quality | Pearson Correlation | 0.743** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |
| Noise Pollution | Pearson Correlation | 0.620** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Source: Own Elaboration.

When analyzing the relationship among two groups of variables, correlation analysis is the most common measure to understand linear relationships among variables. The result of this calculation is the correlation between the two variables. This measure can range from -1 to 1, inclusive. Accordingly, a correlation coefficient is applied in this study too for measuring the association between environment-friendly practices of accommodation units and customer satisfaction at the religious destination of Vaishno Devi shrine.

Further analysis revealed nuanced relationships between specific eco-friendly practices and customer satisfaction. Food quality emerged as a significant predictor of guest satisfaction, with guests valuing the provision of organic meals and information about food and beverage offerings. Similarly, energy conservation practices, such as the use of renewable energy sources and energy-saving tips, were positively associated with customer satisfaction, highlighting the importance of sustainable energy management in enhancing guest experiences.

In contrast, waste management practices did not significantly influence customer satisfaction in the context of religious tourism destinations like the Vaishno Devi shrine. This unexpected finding suggests that guests may prioritize cleanliness and aesthetics over waste management practices, reflecting a potential gap between perceived and actual guest preferences.

Air quality and noise pollution management were identified as critical factors driving customer satisfaction in accommodation units. Guests placed high importance on clean air and minimal noise levels, emphasizing the need for accommodation providers to prioritize environmental factors that directly impact guest comfort and well-being.

The correlation analysis further corroborated these findings, revealing strong and significant associations between air quality, food quality, energy conservation, and noise pollution management practices, and customer satisfaction. However, water conservation and waste management practices did not exhibit significant correlations with customer satisfaction, indicating potential areas for improvement in environmental management strategies within accommodation units.

Thus, null hypothesis (H₁₀) is partially rejected; as two of environment-friendly practices (waste management and water conservation) are not reported any significant relationship to customer satisfaction.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This research was specifically aimed at understanding the effect of environment-friendly practices on customer satisfaction of accommodation units in the religious shrine of Vaishno Devi. This section explains major findings, and managerial implications followed by limitations and direction for future research.

5.1 Discussion of Major Findings

This study delved into the crucial relationship between environment-friendly practices and customer satisfaction within the context of accommodation units at the revered religious shrine of Vaishno Devi. The findings underscore the paramount importance of environment-friendly initiatives in shaping guests' satisfaction levels, shedding light on key insights for industry stakeholders and managers.

Our research revealed that environment-friendly practices exert a significant influence on customer satisfaction, with approximately forty percent of the variance in satisfaction levels attributed to these practices. Specifically, the study identified six dimensions of environment-friendly practices—water conservation, food quality, energy conservation, waste management, air quality, and noise pollution.

Among these dimensions, food quality, energy conservation, air quality, and noise pollution emerged as pivotal factors driving customer satisfaction. However, the study uncovered a lack of significant relationship between water conservation and waste management practices and customer satisfaction, signalling potential areas for improvement in accommodation units' environmental strategies.

5.2 Managerial Implication

The findings of this study hold profound implications for industry practitioners, emphasizing the need for accommodation units to prioritize environment-friendly initiatives to enhance overall customer satisfaction. By demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and environmental

stewardship, accommodation providers can elevate their appeal to increasingly discerning consumers.

It is imperative for managers to recognize that guests actively seek evidence of organizational responsibility, influencing their satisfaction levels and overall perceptions of the accommodation experience. Moreover, as tourism continues to thrive at religious pilgrimage sites like Vaishno Devi, it is incumbent upon decision-makers and managers to prioritize the well-being of both visitors and local communities.

The sustainable management of tourism resources should not only aim to preserve the natural environment but also contribute to the socio-economic development of host communities. By ensuring that local residents derive tangible benefits from tourism development, stakeholders can foster a harmonious relationship between tourism growth and environmental conservation.

In summary, this study underscores the pivotal role of environment-friendly practices in shaping customer satisfaction within the accommodation sector. By aligning operational strategies with sustainable principles, accommodation providers can not only enhance guest satisfaction but also contribute to the long-term viability of tourism destinations.

Moving forward, it is essential for researchers and practitioners alike to continue exploring innovative approaches to sustainable tourism management, thereby fostering a symbiotic relationship between tourism development and environmental conservation.

5.3 Limitation and Future Research Direction

While this study contributes valuable insights into the relationship between environment-friendly practices and customer satisfaction within pilgrimage tourism destinations, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations that warrant consideration for future research endeavours. The focus of this study was confined to pilgrimage tourism destinations, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to other types of tourist destinations.

Future research should explore the applicability of environment-friendly practices across diverse tourism contexts to ascertain their broader implications. This study primarily examined the perceptions of customers of accommodation units, overlooking the perspectives of other stakeholders such as managers and local communities.

Expanding research scope to include the perspectives of managers, policymakers, and local communities would enrich our understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing environment-friendly practices in tourism. Collaborative research efforts involving diverse stakeholders can foster more effective and sustainable tourism management strategies.

Additionally, while this study examined the impact of environment-friendly practices on customer satisfaction, it did not delve into related constructs such as service quality, customer retention, and profitability. Future research should investigate the interplay between environment-friendly practices and various outcomes such as service quality, customer retention, and profitability.

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CRedit author statement.

| Term | Definition | Author 1 |
|----------------------------|---|----------|
| Conceptualization | Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims | X |
| Methodology | Development or design of methodology; creation of models | X |
| Software | Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components | X |
| Validation | Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/ reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs | X |
| Formal analysis | Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyze or synthesize study data | X |
| Investigation | Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection | X |
| Resources | Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools | X |
| Data Curation | Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later reuse | X |
| Writing - Original Draft | Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation) | X |
| Writing - Review & Editing | Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision – including pre-or post-publication stages | X |
| Visualization | Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/ data presentation | X |
| Supervision | Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team | X |
| Project administration | Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution | X |
| Funding acquisition | Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication | |

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