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MEASURING THE SATISFACTION OF STUDENT TOURISTS IN POKHARA: AN ANALYSIS OF TRAVEL LIFE DOMAINS

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Abstract

Tourism is a significant global economic industry that is expanding rapidly. It is an important sector for development and reducing poverty in developing nations like Nepal. The aim of this paper is to assess the satisfaction of student tourists in Pokhara. 286 students were randomly selected from the 1000 students who visited Pokhara in the last week of December 2022 to participate in the survey. The data was collected by administering the five-point Likert scale questionnaires. Descriptive and analytical methods were used to examine the satisfaction of student tourists in Pokhara. Students who want to travel for experiences that will improve their academic and personal life have made student tourism an important niche in the tourism business. Younger tourists generally have more positive travel experiences compared to older tourists. The study finds that the majority of tourists were female and had a bachelor's degree. The respondents with a master's degree tend to rate their travel experiences more positively compared to those with a high school or bachelor's degree. This implies that education may influence tourists' perceptions and expectations, and that offering high-quality educational opportunities for tourists could lead to increased satisfaction. Therefore, it may be necessary for the tourism industry in Pokhara to adapt to the changing preferences and expectations of younger tourists to attract more visitors in the future.

Background

Economic expansion and financial development are both strongly correlated with one other, as is tourism development (Shahbaz et al., 2019). A sound financial system supports for economic growth of the nation in long run (Dhungana, 2014; Levine, 1998). There is a nexus between tourism, financial development and economic growth (Ehigiamusoe, 2021). Tourism is a major contributor to the economy. The tourism sector makes a major contribution to the nation's foreign exchange reserves and offers both direct and indirect employment opportunities to a large portion of the population (Thommandru et al., 2021).

Tourism is a vital sector for many countries, and Nepal is no exception. The country's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and religious significance attract thousands of visitors every year. Nepal is home to many world-renowned natural and man-made attractions, including Mount Everest, Lumbini (the birthplace of the Buddha), the Pashupatinath Temple, and the Chitwan National Park. These destinations, coupled with the country's hospitable people, have made Nepal a popular destination for tourists from all over the world.

Among the many tourist destinations in Nepal, Pokhara stands out as one of the most popular. Located in the western part of Nepal. Pokhara being one of the most popular destinations for domestic and international tourists. Its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and recreational activities make it an attractive location for student tourists. The satisfaction of these tourists in different domains of travel life is crucial for the sustainable development of tourism in Pokhara. Hence, this study aims to explore the satisfaction of student tourists in Pokhara in different travel life domains. Pokhara is a city nestled in the lap of the Annapurna Mountain range, which is home to some of the highest peaks

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in the world. Pokhara's natural beauty, including Phewa Lake, the Seti River, and the Mahendra Cave, attracts tourists who seek adventure, tranquility, and spiritual experiences.

In addition to natural attractions, Pokhara also offers a range of man-made amenities, including museums, temples, restaurants, and shopping centers. The International Mountain Museum, the World Peace Pagoda, and the Bindhyabasini Temple are among the many popular tourist destinations in the city.

Student tourism has become an important niche in the tourism industry, with students seeking travel experiences that enrich their academic and personal lives (Raj, 2016). Student tourists often have different needs and expectations than other types of tourists, and their satisfaction with their travel experience is a key determinant of the success of the tourism industry (Niazi & Shaheen, 2012).

One of the main modes of transportation for student tourists visiting Pokhara is tourist buses. These buses are often used by student tourists from different parts of Nepal to visit Pokhara during a typical week and they play a significant role in the tourism industry in the region.

The satisfaction of tourists is a complex and multidimensional concept that has been extensively studied in literature (Sinha & Mandal, 2015). Researchers have identified various factors that influence tourist satisfaction, including accommodation, food, transportation, attractions, shopping, nightlife, activities, entertainment, weather, safety, cleanliness, friendliness of locals, hospitality, and value for money (Sirgy et al., 2011).

However, there is limited research on the satisfaction of student tourists in Pokhara, particularly with regards to the fourteen travel life domains identified by Sirgy et al. (2011) and Sharma (2017). Therefore, this study aims to explore the satisfaction of student tourists in Pokhara by measuring their satisfaction levels across these fourteen domains.

There is limited research on the satisfaction of student tourists in Pokhara, particularly with regards to the 14 travel life domains identified by Sirgy et al. (2011). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the satisfaction levels of student tourists in Pokhara across these 14 domains, and to identify areas where improvements can be made to enhance their travel experience. The study will use a Likert scale questionnaire to measure the satisfaction levels of student tourists in different domains of travel life in Pokhara. The results of this study will provide insights into the factors that influence the satisfaction of student tourists in Pokhara, and inform recommendations for the tourism industry in the region to better serve this important segment of tourists.

The general objectives of the study is to explore the satisfaction level of students tourists in Pokhara and the specific objectives are: (i) to identify the domains of travel that have the highest level of satisfaction among tourists in Pokhara and to explore ways to improve the satisfaction levels in the domains with the lowest scores (ii) to analyze the impact of demographic characteristics such as gender age and education level on different life domains of the travel experience (iii) to contribute to the existing literature on tourism and travel experiences by providing insights into the specific case of Pokhara (iv) to provide recommendations to tourism authorities and service providers in Pokhara to improve tourists' overall satisfaction and to create a more positive travel experience.

This study will contribute to the literature on tourism by providing insights into the satisfaction levels and key factors that influence the satisfaction of student tourists in Pokhara. The study will also have practical implications for tourism management in the region by identifying areas that require improvement and highlighting the factors that are most important to student tourists. Additionally, the study will provide a basis for further research on the topic and can serve as a reference for future studies on tourist satisfaction in similar contexts. Overall, the study will help to enhance the quality of tourism experiences in Pokhara and contribute to the sustainable development of the tourism industry in Nepal.

This study focuses specifically on the satisfaction levels and key factors that influence the satisfaction of student tourists in Pokhara, Nepal. The study will not investigate the satisfaction levels and preferences of other types of tourists or residents of Pokhara. The study will also be limited to investigating the fourteen travel life domains used by Sirgy et al. (2011) and will not include other factors that may influence tourist satisfaction.

Additionally, the study is limited to data collected from a sample of student tourists who visit Pokhara using tourist buses. The study has not investigated the satisfaction levels of student tourists who visit Pokhara using other modes of transportation or who stay in different types of accommodation. The study is also limited to the time period during which the data is collected and may not reflect seasonal variations in tourist satisfaction levels.

Review of Literature

Tourism is a thriving industry that plays a significant role in the economic and social development of countries. Tourist satisfaction is a crucial indicator of the success of any tourist destination. This literature review aims to explore the previous research on measuring tourist satisfaction, with a specific focus on student tourists in Pokhara, Nepal.

Pokhara is a well-known tourist destination in Nepal that offers adventure tourism, cultural heritage, and wellness tourism. The tourism industry in Nepal has been growing steadily, and the government has made substantial efforts to promote and develop the sector. However, despite the growth, there are several challenges that must be addressed to ensure sustainable tourism development.

Tourist satisfaction has been defined and measured in various ways, using both multidimensional and unidimensional approaches. Kozak and Rimmington (2000) found that tourist satisfaction is a complex and multidimensional concept that is affected by various factors, including destination attributes, tourist motivations, and personal characteristics of tourists. Gurung and Seo(2014) developed a multidimensional scale to measure tourist satisfaction in Pokhara. The scale includes service quality, destination image, price, accessibility, and safety as key factors that influence tourist satisfaction.

Service quality is considered the most critical factor that influences tourist satisfaction, and a positive destination image can attract more tourists. Destination attributes such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, and infrastructure significantly influence tourist satisfaction (Kozak and Rimmington,2000). The level of service provided, authenticity of cultural heritage sites, and accessibility of the destination are also key factors influencing tourist satisfaction (Gurung & Seo, 2013)

According to existing literature, tourist satisfaction is a critical determinant of repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth recommendations for a destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Dayour & Adongo, 2015; Kim et al., 2015). Dayour and Adongo (2015) have emphasized the significance of tourist motivation as a factor influencing the intention to revisit, with overall satisfaction mediating this relationship. They have further suggested that satisfied tourists are more likely to revisit the destination in question or communicate positive word-of-mouth about it. Despite this disagreement among scholars, a substantial body of research has established that overall tourist satisfaction is indeed the primary factor influencing both their intention to revisit and their recommendation of the destination to others (Alegre & Garau, 2010; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Kozak, 2001; Meleddu et al., 2015; Meng & Han, 2018; Zhang et al., 2017)

Research in the field of hospitality and tourism has identified "cost of stay" as a significant determinant of tourist satisfaction (Kozak, 2001). In particular, price has been identified as an important factor that influences tourists' intention to return to a destination (Kozak, 2001). Tourists who perceive that they have paid a reasonable price for the expected services are more likely to be satisfied than those who feel they have paid a higher price (Hutchinson et al., 2009).

While qualitative factors such as scenic beauty, quality of accommodation, and cultural programs are important to tourists, price becomes more salient when tourists have to choose from a range of products related to their trip (Stevens, 1992). Scholars in the marketing field have also recognized the importance of price as a key factor in customer satisfaction and customer switching behavior (Keaveney, 1995; Ryu & Han, 2010). De Ruyter et al. (1997) further suggest that customers may not necessarily opt for the highest quality service, but they may still be satisfied with a lower perceived quality.

Assessing tourist satisfaction is crucial for measuring the success of any tourist destination. Factors influencing tourist satisfaction include service quality, destination image, price, accessibility, safety, cultural heritage, natural beauty, and adventure tourism. Although several studies have investigated tourist satisfaction in Nepal, most have focused on general tourists and not student tourists' satisfaction.

A study conducted by Baniya et al. (2020) addressed this research gap by examining the satisfaction levels of international student tourists in Pokhara. The study highlighted that service quality, destination image, price, accessibility, and safety significantly impacted tourist satisfaction. Furthermore, cultural heritage, natural beauty, and adventure tourism emerged as critical factors that contributed to tourist satisfaction. The findings of the study emphasize the need for effective strategies to enhance tourist satisfaction in Pokhara and provide valuable insights into the factors influencing student tourists' satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction and their subjective well-being have become increasingly important in modern marketing strategies for service industries. Tourists seek to improve their quality of life through consuming services and products that they value subjectively. Tourist consumption behavior is driven by personal and emotional factors, as they seek to satisfy their needs and desires. Tourists' unique characteristics, such as their age, personality, and cultural background, can also impact their decision-making process and overall satisfaction with the services they choose. It's important to take these diverse factors into consideration when exploring what shapes a tourist's choices and experiences (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004). According to Del Bosque et al. (2009) and Gnoth (1997), tourists' expectations play a significant role in shaping their travel choices and perception of experiences. Tourist satisfaction is closely linked to the fulfillment of their expectations.

To create enjoyable and memorable travel experiences, it's essential to understand tourist motivation. Studies by Cohen (1978), Dann (1981), and Swarbrooke and Horner (1999) highlight the importance of tourist motivation and satisfaction in the consumption process, driven by the desire for gratification and the level of satisfaction from consumption choices.

Individual characteristics such as demographic, psychological, social, and cultural factors play significant roles in shaping tourist behavior and quality of life (Richards, 1999). By exploring these factors, we can gain insights into the complex dynamics of tourist consumption behavior and its impact on individuals and society as a whole. Understanding tourist motivation and satisfaction is essential for enhancing the tourist experience and promoting sustainable tourism.

Lamichhane and Sharma (2019) brought attention to the negative impacts of tourism development in Pokhara on the environment, society, and economy. They emphasized that natural resources and cultural values have been degraded, and economic disparities have emerged. Pradhan and Gurung (2020) echoed these concerns, stressing the importance of sustainable tourism practices that balance economic benefits with environmental and social impacts. In 2020, Kafle discussed the challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism development in Pokhara, emphasizing the need for involving local communities in tourism planning and development.

Shrestha and Maharjan (2019) focused on the potential benefits of agro-tourism in Pokhara. They suggested that this type of tourism can promote sustainable agriculture and cultural heritage while

providing economic benefits to local communities. Khanal and Sapkota (2018) investigated the role of community participation in sustainable tourism development, finding that involving local communities in decision-making processes can enhance the sustainability of tourism.

Adhikari and Subedi (2020) examined the determinants of tourist satisfaction in Pokhara, finding that tourist satisfaction is influenced by factors such as service quality, price, and location. Pandey (2019) analyzed the current state of homestays in Pokhara and suggested that it can be a sustainable form of tourism, promoting cultural exchange and community-based tourism. Lastly, Gurung (2018) emphasized the role of the private sector in sustainable tourism development, stating that it can contribute to economic growth and environmental conservation through responsible tourism practices.

Based on the existing literature, there is a research gap regarding the satisfaction level of student tourists in Pokhara, Nepal. While several studies have explored tourist satisfaction in Nepal, most of them have focused on general tourist satisfaction rather than student tourists' satisfaction. As student tourists are a unique segment of the tourist market with specific needs and expectations, it is essential to understand their satisfaction level and the factors that influence it.

This review aims to address this research gap by focusing specifically on student tourists in Pokhara and identifying the factors that influence their satisfaction. By exploring this specific segment of the tourist market, this review can provide insights that can be used to develop targeted strategies to enhance student tourists' satisfaction in Pokhara. This is particularly important given the growing number of students traveling for both educational and leisure purposes and the potential economic benefits that this segment of the market can bring to the tourism industry.

Overall, this review highlights the need for more research on tourist satisfaction in the context of student tourists in Pokhara, Nepal. By addressing this research gap, it is possible to develop a deeper understanding of the factors that influence satisfaction in this specific segment of the market, and to develop practical recommendations to enhance their satisfaction level.

Research Methodology

Pokhara, a popular tourist destination in Nepal, attracts a large number of visitors every year. In the last week of December 2022, 1000, students visited the city, according to the records of the Tourist Bus Association Pokhara. This research aims to gain insights into the travel experiences of these students by conducting a survey using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of fourteen domains of travel life, selected based on their relevance to the experiences of students visiting Pokhara.

Assuming a margin of error of 5percent, the calculated sample size by using Yamane formula (Yamane,1967) was 286. Therefore, 286 students were randomly selected from the 1000 students who visited Pokhara in the last week of December to participate in the survey through email and telephone. Out of the 286 students who were randomly selected for the survey, 45 were unable to participate. To ensure that the desired sample size was achieved, an additional 45 students were selected from the original list of visitors to Pokhara. The data was collected by administering the five-point Likert scale questionnaire to the 286 students via telephone. The questionnaire consisted of fourteen domains of travel life, including accommodation, transportation, food, attractions, and overall satisfaction. Each domain had a series of questions with responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The responses were recorded by the researcher and saved in an electronic format for further analysis.

In order to determine the overall satisfaction of students with their trip to Pokhara, the responses from fourteen different domains of travel life were combined and averaged. This resulted in a single score that represents the students' overall satisfaction. Before combining the responses, positive and negative statements were reversed.

Descriptive methods of analysis were used to analyze the data collected from the survey. Frequency distributions and measures of central tendency were utilized to summarize the responses. Frequency distributions were used to determine the percentage of respondents who agreed or disagreed with each statement in the questionnaire, while measures of central tendency such as mean, median, and mode were used to describe the central values of the data. Cross-tabulations were also conducted to examine the relationship between different domains of travel life.

Results and Discussion

The table below displays the demographic characteristics of the study participants, categorizing them by gender, age group, and education level. The table includes the number of respondents and the corresponding percentage for each category.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Gender		
Male	139	48.6%
Female	147	51.4%
Age Group		
18-21 years old	98	34.3%
22-25 years old	117	40.9%
26-29 years old	46	16.1%
30 years old and above	25	8.7%
Education Level		
High School	55	19.2%
Bachelor's Degree	166	58.0%
Master's Degree	65	22.8%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

The table presents data on the demographic characteristics of 286 students who traveled to Pokhara in the last week of December 2022. It comprises three columns, including demographic characteristics, number of respondents, and percentage of respondents. The first demographic characteristic is gender, with 139 (48.6%) male and 147 (51.4%) female respondents. The second demographic characteristic is age group, with the highest number of respondents (117 or 40.9%) aged between 22-25 years old. The third demographic characteristic is education level, with 166 (58.0%) respondents having a bachelor's degree, which is the highest percentage among all categories. The table provides a clear and concise summary of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, which is valuable for understanding the sample of students who participated in the survey.

Based on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, we can conclude that the sample is fairly diverse in terms of gender and age group, with a slight majority of female respondents. The majority of respondents fall within the 18-25 age range, with a significant proportion having a bachelor's degree. Overall, this suggests that the survey captured a range of perspectives from students who visited Pokhara, and the results can be used to gain insights into their travel experiences.

In addition, it can be inferred from the data that the majority of the respondents were female, comprising 51.4 percent of the sample size. This indicates that female students may be more likely to visit Pokhara for educational or leisure purposes. Furthermore, the largest age group was 22-25 years old, accounting for 40.9 percent of the respondents. This suggests that Pokhara may be a popular destination for young adults in their early twenties. Finally, it is worth noting that the majority of

respondents had a Bachelor's degree, representing 58 percent of the sample size. This may indicate that the students who visited Pokhara were primarily from higher education institutions.

Table 2

Combined Scores of Life Domains with Frequency (Likert Scale)

Life Domains	Lowest score 3	Medium score 4	Highest score 5
Social life	75	150	61
Leisure and recreation life	100	156	30
Family life	150	75	61
Love life	80	180	26
Arts and cultural life	60	190	36
Work life	100	180	6
Health and safety life	90	110	86
Financial life	175	80	31
Spiritual life	75	125	86
Intellectual Life	200	50	36
Self- life	150	100	36
Culinary life	100	100	86
Travel life	145	85	56
Environmental quality of life	50	100	136

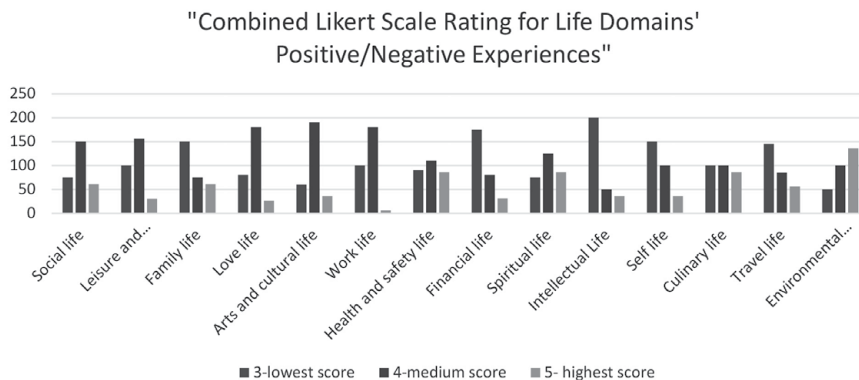
Source: Researcher's own calculation based on field survey 2022.

The table represents the scores assigned to different life domains by the respondents. The scores are based on a scale of 3-5, with 3 being the lowest score and 5 being the highest score. Each row represents a life domain, and the columns represent the number of respondents who assigned a score of 3, 4, or 5 to that domain. The table provides an overview of how the respondents perceive their satisfaction with different life domains. For example, the "Environmental quality of life" domain has the highest number of respondents assigning a score of 5 (136), indicating a high level of satisfaction in this area. On the other hand, the "Work life" domain has the lowest number of respondents assigning a score of 5 (6), indicating a low level of satisfaction in this area.

The table displays the different life domains and their corresponding scores ranging from 3 (lowest) to 5 (highest). The life domains are categorized into social, leisure and recreation, family, love, arts and cultural, work, health and safety, financial, spiritual, intellectual, self, culinary, travel, and environmental quality of life.

The scores indicate the level of satisfaction or importance attributed by the respondents to each life domain. For example, social life has a medium score of 4 (150 respondents) and a lowest score of 3 (75 respondents), indicating that a larger number of respondents are moderately satisfied with their social life, while a smaller number are less satisfied. On the other hand, work life has a highest score of 5 (6 respondents) and a medium score of 4 (180 respondents), indicating that a larger number of respondents are highly satisfied with their work life, while a smaller number are moderately satisfied.

Overall, the table provides a snapshot of the areas of life that respondents are most satisfied with, as well as areas where there may be room for improvement. The scores can be used as a basis for further analysis and decision-making in order to enhance the quality of life for the respondents. The data given in the Table 2 can be best explained by the following bar diagram.

Figure 1*Likert Scale Rating for Life Domains*

A chi-square test was conducted to determine the association between life domains and demographic characteristics, specifically age group and gender. The results showed that there was no significant association between domain and age group (Pearson chi-square = 39.932, $df = 39$, $p = 0.445$), but there was a significant association between domain and gender (Pearson chi-square = 25.839, $df = 13$, $p = 0.025$).

Further analysis of the data revealed that females rated social life, family life, love life, health and safety life, and spiritual life higher than males. On the other hand, males rated work life, financial life, and intellectual life higher than females. Respondents aged 18-21 tended to rate leisure and recreation life, family life, and love life higher than other age groups, while those aged 22-25 rated social life, arts and cultural life, and travel life higher. Those aged 26-29 tended to rate financial life and environmental quality of life higher, while those aged 30 and above rated health and safety life higher. Respondents with high school education tended to rate lower on all life domains except for environmental quality of life, while those with a bachelor's degree rated work life, financial life, and intellectual life higher than other education levels. Those with a master's degree rated arts and cultural life, self-life, and spiritual life higher than other education levels.

The highest average scores were given to the domains of environmental quality of life and spiritual life, followed by family life and health and safety life. These findings suggest that tourists highly value these aspects of their travel experience in Pokhara and that efforts should be made to further improve them. Conversely, the lowest average scores were given to the domains of work life and intellectual life, followed by love life and arts and cultural life. These areas should be focused on to enhance the overall tourism experience in Pokhara.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Students who want to travel for experiences that will improve their academic and personal life have made student tourism an important niche in the tourism business. Any destination's success can be measured in large part by how satisfied its visitors are. Younger tourists generally have more positive travel experiences compared to older tourists. The study finds that the majority of tourists were female and had a bachelor's degree. The respondents with a master's degree tend to rate their travel experiences more positively compared to those with a high school or bachelor's degree. This implies that education may influence tourists' perceptions and expectations, and that offering high-quality educational opportunities for tourists could lead to increased satisfaction. Therefore, it may be necessary for the tourism industry in Pokhara to adapt to the changing preferences and expectations of younger tourists in order to attract more visitors in the future.

These findings highlight the importance of considering the demographic characteristics of student tourists when developing tourism policies in Pokhara. In order to attract more female student tourists, the tourism industry could focus on promoting activities and attractions related to social life, family life, love life, health and safety life, and spiritual life. Similarly, to attract younger student tourists, the industry could promote leisure and recreation life, social life, arts and cultural life, and travel life. For student tourists with higher education, the industry could promote work life, financial life, intellectual life, arts and cultural life, self- life, and spiritual life.

Policymakers should develop customized tourism products and services that cater to the needs and preferences of different education levels. The cultural and educational tourism products could be developed for student tourists with high school education, while luxury tourism products and services could be developed for student tourists with a higher education level. By considering these factors, policymakers can create a more diverse range of tourism products and services that appeal to a wider range of student tourists visiting Pokhara. Environmental quality, health, and safety measures, and cultural and arts offerings are required to improve for the promotion of tourism. Continuously monitoring and evaluating the performance of the tourism industry is required to ensure sustainable growth and development. Policymakers should establish performance metrics and regularly collect and analyze data to assess the effectiveness of their policies and adjust as necessary.

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