PERCEPTION OF TOURISTS ABOUT INDIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

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Title: Perception of Tourists about India as a Tourist Destination: A Comprehensive Analysis

Abstract

This research paper delves into the perception of tourists about India as a tourist destination through a comprehensive analysis. India's diverse cultures, breathtaking landscapes, and rich historical heritage have long captivated travellers worldwide. Understanding tourists' perceptions is critical for policymakers, destination marketers, and industry stakeholders to develop effective strategies for promoting tourism and enhancing visitor experiences.

The paper examines various factors influencing tourists' perception of India, including cultural appeal, safety, infrastructure, cleanliness, hospitality, and marketing campaigns such as the 'Incredible India' initiative. It evaluates the impact of marketing campaigns on shaping tourists' perceptions, analysing campaign reach, messaging, branding strategies, and their influence on raising awareness and influencing travellers' decisions.

Tourist satisfaction and experience during visits to India are crucial for evaluating destination management efforts. Factors contributing to positive or negative experiences, such as hospitality, transportation, accommodation, attractions, and infrastructure, are analysed.

Challenges faced by India as a tourist destination, including cleanliness concerns, safety issues, infrastructure limitations, and cultural barriers, are explored. Opportunities for enhancing India's appeal, such as promoting niche tourism segments, improving infrastructure, and leveraging digital marketing, are discussed.

The paper concludes with recommendations for destination marketers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to address challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and enhance India's positioning as a preferred tourist destination. By providing valuable insights and actionable recommendations, this research aims to contribute to fostering sustainable tourism growth, promoting cultural exchange, and maximizing economic benefits for India on the global tourism stage.

Keywords: Incredible India, tourism promotion, branding India, Communication effectiveness

Introduction

India, known for its diverse cultures, stunning landscapes, and rich historical heritage, has long fascinated travellers worldwide. Its vibrant tapestry of traditions, languages, and scenery positions India as a prime tourist destination. Recognizing the importance of understanding tourists' perceptions, policymakers, destination marketers, and industry stakeholders aim to develop effective strategies for promoting tourism and enhancing visitor experiences.

Tourists' perceptions of a destination are influenced by numerous factors, including cultural appeal, safety, infrastructure, cleanliness, hospitality, and overall tourist experiences. These perceptions are shaped by various influences such as marketing campaigns, word-of-mouth recommendations, media portrayal, and personal experiences. Analyzing tourists' perceptions provides valuable insights into how India is perceived as a tourist destination and the factors driving these perceptions.

This research paper seeks to conduct a comprehensive analysis of tourists' perceptions about India as a tourist destination. By synthesizing existing literature, empirical studies, and qualitative insights, the paper aims to address several key aspects:

1. Factors Influencing Tourists' Perception: This section examines the various factors shaping tourists' perception of India, including cultural attractions, safety and security, cleanliness, infrastructure, hospitality, and marketing campaigns like the 'Incredible India' initiative.

2. Impact of Marketing Campaigns: Evaluating the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, such as the 'Incredible India' campaign, in shaping tourists' perceptions. This includes assessing campaign reach, messaging, branding strategies, and its influence on raising awareness and influencing travelers' decisions.

3. Tourist Satisfaction and Experience: Understanding tourists' satisfaction levels and overall experiences during their visit to India is essential for evaluating destination management efforts. Factors contributing to positive or negative experiences, such as hospitality, transportation, accommodation, attractions, and infrastructure, will be analyzed.

4. Challenges and Opportunities: Exploring challenges faced by India as a tourist destination, including cleanliness concerns, safety issues, infrastructure limitations, and cultural barriers. Additionally, opportunities for enhancing India's appeal, such as promoting niche tourism segments, improving infrastructure, and leveraging digital marketing, will be discussed.

5. Recommendations for Destination Management: Proposing recommendations for destination marketers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to address challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and enhance India's positioning as a preferred tourist destination.

Formulation of Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between respondents' perception about dominant themes that represent India and nationality of the respondents.

Objective of the Study

To know perception about dominant themes that represent India

1. To analyze the factors influencing tourists' perception of India as a tourist destination, including cultural appeal, safety, infrastructure, cleanliness, hospitality, and marketing campaigns.

2. To evaluate the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, such as the 'Incredible India' initiative, in shaping tourists' perceptions and raising awareness about India as a tourist destination.

3. To assess tourists' satisfaction levels and overall experiences during their visits to India, focusing on factors such as hospitality, transportation, accommodation, attractions, and infrastructure.

4. To identify the challenges faced by India as a tourist destination, including cleanliness concerns, safety issues, infrastructure limitations, and cultural barriers.

5. To explore opportunities for enhancing India's appeal as a tourist destination, including promoting niche tourism segments, improving infrastructure, and leveraging digital marketing strategies.

Research Methodology

- A survey was undertaken to gather information from 600 participants, employing a self-administered questionnaire. The survey targeted tourists, both foreign and Indian, visiting the national capital of India, New Delhi.
- Purposive or judgmental sampling was employed for participant selection.
- Statistical analysis utilized cross-tabulation and chi-square tests, with data presented in counts, percentages, and cross-tabulations alongside the results of chi-square tests.

Analysis of Results

The present study endeavours to delve into this dimension of destination marketing, specifically examining the perception of India as a tourist destination among international travellers. By scrutinizing

the various factors influencing tourists' perceptions of India, this research seeks to elucidate the intricacies of destination image formation and the impact of marketing efforts on shaping these perceptions. Through empirical investigation and analysis, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of how India is perceived on the global tourism stage, thereby informing future marketing strategies and destination management initiatives.

India as a perfect vacation destination

To gauge the general perception of tourists regarding India as a tourist destination, respondents were requested to provide feedback using a five-point scale. Out of the total 424 respondents who had been exposed to the 'Incredible India' campaign advertisements, 309 (72.8%) were Indian nationals, while 115 (27.1%) were foreigners. The distribution of responses revealed that 46.9% of all respondents 'strongly agreed' with the statement, followed by 38.2% who 'agreed', and 12% who remained 'neutral'. Among Indian respondents, 53% expressed a 'strong agreement', with 35% indicating 'agreement'. Conversely, among foreign respondents, 29.6% 'strongly agreed', while the highest proportion (47%) 'agreed' with the statement, and 17.4% remained 'neutral'. However, it is worth noting that the exposure to the 'Incredible India' campaign does not necessarily imply that tourists viewed India as their destination solely due to the advertising campaign. There may be additional factors influencing their choice of destination.

Table: India as a perfect vacation destination

			Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Nationality	Indian	Count	165	108	31	3	2	309
		Column %	53.4%	35.0%	10.0%	1.0%	.6%	100.0%
	Foreigner	Count	34	54	20	4	3	115
		Column %	29.6%	47.0%	17.4%	3.5%	2.6%	100.0%
	Total	Count	199	162	51	7	5	424
		Total %	46.9%	38.2%	12.0%	1.7%	1.2%	100.0%

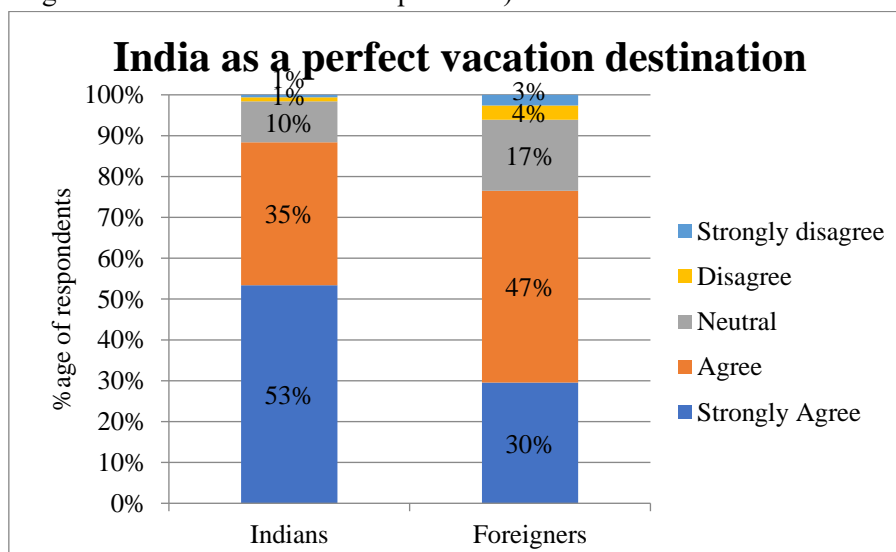(Note: Percentages and totals are based on respondents)

Fig: India as a perfect vacation destination

Dominant themes representing India

The dominant themes representing India were explored in the study, revealing insights into how both Indian and foreign nationals perceive the country. Among foreign tourists, 94.5% identified India primarily for its 'cultural heritage', followed by 'diversity' at 72%, and 'religious and spiritual interest' and 'variety of food' at 65.3% and 64.4% respectively (see Table 4.42). Conversely, for Indian tourists, 'cultural heritage' was also the most prominent feature, with 88.1% expressing this perception. Following closely were 'religious and spiritual interest' (74.9%), 'variety of food' (72.7%), and 'diversity' (71.5%).

Interestingly, both Indian and foreign nationals assigned the least importance to India as a 'recreation place', with only 21.5% of Indian respondents and 11.4% of foreign respondents associating India with this feature.

Hypothesis of the study posited that there is no significant relationship between respondents' perception of dominant themes representing India and their nationality. However, the results indicated otherwise. The Chi-Square test revealed significant Pearson Chi-Square values for all major themes representing India (excluding diversity, scenic beauty, and hospitality) across the nationality of the respondents. This suggests a notable relationship between respondents' perception of dominant themes representing India and their nationality. Thus, the study did not support Hypothesis, except in some instances.

Table: Dominant themes representing India

India is known for		Nationality		Total N=598	Pearson Chi-Square
		Indian (N=362)	**Foreigner (N=236)**		
Diversity	Count	259	170	429	0.017
	% within Nationality	71.5%	72.0%	71.7%	
Cultural Heritage	Count	319	223	542	6.830*
	% within Nationality	88.1%	94.5%	90.6%	
Scenic Beauty	Count	214	134	348	0.321
	% within Nationality	59.1%	56.8%	58.2%	
Variety of Food	Count	263	152	415	4.804*
	% within Nationality	72.7%	64.4%	69.5%	
Hospitality	Count	189	135	324	1.435
	% within Nationality	52.2%	57.2%	54.2%	
Recreation Place	Count	78	27	105	10.080*
	% within Nationality	21.5%	11.4%	17.6%	
Religious & Spiritual Interest	Count	271	154	425	6.414*
	% within Nationality	74.9%	65.3%	71.1%	
Yoga& Meditation	Count	186	101	287	4.218*
	% within Nationality	51.4%	42.8%	48.0%	
Ayurveda	Count	175	59	234	32.681*

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Rich Wildlife	% within Nationality	48.3%	25.0%	39.1%	
	Count	123	56	179	7.155*
	% within Nationality	34.0%	23.7%	29.9%	
Something else	Count	8	10	18	
	% within Nationality	2.2%	4.2%	3.0%	

(Source: Primary data, * indicates values are significant at 5 per cent significance level)

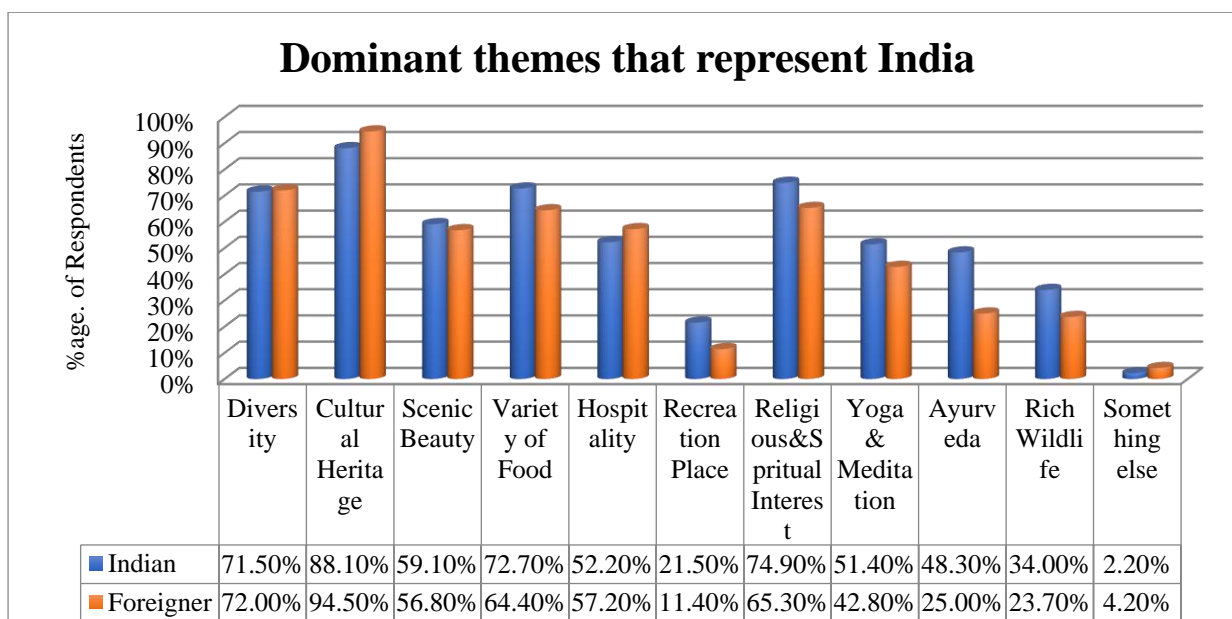|	Divers ity	Cultur al Herita ge	Scenic Beauty	Variet y of Food	Hospit ality	Recrea tion Place	Religi ous&S pritual Interes t	Yoga & Medita tion	Ayurv eda	Rich Wildli fe	Somet hing else
Indian	71.50%	88.10%	59.10%	72.70%	52.20%	21.50%	74.90%	51.40%	48.30%	34.00%	2.20%
Foreigner	72.00%	94.50%	56.80%	64.40%	57.20%	11.40%	65.30%	42.80%	25.00%	23.70%	4.20%

Fig : Dominant themes that represent India

Aspects of India that attract tourists

The attractiveness of India as a tourist destination is influenced by various factors that contribute to the overall tourist experience. According to Amitabh Kant, former-joint secretary in the ministry of tourism, government of India, in his book 'Branding India: An Incredible Story', the success of India's branding exercise hinges on sustained economic growth, significant improvements in infrastructure, widespread gains in health and education systems, and a reduction in poverty levels. Kant emphasizes that economic growth is pivotal in bridging the gap between India's perceived image and reality as a tourist destination. A survey conducted by Indian tourism in October-November 2006 across thirteen major source markets identified key concerns related to travel in India, ranked in order of importance as cleanliness and hygiene, safety and security, transportation, promotional support, and affordability. Similarly, a Synovate survey on behalf of CNN in December 2006 highlighted India's positive image perception globally, particularly regarding its rich culture and heritage. However, it indicated low rankings in terms of tourist friendliness.

The World Economic Forum, based in Geneva, developed the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) to assess factors influencing the attractiveness of countries for travel and tourism development. In this index covering 124 economies, India ranked significantly low at sixty-fifth position, reflecting challenges in its tourism competitiveness.

Table illustrates positive responses from both Indian and foreign nationals regarding India's affordability and uniqueness as tourist destinations. Foreign tourists primarily value India for its

affordability (62.3%) and uniqueness (58.5%). Similarly, Indian citizens appreciate India for its affordability (47.2%), diverse attractions suitable for all age groups (42%), and uniqueness (41.4%). Despite these positive aspects, both Indian and foreign nationals express concern over cleanliness and hygiene (7%), highlighting a consistent issue identified in earlier surveys conducted by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Addressing these concerns and leveraging India's strengths are crucial for enhancing its attractiveness as a tourist destination and improving the overall tourist experience.

Table: Indian Tourism experience of Travelers

| For a tourist India is		Nationality		Total N=598
		Indian (N=362)	**Foreigner (N=236)**	
Safe and Secure	Count	90	59	149
	% within Nationality	24.9%	25.0%	24.9%
Clean and Hygienic	Count	40	2	42
	% within Nationality	11.0%	.8%	7.0%
Something for every age	Count	152	53	205
	% within Nationality	42.0%	22.5%	34.3%
Affordable	Count	171	147	318
	% within Nationality	47.2%	62.3%	53.2%
Soothing experience	Count	83	23	106
	% within Nationality	22.9%	9.7%	17.7%
Unique	Count	150	138	288
	% within Nationality	41.4%	58.5%	48.2%
Modernized country	Count	64	29	93
	% within Nationality	17.7%	12.3%	15.5%
None of these	Count	55	30	85
	% within Nationality	15.2%	12.7%	14.2%
Something else	Count	9	15	24
	% within Nationality	2.5%	6.4%	4.0%
Source: Primary data				
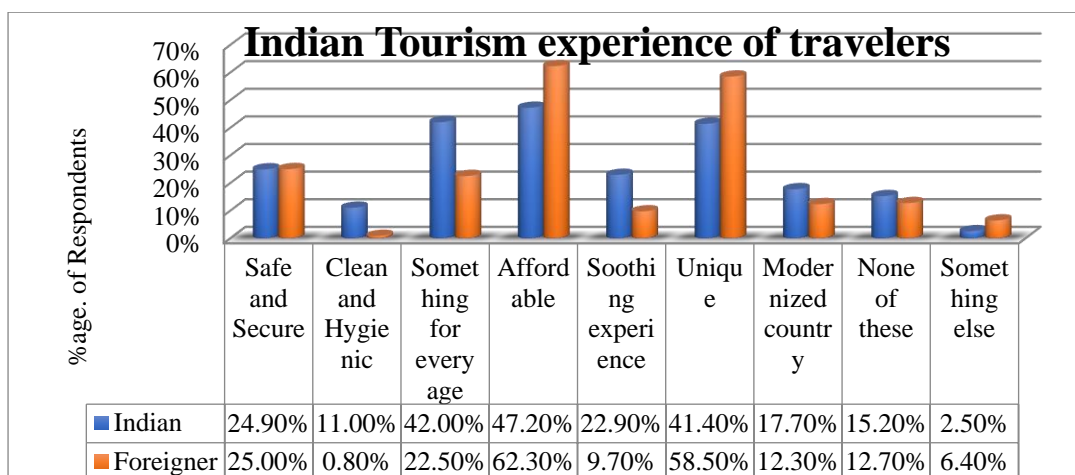
Fig: Indian Tourism experience of travelers

Experience of travelling India

To gauge the overall experience of traveling in India, tourists were invited to rate their experiences on a five-point scale ranging from 'excellent' to 'very bad'. Out of 585 respondents, the majority (59.3%) rated their experience as 'good', while 32.1% rated it as 'excellent'.

Interestingly, a higher proportion of foreigners (33.9%) rated their experience as 'excellent' compared to Indians (31%). Moreover, no foreign nationals reported having a 'very bad' experience at Indian tourist destinations. However, it is worth noting that a small percentage of foreigners (2.7%) reported having a 'bad' experience, which is slightly higher than the percentage of Indian nationals (0.3%) who reported the same.

Table: Experience of travelling India

			Nationality		Total
			Indian	**Foreigner**	
Your experience of visiting Indian tourist places is	**Excellent**	Count	112	76	188
		% within Nationality	31.0%	33.9%	32.1%
	Good	Count	221	126	347
		% within Nationality	61.2%	56.2%	59.3%
	Neutral	Count	25	16	41
		% within Nationality	6.9%	7.1%	7.0%
	Bad	Count	1	6	7
		% within Nationality	.3%	2.7%	1.2%
	Very bad	Count	2	0	2
		% within Nationality	.6%	.0%	.3%
Total		Count	361	224	585
		% within Nationality	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Source: Primary data)

Overall experience of visiting India

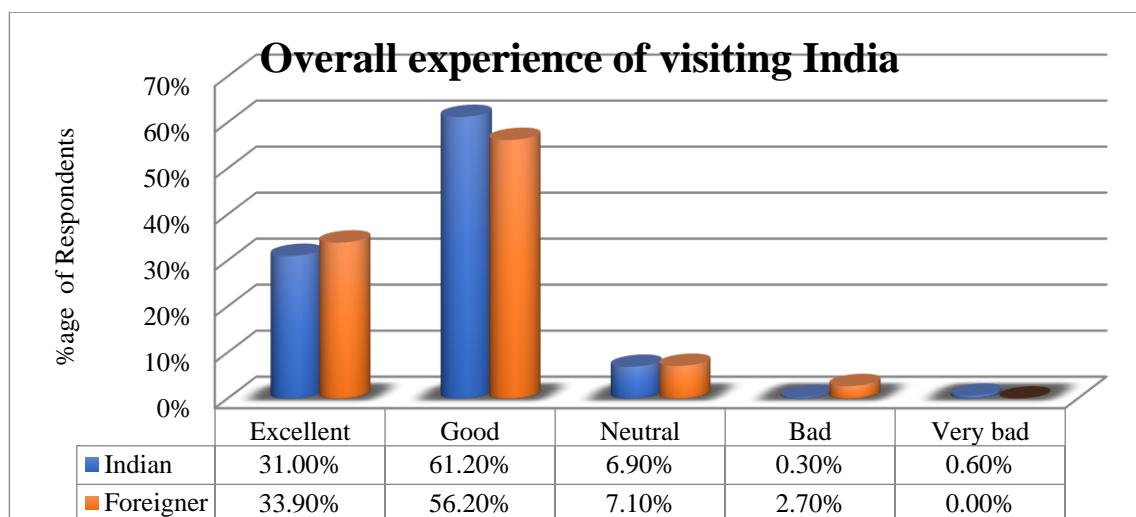|	Excellent	Good	Neutral	Bad	Very bad
Indian	31.00%	61.20%	6.90%	0.30%	0.60%
Foreigner	33.90%	56.20%	7.10%	2.70%	0.00%

Fig: Overall experience of visiting India

Usage of Mass Media in routine life

Developing an effective multimedia mix poses a constant challenge for brands, particularly with the growing emphasis on integrated communication strategies and the increasing significance of the internet. Scientific studies examining the advertising effectiveness of cross-media campaigns suggest that utilizing a combination of media channels tends to yield higher effectiveness compared to relying solely on internet advertising (Wakolbinger, Denk & Oberecker, 2009).

To gain insights into the media preferences of tourists and assess whether advertising campaigns align with the preferences of the target audience, respondents were asked to rank various media options based on their priority of usage. Television emerged as the most utilized media, with 516 respondents ranking it highest, followed closely by newspapers (436) and the internet (428).

Among foreign nationals, the internet was identified as the most preferred media, with 203 respondents ranking it highest, while television (173) and newspapers (140) also held significant importance. In contrast, Indian nationals favored television as their primary media choice, with newspapers (296) following closely behind. Interestingly, the internet (225) also emerged as a prominent communication medium for Indian respondents.

Overall, the rank distribution across all groups indicates that television remains the preferred choice, with 46.9% of respondents ranking it first. However, the internet's prominence is evident, with 203 respondents ranking it as their top choice. Meanwhile, newspapers, though ranked third overall, still command attention from a significant portion of respondents, with 65 ranking it as their primary media preference. This suggests that television continues to dominate even in an era of technological convergence. technology (see fig.).
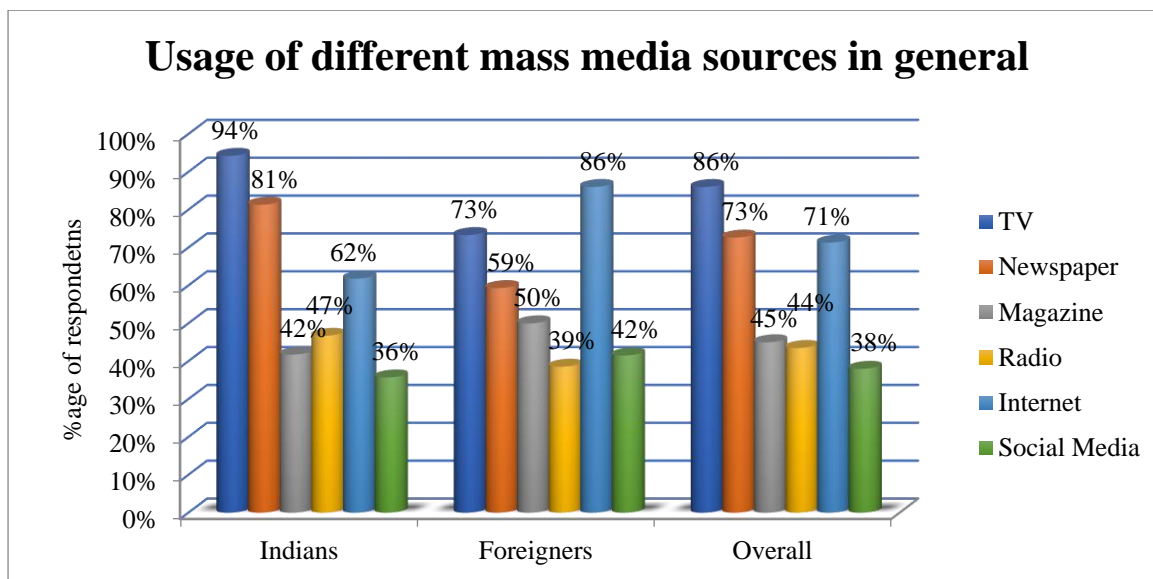
Fig: Usage of Mass Media in general

Among foreign nationals, the internet emerged as the top priority media choice, with 63.8% ranking it first, while television garnered a significantly lower preference, with only 16.3% of foreigners ranking it as their primary media choice. The utilization of social media platforms was notably higher among foreign nationals compared to other media channels.

Conversely, among Indian respondents, television was overwhelmingly favoured, with 65.6% ranking it as their top media choice, while the internet received a much lower percentage, with only 17.1% of Indians ranking it first.

Media preferences varied across different age groups, with the majority of individuals below 25 years of age prioritizing television (56.8%) as their primary media choice. In the age group between 25-50 years, internet usage took precedence, with 45.1% ranking it first. Interestingly, among individuals above 50 years of age, newspapers remained the favoured media choice, with 36.1% ranking it as their top priority. However, magazine and radio usage were minimal across all age groups.

It is worth noting that while magazine and radio usage were limited, many foreign nationals were observed to utilize travel magazines, guides, and books for tourism purposes, indicating a niche preference within the foreign tourist demographic.
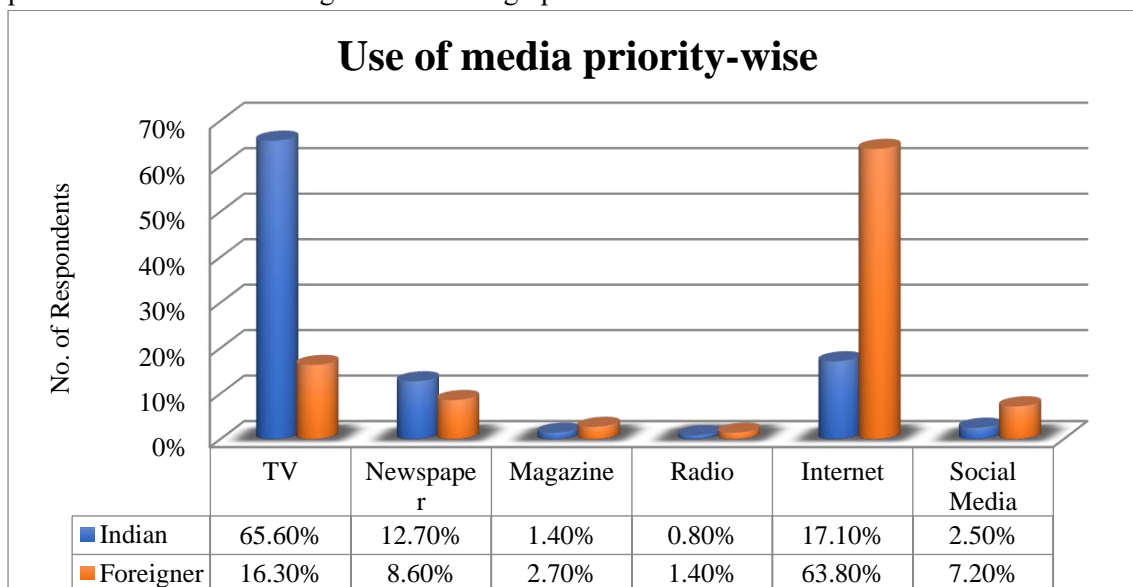

	TV	Newspaper	Magazine	Radio	Internet	Social Media
Indian	65.60%	12.70%	1.40%	0.80%	17.10%	2.50%
Foreigner	16.30%	8.60%	2.70%	1.40%	63.80%	7.20%

Fig: Usage of Media priority-wise

Conclusion

In conclusion, international tourists' perceptions of India are multifaceted, reflecting both the country's rich cultural tapestry and the challenges it faces. While India is celebrated for its cultural heritage, spirituality, and diverse experiences, issues such as poverty, corruption, and inadequate infrastructure also shape tourists' impressions. Concerns about cleanliness, safety, and the behavior of locals further impact the overall tourist experience.

To enhance India's appeal as a tourist destination, addressing these challenges is paramount. Improving infrastructure, enhancing safety measures, and promoting responsible tourism behaviors are crucial steps. By doing so, India can better showcase its cultural richness, spiritual values, and captivating landscapes while providing a more welcoming and tourist-friendly environment. Ultimately, India's allure remains undiminished, with the term "Incredible India" encapsulating its unique and diverse character, endorsed by both visitors and global leaders alike.

Indians perceive their country as culturally diverse, spiritually rich, and visually stunning, with significant historical and religious landmarks. While many express pride in India's progress, others acknowledge challenges like cleanliness issues, safety concerns, and misinformation. The discrepancy between the portrayed and actual tourist experience can negatively impact the destination's brand image. Effective infrastructure development and resource management are essential for ensuring a positive visitor experience and sustaining the destination's brand reputation. Attention to various factors contributing to the overall tourism experience is crucial for the continued development and success of tourism efforts.

Yet, improvements are clearly needed to enhance the overall tourist experience. Issues like inadequate information, lack of signage, transportation challenges, and security concerns must be addressed. Efforts to combat negative behaviours such as littering, vandalism, and harassment of tourists are essential for fostering a more welcoming and tourist-friendly environment. Strengthening hospitality standards, providing better guidance, and ensuring the availability of essential amenities are critical steps towards achieving this goal.

Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and attracting tourists to India. To effectively reach and engage specific target audiences, DMOs must employ a range of strategies. These include leveraging data-driven insights, investing in digital marketing, partnering with influencers, implementing targeted advertising campaigns, engaging in community outreach, and monitoring performance to make data-driven adjustments.

By adopting a holistic approach that addresses both the strengths and challenges of India as a tourist destination, and by implementing targeted marketing strategies, DMOs can help position India as a premier destination that offers enriching and unforgettable experiences for travellers from around the world.

In conclusion, understanding tourists' perception of India as a tourist destination is crucial for fostering sustainable tourism growth, promoting cultural exchange, and maximizing economic benefits. Through a nuanced analysis of tourists' perceptions, this research paper aims to provide valuable insights and actionable recommendations for enhancing India's attractiveness as a tourist destination on the global stage.

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