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Understanding motorcycle tourists' preferences, satisfaction and intentions in the Trans Himalayan landscape

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Abstract

Motorbike tours, particularly to the Himalayas' cold, rugged mountain regions, require significant courage and a unique interest. This study aims to understand motorcycle tourists' activities, destinations, routes, and accommodation preferences, while also exploring their satisfaction levels with motorcycle tourism experience. The research is based on a survey of 400 motorcycle tourists in the trans-Himalayan regions of Spiti and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh. The findings reveal a great level of satisfaction with the landscape beauty of the region and the adventure of riding. Riding a scenic route is among the top preferences of tourists. Tourists prefer clean and hygienic home-stays. However, they express dissatisfaction with the services provided by travel agents and bike rental companies. Still motorcycle tourists have strong revisit, positive experience sharing, and recommending intentions and Instagram is the most preferred platform to share experiences.

Keywords: Motorcycle tourism, Trans Himalaya, spiti tour

Introduction

As per Sykes, Kelly, & Ireland (2012) ^[8] motorcycle tourists are those who embark on on-road or off-road trips away from home on a motorcycle for recreation, entertainment, leisure, or vacation to sporting events, commercial events, charitable purposes, or independent activities. The tourist may be either the rider or a passenger, and the duration can vary from a single day to an extended overnight journey. Motorcycles can be used for transportation from one location to another but not for daily commuting. Motorcycle tourism in Spiti, a remote Trans-Himalayan region, offers riders an adventurous journey through rugged terrain, high-altitude passes, and stunning, barren landscapes. Known for its Tibetan-Buddhist culture and isolated beauty, Spiti attracts motorbike enthusiasts seeking a challenging yet rewarding experience. The region's off-road paths, ancient monasteries, unique geology, clear skies suitable for sky gazing, and serene atmosphere provide a unique escape from routine, making it a favored destination for those seeking adventure and spiritual connection amidst one of India's most breathtaking environments.

Tourist satisfaction and preferences are key concepts in tourism research that help understand what makes tourists happy with their experiences and what they look for when choosing routes, destinations, activities, accommodations, and amenities. Tourist preferences refer to tourists' specific choices or priorities for planning or engaging in travel. These preferences guide their decision regarding destinations, activities, accommodations, and other travel-related aspects. Preferences have also become the basis for tourists' typology of allocentric and psychometric for Plog (1974) ^[5]. Preferences reflect consumers' choices driven by their motivations and underlying unconscious needs (Tran & Ralston, 2006) ^[9]. Understanding tourists' preferences is important to ensure destination competitiveness by offering what they prefer and thus tourists' satisfaction.

Tourist satisfaction refers to the overall contentment or happiness a tourist feels after their travel experience. It measures how well the experience met or exceeded their expectations, the value it provided, and the memorable experiences it created. Wu *et al.*, (2021) ^[10] define experiential satisfaction as an evaluation of consumption and contentment with the whole consumption. Understanding tourist satisfaction and preferences is crucial for tourism businesses and destination managers as it helps them tailor their offerings to meet the needs

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and desires of tourists, leading to better experiences, repeat visits, positive word-of-mouth, and overall success in the competitive tourism markets. While much research has been conducted on destination preferences, studies focusing on individual components or intra-destination preferences of tourism products are still limited. In motorcycle tourism, however, the preferences and satisfaction attributes are explored in various studies. It is already established by Cappelloni, Baglioni, & Staffieri, (2019) [1] that motorcycle tourists strongly prefer small towns away from city crowds, panoramic views, and food stops. They do not prefer booking formalities, they prefer freedom of choice where they can amend their plans on their own, with no prior notifications. This was about Italian tourists. Cater, (2012, 2017) [2, 3-4] explored the preferences of Motor Bike Tourists for accommodation, activity choices, and information sources in the United Kingdom, Nickerson *et al.*, (2019) Montana, Corey, (1997) in West Virginia, and Weddel, (2014) in North Carolina to Blue Ridge Parkway. For motorcycle tourists, satisfaction comes with challenges such as riding a motorcycle deemed difficult for women (Romy & Dewan, 2020) [6]. Sharing experiences through group rides (Cappelloni, Baglioni, & Staffieri 2019) [1], and the journey or route (Sykes & Kelly. 2014) [7] are also acknowledged satisfactions. This study aims to uncover satisfaction and preferences. Wu *et al.*, (2021) [10] proved that motorcycle tourists' experiential satisfaction influences experiential acceptance and desire, experiential trust, and experiential attitude. This experiential attitude subsequently influences experience-sharing intentions. Motorcycle tourism is growing in India, especially in the Trans Himalayas, but nothing is known about the preferences or satisfaction of this particular market. Hence, the present study attempts to fill this gap by exploring the preferences of motorcycle tourists and their satisfaction with tours to Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India.

Methodology

The study employs a quantitative survey utilizing a structured questionnaire to collect responses on a five-five-point Likert scale, focusing on importance ratings and satisfaction. A sample of 400 participants was selected, and the results were interpreted using frequency analysis and measures of central tendency.

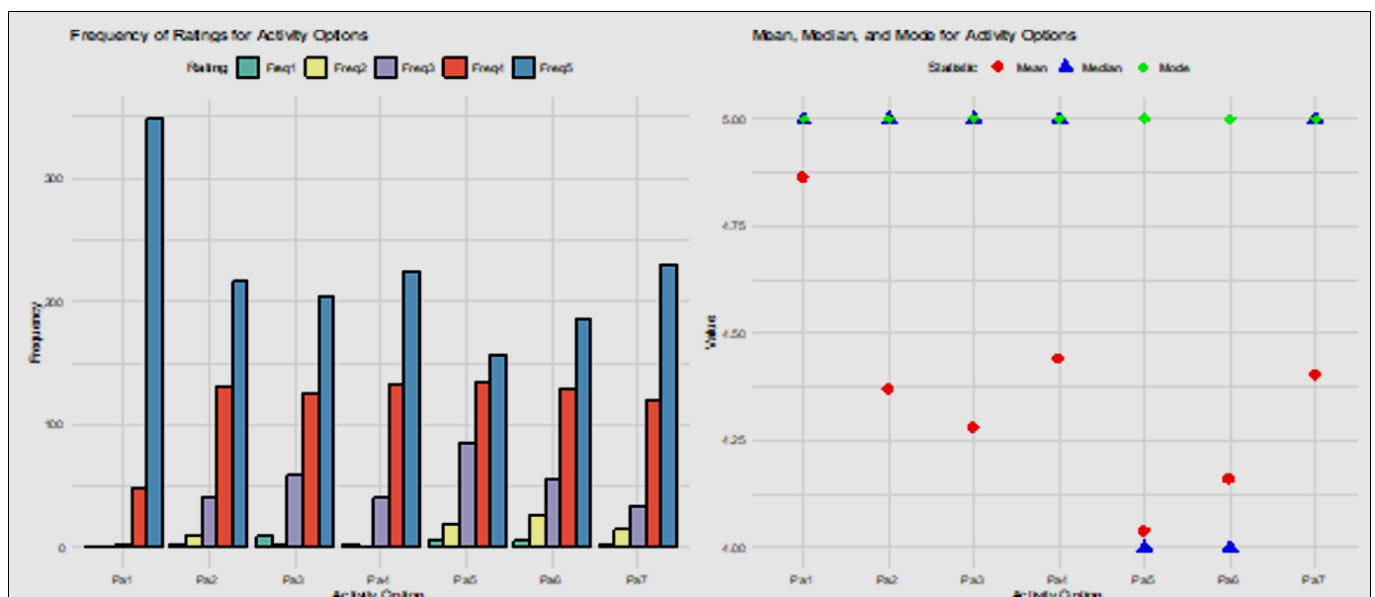
Results and Discussion

The preferences for activity choices, destination and route choices, and accommodation options were explored among motorcycle tourists. Tourists exhibited a strong preference for various activities, with a mean score above 4 for each of the seven options. The frequency and central tendency measures are shown in Figure 1.

Riding a scenic and adventurous route emerged as the most preferred activity, with a mean score of 4.86, highlighting the significance of riding, scenic views, and adventure as the core preferences of motorcycle tourists.

Second in preference was visiting a tourist attraction or sightseeing, with a mean score of 4.44, indicating that while these individuals are primarily riders, they also have a strong interest in tourism activities. This is further supported by the third and fourth highest-rated activities, Learning new skills or facts, with a mean score of 4.40, underscoring their experiential nature, and Trying local food and drinks with a high mean score of 4.37, showing the appeal of local culinary experiences.

Additionally, Riding with fellow riders scored 4.28, reflecting the social aspect of the journey. While Buying souvenirs received a slightly lower mean of 4.16, the interest in collecting mementos despite luggage constraints is notable. Finally, Attending local or cultural events had the lowest mean of 4.04, but still indicates a meaningful interest in cultural immersion.



Legends

Pa 1: Riding a scenic & adventurous route, **Pa2:** Trying local food and drinks, **Pa3:** Riding with fellow/other riders, **Pa4:** Visiting a tourist attraction / Sightseeing, **Pa5:** Attending a local / cultural event, **Pa6:** Buying souvenirs, **Pa7:** Learning new skills/facts

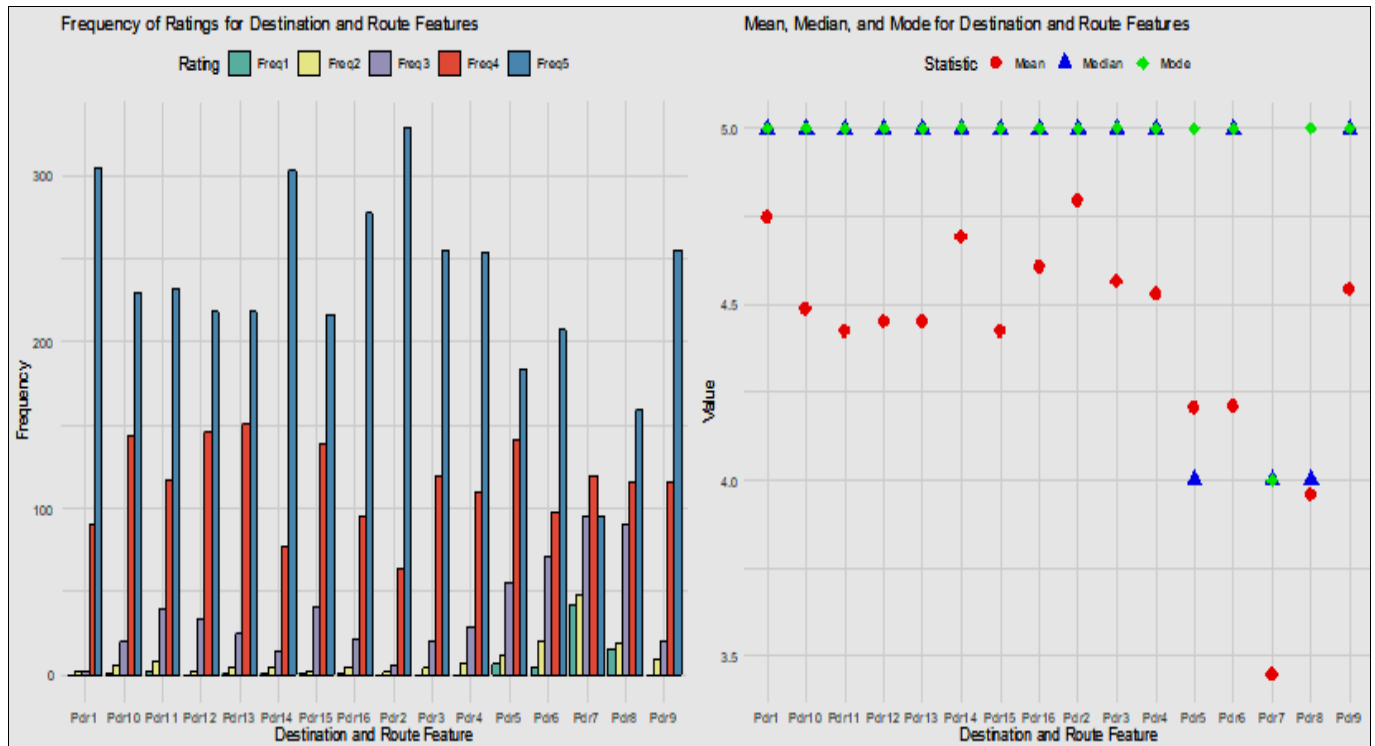
Fig 1: Activity Preferences of Motorcycle Tourists

For destination and route features, 16 attributes were explored again on the importance rating scale and ratings range from a mean score of 3.44 to 4.79. The central

tendency measures and frequency bars are shown in figure 2. Among the highly rated items on the importance rating scale are items related to picturesque beauty, weather, and

wildlife. The mean score of each of these items on the importance rating scale is above 4.6. The destination and route that offers scenic beauty, photography stops, wildlife, nature, and pleasant weather are most important for these tourists. Closely follow preference for adventurous routes which are challenging with roughness because it is unpaved or curvy, and at the same time safety and ease are ensured through proper signage. Each of these items received a mean rating score of 4.5 and above but less than 4.6 So adventure and safety are equally important.

Facilities that include feasible fuel stations, mechanics, accommodation options, and food and beverage points on routes are also desired with an importance rating of 4.4250 and above but less than 4.5 for each. The tourists also rated important Cultural, historic, and religious attractions, less or no traffic routes, and smooth well-paved roads. Comparatively, lower ratings below four but above a neutral point of 3 are received by a place to meet other bikers and quickest route.

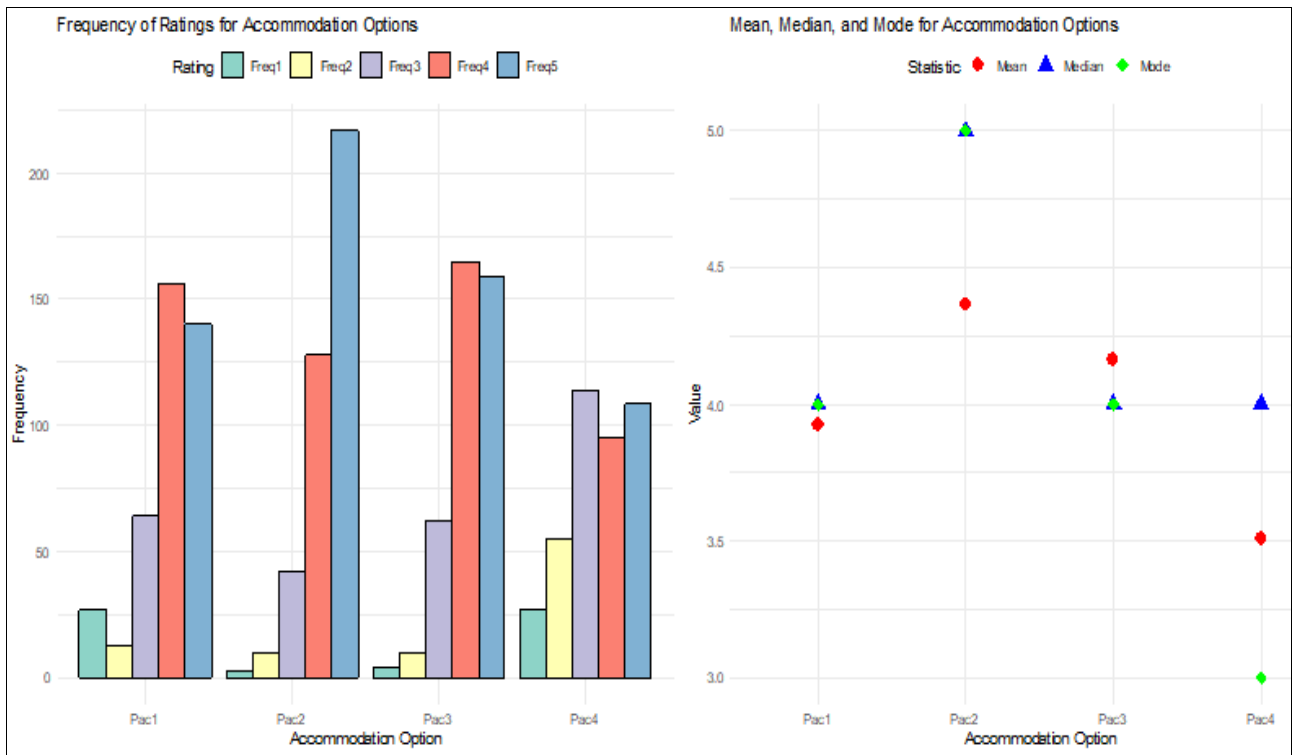


Pdr1- Beautiful picturesque stops, Pdr2- Scenic routes, Pdr3-rough and challenging unpaved roads, Pdr4 - Curvy roads, Pdr5 - No or least traffic, Pdr6 - Smooth well paved roads, Pdr7 - The quickest route to Spiti, Pdr8 - A place where we can meet other bikers, Pdr9 - Route with signage, Pdr10 - Fuel stations at feasible distance, Pdr11 - Regular mechanic/ repair workshops, Pdr12 - Route with food and drink points, Pdr13 - Route with accommodation options, Pdr14 - Nature and wildlife, Pdr15 - Cultural/historic/religious attractions, Pdr16 - Pleasing weather at Route and sites

Fig 2: Destination and Route Choices of Motorcycle Tourists

For accommodation, only four options are explored. The frequency and central tendency measures are shown in Figure 3. Among these options, a homestay is most desired with the highest rating of 4.3. Tourists desire a local authentic stay. Closely follow with a mean rating of 4.1 an

outdoor yet comfortable stay in the campsite where there are all the basic facilities available. Other less important accommodation options of a modern hotel and self-camping have also received above-neutral ratings of 3.9 and 3.5 respectively.

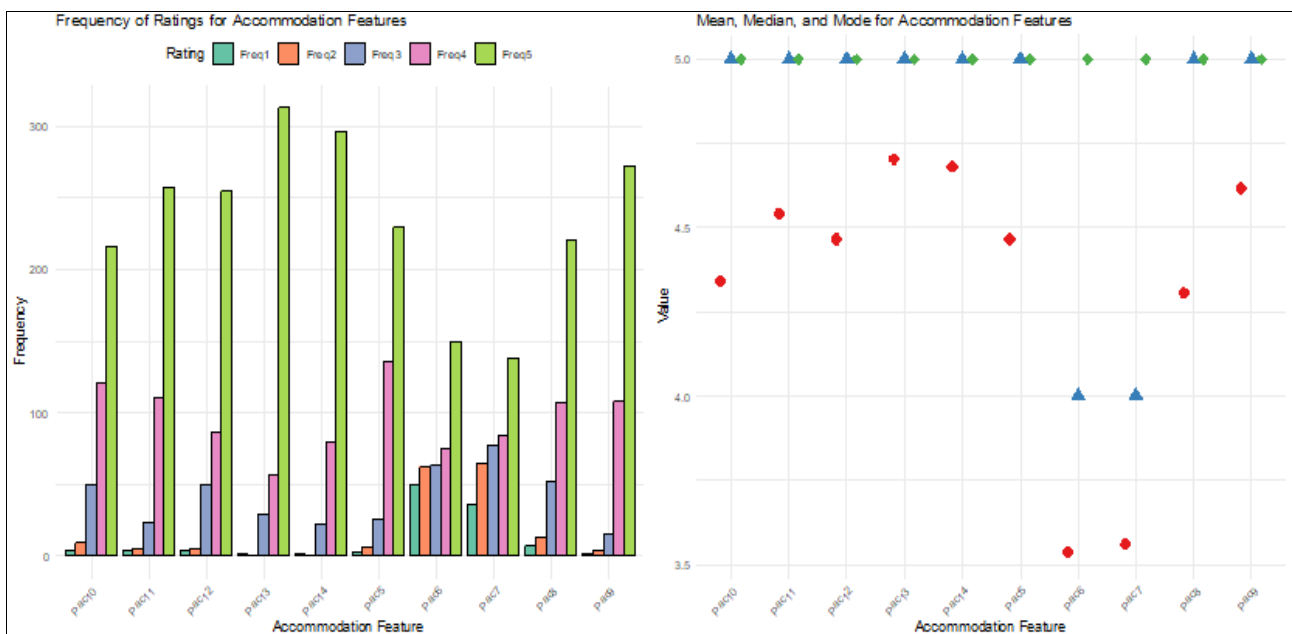


Legends: Pac1 - A modern hotel, Pac2 - A home stay, Pac3 - Site with all basic facilities, Pac4 - Self-camping

Fig 3: Accommodation Preferences of Motorcycle Tourists

The accommodation options are further explored by their ten different attributes. The frequency and central measures are shown in Figure 4. Among the most important attributes that received an average rating above 4.5 are hygiene, cleanliness, food-beverage availability, and safe parking. The other attributes rated above four but less than 4.5 are

hotel staff offering local insights and itinerary suggestions, discounts, easy access, common area, and wi-fi. A lower rating of only 3.5 is received by the bike wash facility and laundry area signifying the management skills of these tourists.



Legends: Pac5-on/near the route, Pac6- bike wash facility/area, Pac7-laundry/drying facility, Pac8 - offer Wi-Fi, Pac9- safe parking, Pac10- common place to socialize, Pac11- host can provide itinerary suggestions and local insights, Pac12- offers discounted rates, Pac13 -Maintains Hygiene, cleanliness, Pac14- Food and Beverage avail be/nearby

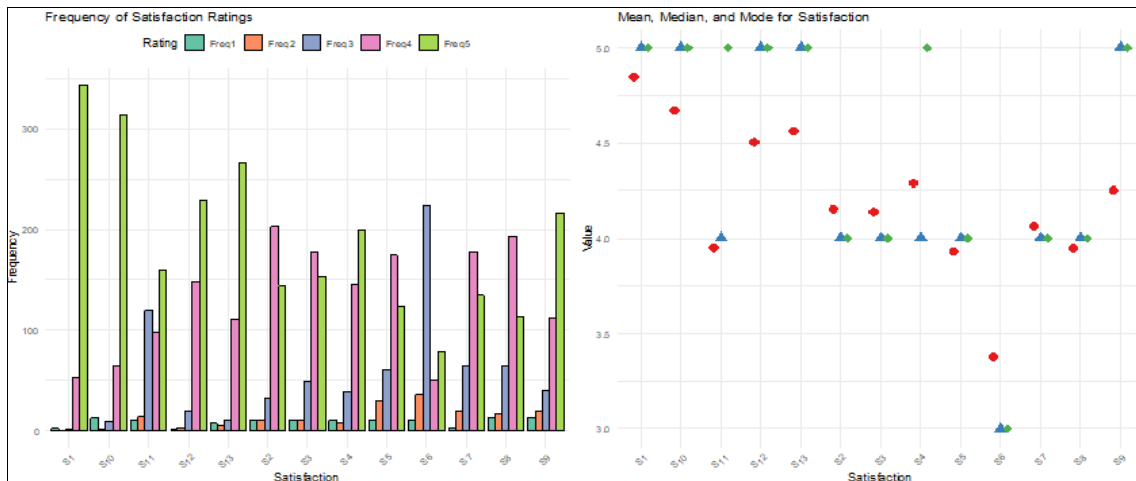
Fig 4: Preferred Accommodation Attributes

Thirteen items including an overall satisfaction rating comprised the satisfaction rating scale. Overall satisfaction has received a mean score of 4.5. Two items: sightseeing and riding have received ratings higher than overall. It is the

place, its geography, and its culture that satisfies the tourists the most. The thrill of riding is also fulfilling for the tourists. Ratings above four but not more than 4.2 are received by each item comprising various accommodation attributes

hygiene, cleanliness, and facilities (Wi-Fi, parking); cost of the entire tour; and amenities (food stops, fuel stations, and

rain shelters) en route.



Legends: S1- The place (it's geography & culture)/ Sightseeing, S2- Accommodation (Facilities- Wi-Fi, Parking etc.), S3- Hygiene and cleanliness at accommodation, S4 - Hotel staff or host of the accommodation, S5- Food and Beverages, S6 - With the service of travel agents/bike rentals, S7- Wayside Amenities (fuel, food, rain shelters etc.), S8- Condition of roads, S9- Cost of the entire tour, S10 - The riding adventure, S11 - Riding in Group, S12 - The journey, S13 -Overall

Fig 5: Motorcycle Tourists' Satisfaction Level

Road conditions, group riding, and food received average ratings below 4, with a score of 3.9. The lowest ratings were for services of travel agent and bike rentals, averaging only 3.3. However, not all tourists traveled in groups or used bike rental or travel agent services. To assess the impact of these factors, ratings were filtered for those who traveled in groups or used travel agents or bike rentals. The conditional descriptive statistics show that tourists traveling in large groups were more satisfied with their group experiences, with ratings improving from an average of 3.9 to 4.1 in

small groups, 4.5 in large groups, and 4.3 in both as shown in Figures 6 and 9.

However, satisfaction with travel agent services and bike rentals remained below 4. For those who booked through travel agents, the rating was 3.5, regardless of bike rental use. Tourists using rental bikes, whether booked through an agent or not, rated their experience at 3.3. When combining those who either booked through a travel agent or used a rental bike, the rating was 3.4. Figures 7, 8, and 9 show these details.

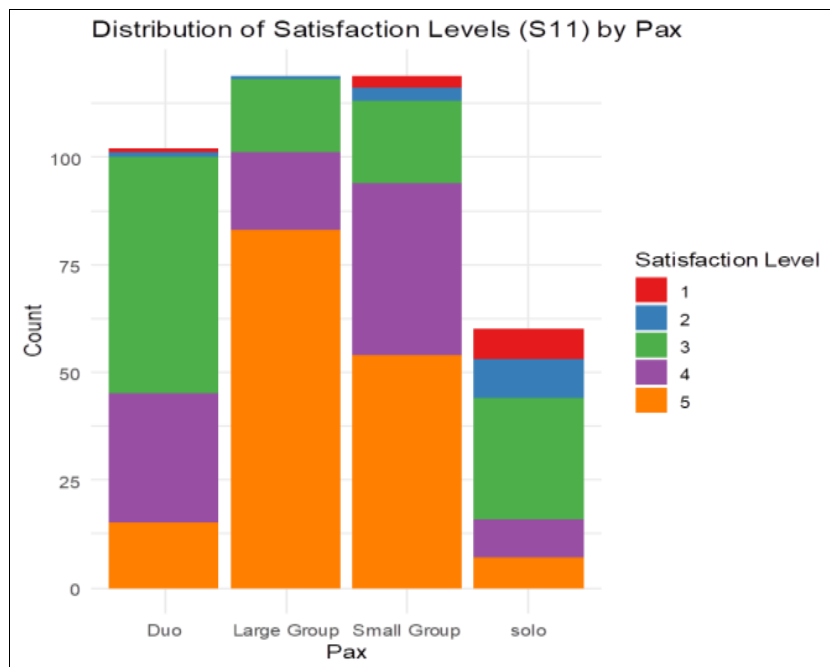


Fig 6: Satisfaction with Group Rides in Group, Solo, and Duo Tourists

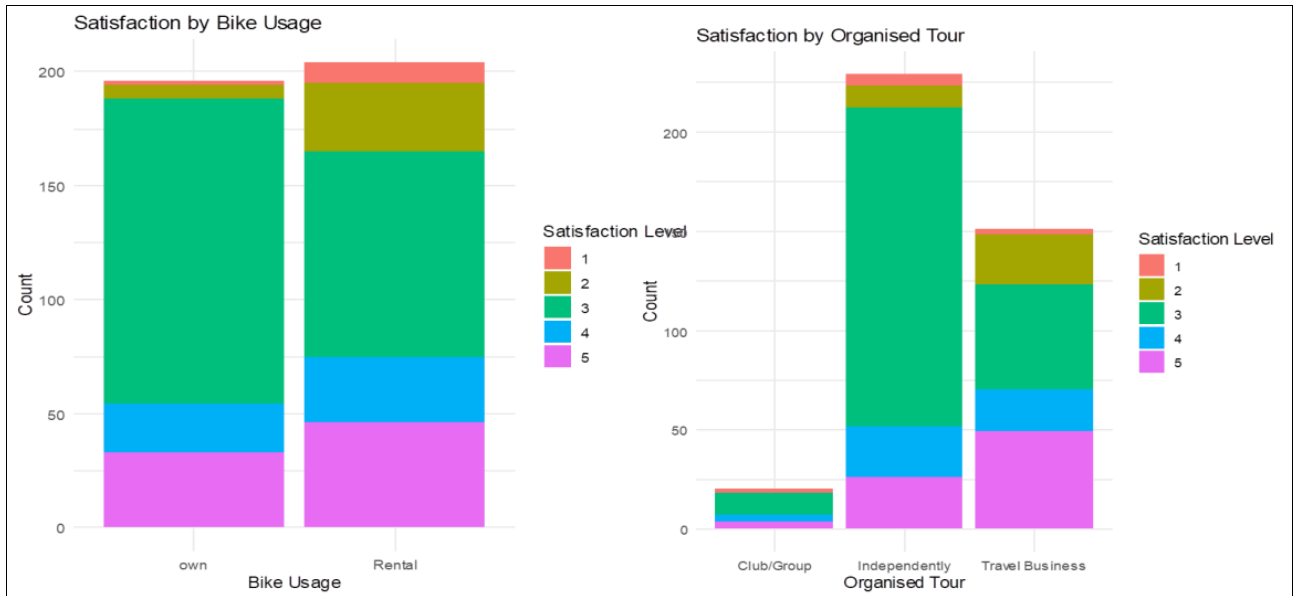


Fig 7: Satisfaction with Agent/Rental Services as per Rental/Own Bikes and Independent/Organised Tourists

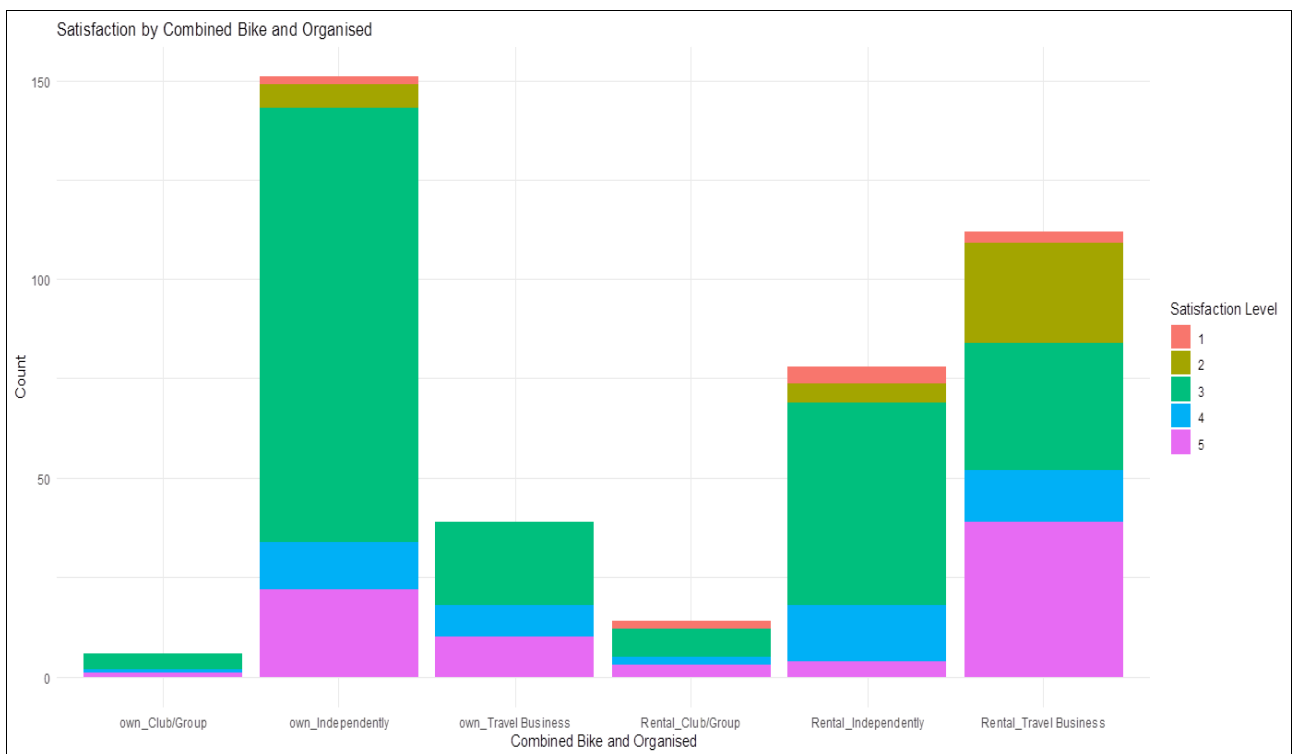
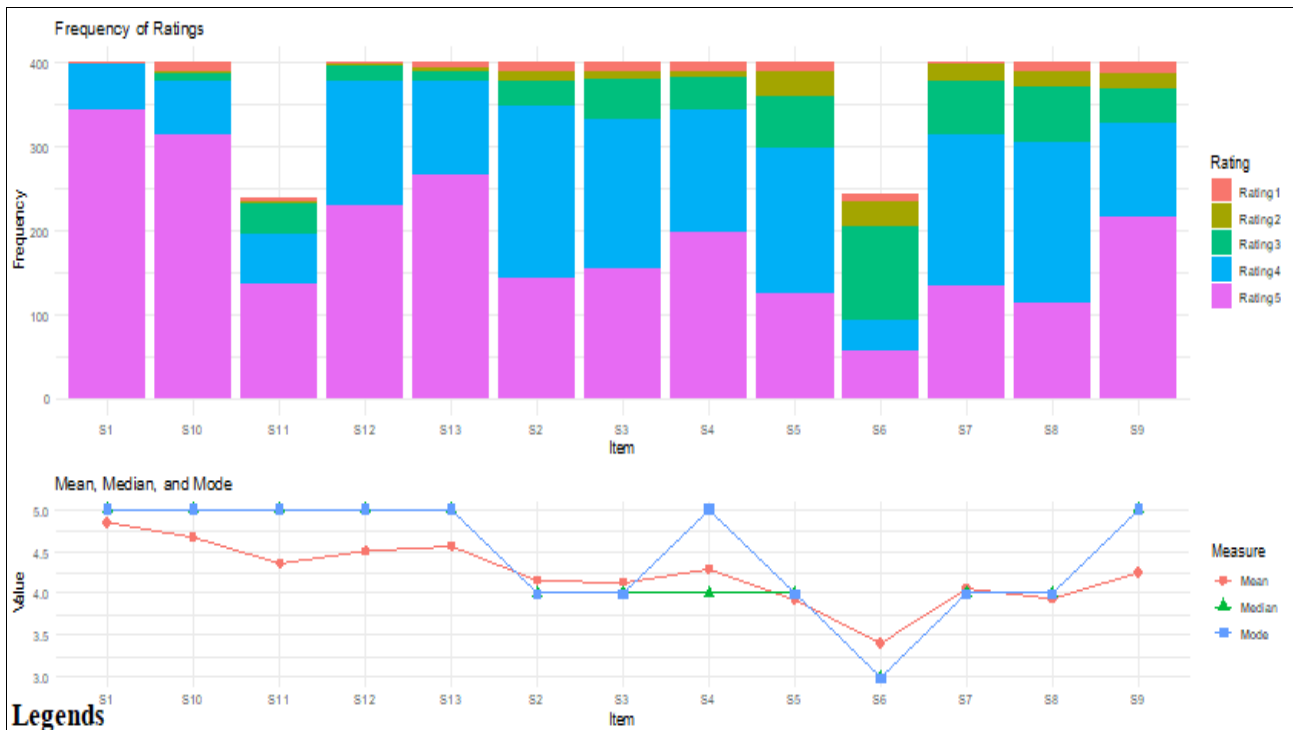


Fig 8: Satisfaction as per Organization Type and Bike Status combinations



Legends: S1 - The place (it's geography & culture)/ Sightseeing, S3- Accommodation (Facilities- Wi-Fi, Parking, etc.), S3 - Hygiene and cleanliness at accommodation, S4- Hotel staff or host of the accommodation, S5- Food and Beverages, S6- With the service of travel agents/bike rentals, S7- Wayside amenities (fuel, food, rain shelters etc.), S8- Condition of roads, S9 - Cost of the entire tour, S10- The riding adventure, S11 - Riding in group, S12- The journey, S13- Overall satisfaction

Fig 9: Satisfaction when solo and duo excluded for S11 and independent or own motorcycle tourists exclude for S6

The data reveals insightful patterns about tourists' intentions regarding sharing experiences and revisiting Spiti. A significant majority of participants (348) demonstrated a strong commitment to sharing their positive experiences, underlining the high motivational impact of positive encounters. However, a smaller group (36) was tentative about sharing positive experiences, and only a few (16) had no intention of sharing them at all. This suggests that while most tourists are eager to share their positive experiences, a

small fraction may hesitate or choose not to. When it comes to negative experiences, 141 participants indicated a definite intention to share them, though this is less frequent compared to positive experience sharing. An additional 126 participants were unsure about sharing negative experiences, suggesting a mix of hesitation and readiness. Conversely, a notable number (133) preferred not to share negative experiences, indicating a strong preference for avoiding negativity in their communications.

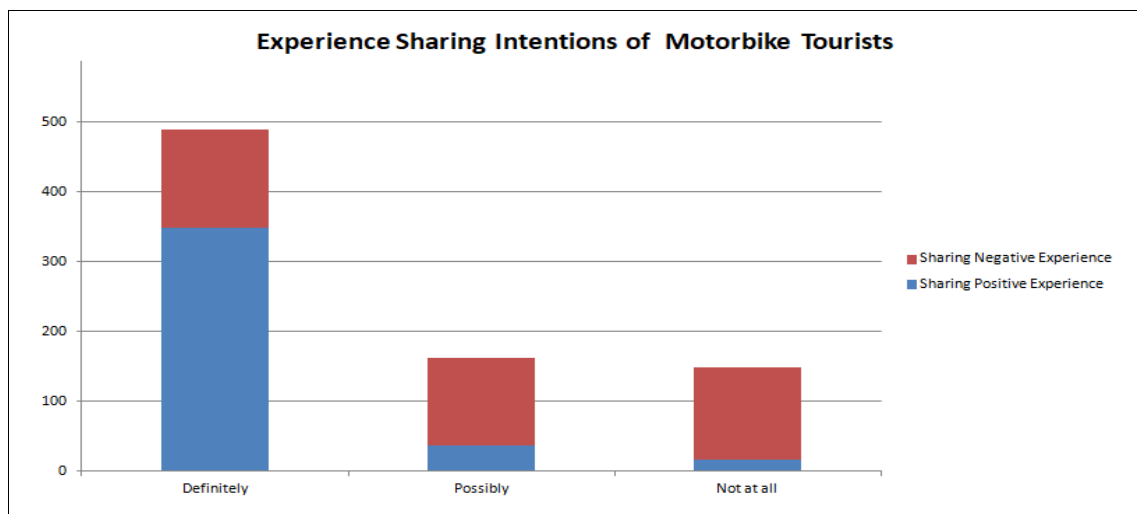


Fig 10: Experience sharing intentions of Motorcycle Tourists

Finally, when asked about recommending a motorbike tour to Spiti, a striking 98.5% of respondents (394) affirmed they would recommend it to others. Recommendations were primarily directed towards friends (366), followed by members of riding communities (214), family (199), and

colleagues (194). Only one respondent suggested recommending it to followers, illustrating the influence of personal connections and the role of bloggers in promoting such experiences.

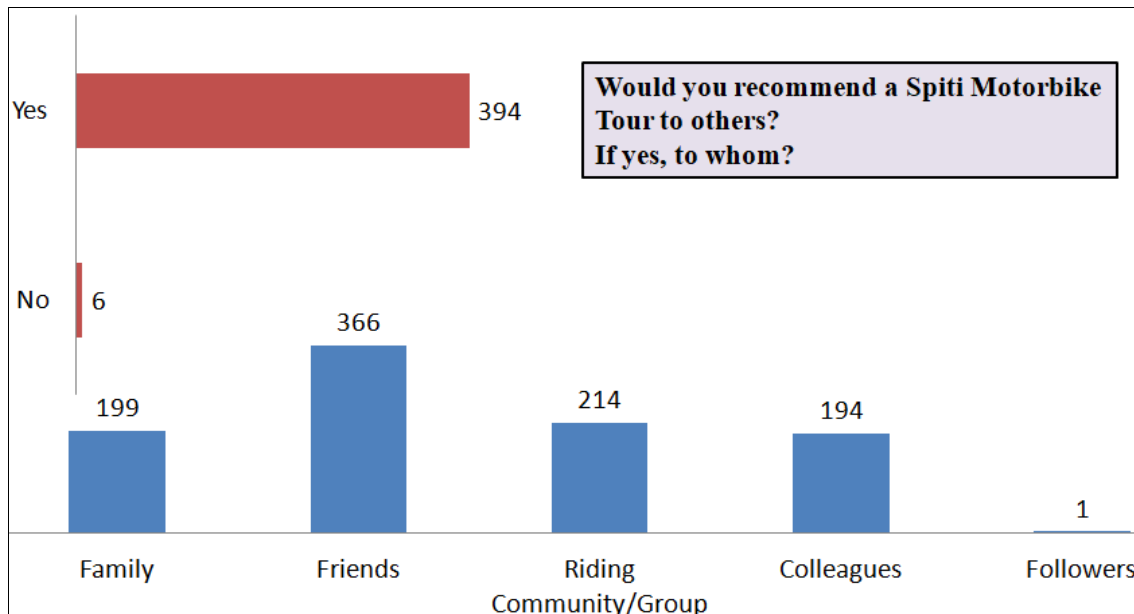


Fig 13: Recommend Intentions

Conclusion

The survey revealed that motorcycle tourists overwhelmingly prioritize riding, particularly on scenic and adventurous routes, as their top activity preference. In terms of secondary preferences, they are drawn to activities such as sightseeing, exploring local culture, and sampling regional cuisines. Tertiary activity choices, ranked in order of importance, include group rides, collecting souvenirs, and engaging in local events, highlighting a balanced interest in both individual and social experiences during their journeys. These findings confirm the central role of the riding experience in motorcycle tourism through the most favored activity. Also the rides should be scenic and pleasant. Destinations with nature and good weather only hold the potential for motorcycle tourism. Tourists also seek thrill as revealed with their preferences for destination and routes.

For destination and route preferences, the most important features include visually appealing landscapes, pleasant weather, nature and wildlife, and challenging unpaved routes with curves and signage. Convenient access to fuel stations, mechanics, accommodation, and food and beverage stops along the way are also key considerations. In contrast, cultural, historic, and religious attractions, traffic-free routes, smooth well-paved roads, opportunities to meet other bikers, and the fastest route are comparatively less important.

For accommodation, home-stays are the most preferred option, followed by campsites with basic facilities. Modern hotels and self-camping are comparatively less important. Key requirements for accommodation include cleanliness, hygiene, availability of food and beverages, and secure parking. Additional factors such as staff offering local insights and itinerary suggestions, discounts, easy access, common areas, and Wi-Fi are also valued. However, facilities like bike wash and laundry services are not considered important.

Tourists expressed overall satisfaction with the motorcycle tour to Spiti, Himachal Pradesh. The destination and the riding experience especially are the most fulfilling. Accommodation options, cost, and wayside amenities on roads are also marked satisfactory. Group tourists are satisfied with the group riding experience. However, The road conditions and food options can be improved. The dissatisfaction with the services of travel agents and bike rentals needs to be explored.

The findings reveal a strong inclination among tourists to share positive experiences, with a majority keen on utilizing platforms like Instagram for this purpose, while a smaller segment remains hesitant or chooses not to share at all. In contrast, negative experiences are less frequently shared, with a notable portion of participants preferring to avoid sharing negativity. The strong intent to revisit Spiti on a motorbike, demonstrated by 67.6% of respondents, underscores the destination's significant appeal. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority (98.5%) of participants would recommend a motorbike tour to Spiti, primarily to friends and peers, highlighting both the high satisfaction levels and the influence of personal networks in promoting travel experiences.

The research is limited largely by the subjectivity of respondents as it is based on stated preferences and satisfaction perceived. Future studies should focus on revealed behavior. Also, exploring the reasons behind dissatisfaction with travel agents and bike rentals could offer insights into areas for improvement. Tourists have shown a preference for homestays, however, investigating the impact of motorcycle tourism activities on local communities and the environment could provide a more holistic view of motorcycle tourism's effects. Future research can leverage Instagram and YouTube to explore how these platforms influence tourists' decision-making and experience-sharing behaviors. Specifically, studies could

examine how content shared on Instagram and YouTube affects viewers' perceptions of destinations, the role of visual storytelling in shaping travel intentions, and the impact of influencer endorsements on audience engagement. Additionally, the research could investigate how tourists' content creation and sharing on these platforms contribute to their overall satisfaction and likelihood of revisiting destinations. Understanding these dynamics can offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of social media as a tool for tourism promotion and enhance strategies for engaging with potential travelers.

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