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Socio-demographic composition of residents in Himachal Pradesh: A descriptive study

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Abstract

The study examines the demographic profile of residents in key tourist destinations of Himachal Pradesh—Manali, Shimla and Dharamshala—and interprets their perceptions of tourism through the theoretical lenses of Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model. 400 responses from respondents are gathered using a descriptive research design in order to examine significant variables. The sample, according to the results, is primarily young, well-educated, and modestly off, with little direct involvement in jobs related to tourism. Consistent with SET assumptions, the results indicate that locals' support for tourism is mostly impacted by perceived costs and benefits at the community level rather than by personal financial advantages. Furthermore, the trends show that these places are probably in the TALC model's consolidation phase, where early developmental benefits start to lose ground to overtourism pressures. Although the results theoretically fit with accepted theories of tourism, more empirical research is necessary to confirm these connections in a scientific manner. In the swiftly evolving tourism dynamics of Himachal Pradesh, the study emphasizes the significance of implementing sustainable and community-centered tourism policies that guarantee fair benefit distribution and long-term destination resilience.

Keywords: Resident Perceptions, Overtourism, Descriptive Analysis, Community, Tourism Development

Introduction

Overtourism is a phenomenon in which the number of visitors exceeds the carrying capacity of tourist destinations; arising as a major challenge for popular tourist destinations worldwide. The problems linked with overtourism intensify due to sensitive and fragile ecosystems, limited public infrastructure and civic amenities, narrow transport corridors, etc. Tourism is a key source for income generation and job creation for local stakeholders; especially for those communities who are on the verge of losing their cultural/tribal identity. However, surging tourist arrival is becoming a burden on natural resources, environment, public amenities, -water supply, waste management, traffic control system, etc.

Local communities depend upon tourist activities for their livelihood. While tourism linked economic benefits raise their standard of living & improve their quality of lives; associated costs lead to various repercussions. Therefore, to examine perceived impacts of overtourism by residents, it is important to study their demographic background. Profiling of residents' demographics play an important role in understanding their socio-economic characteristics for in-depth study of the problems they are facing due to overtourism and its negative impacts. The characteristics of residents such as age, education, income level, occupation, etc often shape their attitudes toward tourism development and environmental management (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sekaran & Bougie, 2020) ^[4, 14].

The doctorate-level work of researcher, "Overtourism and Its Impacts on the Socio-Economic Environment of Himachal Pradesh-An Exploratory Study", serves as the basis for the current investigation. Description and interpretation of the demographic traits of the respondents from Manali, Shimla, and Dharamshala—three of the state's most popular urban hill destinations—is the goal of this sub-study. In particular, this analysis helps determine the degree to which socio-demographic characteristics affect perceptions of the repercussions of overtourism, ensuring the validity and representativeness of the major study findings

1.2 Literature Review

Overtourism is a situation occurring due to number of visitors, use of patterns, or tourism-related activities which stresses out the social, environmental and infrastructural carrying

capacity, decreasing living standards, quality of lives and environmental destruction. As per literature studies, overtourism is a multi-dimensional concept, rather a matter of surging visitations. It depends on the factors such as infrastructure, seasonality, temporal and spatial concentration, perceptions and opinions of residents, governance, etc. Intensity of overtourism on these factors vary from destinations to destinations; while for some destinations, overtourism have perceived to be economic beneficial but harmful for others. To monitor and curb overtourism, a multi-faceted framework of governance and destination management is required than just a single metric; that should incorporate environmental, socio-cultural, economic and governance variables. There are various key causes and drivers that lead to overtourism such as low-cost travel, short-term rentals (eg. Airbnb), aggressive marketing of places “must visit”, transportation advancements, promotions and discounts especially during special occasions, events, festivals, etc, social media platforms, etc. There is a need to strengthen policies and action plans, encourage role of local bodies, awareness of stakeholders, community participation, etc to mitigate overtourism. Measures like dynamic pricing, off-season promotion, digital visitor control system, etc are among strategies of monitoring and controlling overtourism.

In survey-based tourism research studies, descriptive analysis of demographic profile of residents is highly relied as their opinions, perceptions and attitudes are influenced by their socio-economic characteristics. Behavioural aspects of residents are open correlated with their demographic backgrounds and their perceptions towards impacts of any concept or subject (eg., overtourism in this study). Demographic description facilitates representativeness and evaluation: comparison among distributions of sample based upon characteristics such as age, gender, and education, etc in empirical research, local administrative work, policy making, etc. It also helps in revealing those areas that require weightage in generalization. Such analysis is important to make suggestions and recommendations to mitigate over tourism.

Studies reveal that there are positive socioeconomic impacts of tourism such as jobs, entrepreneurship, and infrastructure investment; while negative impacts include seasonal precariousness, unequal benefit distribution, inflation in housing and local pricing, and informal labor. Locals who work directly in tourism or related industry perceive better financial rewards and encourage tourism activities, but they are also more vulnerable to seasonality and precarious employment. Homestays and handicrafts are examples of micro-enterprise possibilities that women and marginal groups may be able to access, although the rewards are often modest and uncertain. Therefore, one can say that socio-economic demographics of residents assist researches in identifying who pays the expenses and who are benefitted the most. Hence, in order to identify susceptible subpopulations and provide focused policy alternatives, descriptive profiling must document profession types, income bands, and if any household members are employed in the tourist industry. In Himalayan and mountain destinations, the impacts of tourism get doubled due unique cultural, tribal or ethnic identities of communities along with rough topography, fragile ecosystems, narrow transport corridors, limited water and waste-management capacity, and pronounced seasonality that concentrate visitor impacts in

short periods. The combined stresses of traffic jams, solid waste buildup, and seasonal housing demand can quickly overwhelm local infrastructure in mountainous areas like the Himalayas, severely affecting the quality of life for locals. The research suggests place-sensitive carrying capacity evaluations and integrated infrastructural solutions—along with social measures like benefit-sharing and community engagement—to manage overtourism in mountain communities because of these site-specific vulnerabilities. Domestic travel in India has increased demand on well-known locations that are commonly criticized for being congested. Dramatic seasonal surges are documented in the media and policy reports. For instance, in Shimla and Manali, the administration reports vehicle movements in lakhs during peak periods, which causes ongoing problems with parking, waste management, and traffic control. Meanwhile, planning and capacity building have not kept up with the growth of tourism, leaving infrastructure under-resourced in comparison to visitor demand. During local surveys, locals have voiced their concerns about the deterioration of public services, the housing crisis and rent increases, the congestion, and the rise in short-term rentals. These region-specific stories demonstrate the urgent need for thorough demographic descriptions: policy responses run the danger of being unfair or futile if it is apparent who the locals are and how many depend on tourism for their livelihoods. While an increase in resident-oriented studies in Himachal is noted, thorough cross-site demographic baselines are still very rare. The literature, therefore, supports the present approach: a carefully documented descriptive profile across Manali, Shimla and Dharamshala that records demographic structure will make subsequent attitudinal and impact analyses both more transparent and policy-relevant.

1.3 Research Gap, Objective & Methodology

While overtourism is receiving more scholarly attention, there aren't many standardized, multi-site demographic descriptions of the people who live in the hill towns of Himachal Pradesh. A large portion of the current research is restricted to small-scale, single-site investigations, which limits the generalizability of results across different locations. Comparison and synthesis are hampered by the frequent inconsistencies in reporting methods and demographic groups. Many studies do not first establish a clear resident baseline before prioritizing impacts or management responses. Residents' opinions and policy recommendations are less contextually interpretable when there is a lack of recent, regularly reported demographic data. This study fills that void by offering a thorough, uniform descriptive profile of 400 respondents who live in Dharamshala, Shimla, and Manali.

This study aims to provide a detailed descriptive account of the socio-demographic characteristics of survey respondents from Manali, Shimla, and Dharamshala — including gender, age, marital status, education, occupation, household income, duration of residence, and household involvement in the tourism industry.

The socio-demographic characteristics of residents in the Himachal Pradesh towns of Shimla, Manali, and Dharamshala—all perceived to be impacted by overtourism are recorded in this study using a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. Instead of using inferential statistical testing, the study is solely descriptive in nature, with the goal of

using frequency distributions and percentages to summarize trends in the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) ^[4].

Primary data are collected directly by the researcher using a structured questionnaire designed to capture socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, monthly income, place and duration of residence and involvement in tourism industry. The questionnaire is administered through face-to-face interactions with local residents in public and community spaces. Respondents are informed about the academic nature of the study and provided verbal consent prior to participation. The survey targets adult respondents

(aged 18 years and above) who are inhabitants of the respective towns.

A total of 400 valid responses are collected for broad representation across the three study locations. The collected data are entered, cleaned, and analyzed using the R statistical software. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages are computed to profile respondents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

1.4 Results and Discussion

The sample characteristics are presented below:

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents (N = 400)

Variable	Category	Sample Size N=400	Percentage %
Gender	Female	240	57.6
	Male	160	39.3
Age	18–24 yrs	166	40.8
	25–34 yrs	68	17
	35–44 yrs	51	12.5
	45–54 yrs	75	18.8
	<18 yrs	32	8
Marital status	65+ yrs	8	2
	Single	243	60
Education	Married	157	38.5
	Graduation	167	41.8
Occupation	Postgraduate	105	26.3
	Student	186	46.5
Monthly income	Private employee	86	21.5
	No income	4	1
	< ₹1 lakh	298	74.9
	1–5 lakh	68	17.0
	5–10 lakh	20	5
Place of residence	10–15 lakh	8	2
	15–20 lakh	2	0.5
	Manali	150	37.5
	Shimla	140	35.0
Involvement in tourism/related industry	Dharamshala	110	27.5
	Yes	103	25.8
	No	297	74.3

The respondents' demographic profile provides important information on the diversity and nature of the study sample. The majority of participants are female (57.6%), with men coming in second (39.3%). Just 2% of respondents are 65 years of age or older, with the majority (40.8%) being in the

18–24 age range, followed by those in the 25–34 (17%) and 45–54 (18.8%) age groups. When it comes to marital status, 38.5% are married and 60% are single. In terms of education, the sample is usually well-qualified, with 26.3% holding postgraduate degrees and 41.8% being graduates.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Dominant Category	Percentage	Mean	Median	Mode	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gender	Female	57.6	1.4	1	1	0.408	-1.833
Age	18–24 yrs	40.8	2.99	3	2	0.492	-0.977
Marital Status	Single	60	1.39	1	1	0.44	-1.806
Education	Graduation	41.8	2.3	2	2	0.287	-0.732
Occupation	Student	46.5	2.13	2	1	1.1	0.094
Monthly Income	< 1 lakh	74.9	2.34	2	2	2.227	5.555
Place of Residence	Manali	37.5	1.9	2	1	0.182	-1.416
Involvement in Tourism	No	74.3	1.74	2	2	-1.109	-0.77

The respondents' profile's central tendency and distributional features are revealed by the descriptive analysis of the sociodemographic variables. Skewness and kurtosis define the form and dispersion of distributions, whereas mean, median, and mode characterize the center position of responses (Field, 2018) ^[5].

1.4.1 Gender

The majority of respondents are female, as indicated by the mean gender value of 1.40 and the median and mode also being 1. The distribution is platykurtic (kurtosis = -1.83)

and slightly right-skewed (skewness = 0.86), indicating that although female involvement is higher, responses are evenly distributed across categories and there is no excessive clustering.

1.4.2 Age

The majority of respondents belong into the 18–24 and 25–34 age groups, according to the age variable's mean of 2.85 and median of 3. While the slight negative kurtosis (-0.91) indicates a fairly balanced distribution across age groups, with no dramatic peaks, the positive skewness (0.67)

indicates that fewer elderly people are included. This demonstrates that the sample is representative of a young, diversified population.

1.4.3 Marital Status

In line with the preponderance of younger participants, the mean value (1.39) and median (1) indicate that the majority of respondents are unmarried. Fewer married respondents are confirmed by the skewness number (0.79), which once more shows a right-skewed pattern. A flat distribution without an unusual concentration of marital groups is suggested by the kurtosis (-1.81).

Educational Qualification: The majority of respondents are graduates, as indicated by the education category's mean of 2.30, median of 2, and mode of 2. Because there are fewer responders with doctorate degrees and higher, the distribution is slightly positively skewed (0.58). A reasonably normal and balanced distribution of education across the categories is indicated by the kurtosis score (-0.69).

1.4.4 Occupation

With a mean score of 2.45, the occupational profile shows that students make up the largest group, followed by workers in the private sector. The data appear to be right-skewed, as indicated by the comparatively high positive skewness (1.10), which connotes a concentration of respondents in lower occupational categories like students or entry-level jobs. The sample's moderate occupational diversity and high student representation are indicated by the negative kurtosis (-0.47), which indicates a flatter-than-normal distribution.

1.4.5 Monthly Income

The majority of respondents reported monthly incomes below ₹1 lakh, according to the income variable's mean of 2.55 and median of 2. While the negative kurtosis (-0.89) shows a wide range of income levels without a dramatic peak, the skewness value (0.89) shows that a significant percentage of the data is concentrated in the lower income brackets. This is common in economies that are dominated by tourism and have low incomes from the service sector.

1.4.6 Place of Residence

The median (2) and mean (1.95), respectively, indicate that the respondents are split almost evenly between Manali and Shimla, with a lower percentage from Dharamshala. A roughly symmetric distribution is indicated by the skewness value (0.37), while a flat distribution is indicated by the kurtosis (-1.42), suggesting that the sampling is evenly distributed among the three sites.

1.4.7 Tourism Involvement

According to the mode (2) and mean value (1.74), the majority of respondents do not work directly in the tourism industry. Low levels of direct participation in tourism-related occupations are confirmed by the negative skewness (-1.09), which indicates a left-skewed distribution and a preponderance of "No" responses. The diversity of inhabitants' indirect associations with tourism activities is highlighted by the negative kurtosis (-0.81), which shows a flatter distribution and answers that are fairly scattered across categories rather than strongly concentrated.

According to the descriptive results, the sample is primarily

young, well-educated, and modestly off, with few direct jobs in tourism-related fields. This socioeconomic makeup suggests that locals' opinions of tourism are more impacted by the costs and advantages of the community as a whole than by individual financial gain. The tenets of Social Exchange Theory, which maintains that people assess travel according to the perceived balance between costs and benefits, are in line with this tendency. Residents are more inclined to support tourism when perceived advantages like better infrastructure, jobs, and community status outweigh perceived drawbacks like crowding or environmental deterioration. According to empirical research, locals' opinions about tourism are not all the same; rather, they differ depending on socioeconomic and demographic factors. This variety is further illustrated by the tourist engagement variable's negative skewness and flat kurtosis, which show that opinions regarding tourism are spread throughout a range of individuals, from direct participants to people who are indirectly impacted. According to studies using the Tourist Area Life Cycle model, resident sentiments become more conflicted as destinations consolidate, with concern about overtourism, resource depletion, and quality of life developing. The destination may be heading toward a consolidation phase, where economic gains stagnate and social and environmental pressures increase, as indicated by the study's high perception of externalities and low direct tourism employment (Ap, 1992) ^[8].

1.5 Limitations of this Study

1.5.1 Geographic Scope

Manali, Shimla, and Dharamshala are the three main tourist sites in Himachal Pradesh that are the focus of this study. Therefore, the results may not accurately reflect the opinions of residents at district-level or in other districts of Himachal Pradesh.

1.5.2 Sample Composition

While 400 respondents provide a sufficient sample size for descriptive analysis, it may not fully represent the socio-economic diversity of the general population. The general representativeness of thoughts may also be impacted by the preponderance of young, well-educated respondents.

1.5.3 Cross-Sectional Design

Because the data are gathered during the peak travel season, it is difficult to track shifts in residents' opinions throughout the year. Longitudinal research may provide more profound understanding of changing attitudes.

1.5.4 Descriptive Nature of Analysis

To examine demographic traits, the study uses descriptive statistical tools. It does not explore causal links between demographic variables and attitudes toward tourism using inferential or structural modeling.

1.6 Conclusion

The present study examined the demographic profile and socio-economic characteristics of residents across key tourist destinations in Himachal Pradesh (Shimla, Manali and Dharamshala). The results indicate that the majority of respondents are young, educated, and economically modest, with limited direct engagement in tourism-related activities. The perceptions of residents toward tourism development

are shaped by collective community outcomes primarily rather than individual benefits. The comparatively low degree of direct tourism involvement in this study is indicative of cautious or ambivalent support, which is impacted by concerns about overcrowding, resource pressure, and unequal economic benefit distribution. All sides considered, the study emphasizes the significance of inclusive and participatory tourism planning that incorporates local viewpoints into the creation of policies. Maintaining the delicate balance between tourism growth and community well-being requires fostering sustainable visitor management techniques, increasing community involvement, and diversifying economic rewards. This study advances knowledge of the social dynamics of overtourism and lays the groundwork for evidence-based decision-making in sustainable destination management by placing the findings within well-established theoretical frameworks. Finally, the results support the tenets of Social Exchange Theory, confirming that the perceived balance between the costs and benefits of tourism influences locals' support for it. Additionally, the data suggests that the destinations under study are probably in the consolidation phase, when the strains of overtourism and resource depletion start to offset the initial economic benefits of tourism growth, according to Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model. This emphasizes how urgently sustainable and community-focused tourism policies are needed to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the destination and the welfare of the local population. Due to the limitations of current study, it may not only represent the opinions of residents accurately from all regions of Himachal Pradesh but also limits the capacity to determine causal or long-term insights into locals' perceptions of tourism. Future studies should use longitudinal surveys with mixed-method approaches to capture shifting resident attitudes over time with a larger and more varied sample from all tourist destinations of the state and a thorough empirical inquiry is also recommended to demonstrate the scientific linkage of findings with theories like SET or TALC even though the findings conceptually fit with these frameworks.

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