

Indian Heritage Tourism – A Netnographic Approach

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Abstract—Heritage tourism in India is seeing many changes with the technology exposure. It can be seen in the past that the demand for heritage tourism in India may be decreasing due to the result of social desirability bias. This could have a camouflage effect for lesser market charm. An approach of netnography was made use of in the exploratory study. It handled 7324 online reviews from global tourists to extract qualitative observation into tourists' level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with respect to Heritage tourism in India. This was done with the aim of understanding the mindsets of the foreign visitors from a qualitative aspect. The netnographical approach was useful in capturing both favourable and unfavourable reviews. It was in fact observed that foreign travelers were intensely positive in relation to their experiences. This research highlights that there is incongruity between those people who actually take part in the heritage tourism experience and those people who do not. Many hidden reasons are discussed in this research.

Index Terms—Heritage tourism, Netnography, Online research, Qualitative research, social desirability bias

1. INTRODUCTION

India is a magnanimous market for tourism. It has a plethora of alcove tourism products ranging from adventure and heritage to medical and ecology. India is also among the most sought after place for spiritual tourism. The total contribution by tourism segment to the GDP of India is estimated to go up from Rs 15.24 trillion to Rs 32.05 trillion in 2018 (www.ibef.org). Tourism industry ranks number 3 in terms of earning foreign exchange to the country. In January 2019, landing on the Indian soil with e-tourist visa raised by 21.10 % (www.ibef.org). For the first time in the history of India, it is observed that a special policy has been floated by the Government of India to extend support to the tourism industry under the name Swadesh Darshan Scheme. India is very rich in its cultural heritage too. India is a land of diversities consisting of beaches, 37 world heritage sites and 25 bio- geographic zones (www.ibef.org).

India is a warehouse of many art, crafts and paintings right from the time of Indus valley civilization from 3rd Century BC itself. The British government established the Archeological survey of India way back in 19th century as Indian art and culture was an indispensable part of heritage. India is among the very few countries which has seen diversity of people from the era of apes to the modern age of digitalization. When any individual travels across India, he will be for sure exposed to different variety of flora, fauna and people with various caste and creed. There are many

places which has beautiful monuments like forts, caves, mansions, palaces, ruins – all of which has an interesting historical or mythological story to share. This leaves behind a legacy of intangible cultural attributes of literature, folklores, rituals and celebrations.

It is of utmost importance to analyse the “cyber cultures” because of the changes that internet has brought in. To understand the online cultures, many approaches have come into light and Netnography is one such approach that tries to unleash the online cultures. Netnography (Kozinets 1997) is a qualitative approach that aims to study communities online with a touch of ethnography. Kozinets (2002) states that netnography is less noticeable and very natural when compared to the conventional ethnographic methods. Hence Netnography shares information with relation to the consumers' sequence and style of online behavior. There have been a lot of research work carried out with the use of Netnography as a methodology (Bartl, Kanaan&Stockinger, 2016; Bengry – Howell, Wiles, Nind& Crow, 2011; Nind, Wiles, Bengry Howell & Crow 2013). But Netnography is not well explored as a research tool by researchers of tourism.

The birth of online communities has given way for a lot of cultural issues that have an influencing role to play in the decision making capacity of different individuals. For example, tourists share their experiences on various social media platforms with their personal views. These views can have a direct effect on destination marketers and potential tourists. Cyber cultures have become an integral part of our everyday life emphasizing conventional relationships among different people in the society. These online platforms encourages the interaction levels among individuals from various sections of the society both nationally and globally. With the rapid growth of web technology and internet, netnographic research is seeing an exponential growth. The findings of netnographic research reveals unseen parts of cultural dimensions, involvement, desires, assumptions.

Netnography was designed primarily as a tool for business research for understanding the behavior of the consumer, the relevance of administering this technique is well appreciated and acknowledged by researchers across various streams (Bartle et al., 2016) and specifically in tourism studies (Tavakoli& Mura,2018; Mkono&Markwell, 2015).

Bartle et al., (2016) in a detailed netnographic research has delved into the business field and highlighted on the numerous studies adopting netnography in the recent years. Mkono&Markwell (2014) in a netnographic study in

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tourism found that the technique of netnography has not been fully utilized by the researchers. The two main reasons for non – usage of netnography as a technique in tourism is limited confidence and lack of awareness (Mkono&Markwell, 2015) and limited knowledge about IT (Tavakoli& Mura, 2018).

The major chunk of netnographic research can be seen on websites, blogs and social media (Web 1.0, Web 1.5, Web 2.0). Other platforms like Web 3.0, Web 4.0 and Web 5.0 can provide background for more rigorous and robust netnographic study.

Up to now, the systematic evaluation carried out via Bartle, et al. (2016) remains the maximum complete systematic assessment analysing netnography. However, the study by Bartle, et al. (2016) focuses in particular on commercial enterprise (i.e. enterprise journals). Even though 1 / 4 of netnographic studies blanketed within the overview had been tourism-associated topics (posted in business journals), the systematic assessment itself changed into now not designed to examine the progress of netnographic studies within the field of tourism. The evaluation, consequently, does not recollect netnographic research posted in tourism, tour and/or hospitality journals. A similarly quandary of the take a look at changed into the time period of 1997–2012, which as the net evolves at a fast tempo, increases an additional need for an up to date assessment in this count. The studies word by Mkono and Markwell (2015) similarly offers a selected expertise of netnographic studies in tourism. However, the system of the evaluate was not systematic and the overview blanketed best 37 papers in total, which had been found by using the hunt characteristic in Google scholar. The dialogue itself is restrained and lacks a complete know-how of the phenomenon due to the lack of data. Consequently, we contend that an intensive know-how of netnographic practices in tourism and hospitality research is still missing. Based totally on these factors, this have a look at became designed to research the modern-day kingdom of netnographic research in tourism. The existing evaluation attempts to address the aforementioned gaps in netnographic systematic evaluations through discussing the advancement of existing net structures and the opportunities they provide for conducting netnography in tourism. This includes 3 principal sections. In the first element, the researchers explain the evolution of the web within the context of tourism. The second one segment projects a complete evaluation of existing netnographic research in tourism. The third component affords tips for viable future studies on netnography in tourism. Lastly, it gives a different dimension to Netnography that researchers need to consider acknowledge while making use of Netnography.

2. THE WEB AND TOURISM

The human interaction is constantly evolving with the advancement in technology. The initial versions of internet saw a new profitable development in 1980s (Cohen – Almagor, 2011). The last decade has witnessed the technological blend in every individual's life and its interference in daily acts. The original web was not very easy to develop the content of websites and aid in interaction. But later when the web entered the commercialization, with the help of content management systems, a revolution in the web

was seen. Web 2.0 raised by throwing a lot of opportunities open for the development of tourism related websites to boost tourism. In fact a lot of hospitality and tourism operators still bank on them.

Gen next web, Web 2.0 saw its inception in the year 2004 by O'Reilly Media and was popularly known as “the social web” (Weber &Rech, 2010). The other names given to this web are “wisdom web”, “people-centric web” and “participative web” (Patel, 2013). It gives ample scope for both creation of online communities and connect with the other existing ones. This encourages both developers and end users to strengthen the substance of the website. Web 2.0 extends the freedom to have “peer to peer” communication (Patel, 2013). Hence, another name to it is “participative media” or “collaborative web” (Patel, 2013).

It is observed that there is a radical upsurge in the usage of smart phones and other smart devices. This has greatly contributed to the progression of web (Pileggi Fernandez – Llatas&Traver, 2012). Applications on mobile have been constantly used by both end users and service providers. The “always-on” (Weber&Rech, 2010) attitude of people who carry their smart gadgets with them always is creating a huge revolution in the tourism industry. For example, route planning and GPS navigation applications (e.g. Waze, Google Maps); social networks for travel reviews (e.g. TripAdvisor); photo galleries (e.g. Instagram); services such as emergency calls and healthcare services; and many other applications are used by most tourists.

3. INDIAN HERITAGE TOURISM

History as well as heritage are interwoven as Heritage is not the principle of the past (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). Heritage is what the present day society wishes to acquire and to pass it on to future (Turnbridge&Asworth, 1996). Heritage can be inferred as a physical thing; a property, building or place which can be both owned and passed on to another person (Campanella, 2013).

Besides these physical objects and heritage sites, there are also different heritage practices that are preserved or transmitted from one generation to the next. These invisible or 'intangible' heritage practices, such as language, culture, popular song, literature or clothing, are just as important in helping us understand who we are as the more physical objects and buildings we are.

4. ADVANCEMENT OF HERITAGE TOURISM IN INDIA

The Ministry of Tourism is the nodal agency to draft national policies and programs for tourism development and promotion. The Ministry is in the process of consulting and collaborating with other sector stakeholders including various Central Ministries/agencies, State Governments/Union Territory Administrations, and private sector representatives. Some of the important schemes are as follows:

The Swadesh Darshan Scheme is a top priority initiative connecting the entire country.



There are as many as 7 projects that have been initiated during 2018-19 which amounts to Rs. 384.67 Crores. (<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=186799>)

There have been 9 projects that were inaugurated between August and December 2018 in some states. This concentrates on the development of various facilities like Tourist Facilitation Centers, Eco Log Huts, Sound and Light Show, Helipads, Cafeteria, Wayside Amenities, Nature Trails, Jetties, Boat club, Adventure Zones, Interpretation Centers, Water Sports, Craft Villages, Tribal Thematic Villages, Illumination etc. have been developed as part of the above projects.

(<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=186799>)

‘National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive’ (PRASHAD) Scheme. One project has been sanctioned during 2018-19 for a total amount of Rs.39.24 Crore. (<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=186799>)

Darvill.T (2007) in the research work has recommended that World Heritage sites should not be just concentrated on research purposes but also needs to be recognized intently with formulation and preservation of various types of knowledge.

India has always been known for its rich heritage, which is reflected in numerous monuments, forts, palaces, temples and archeological sites. For international and domestic tourists, heritage tourism in India is a great attraction. Therefore, in order to sustain the benefits of heritage, a robust mechanism is essential not only for the conservation and protection of heritage, but also for the basic provision of amenities for enhancing the overall experience of the tourists.

5. RESEARCH GAP

The area of Heritage Tourism in India is not very well researched. The extant research has not completely uncovered the rationale behind the market appeal of archaic tourism in India. The earlier studies highlights the fact that Heritage tourism may be affected by social significance bias (Chang et al., 2005; Ruhanen et al., 2015a; Smith, 2007). Majority of the research work with respect to Archaic Tourism in India and other parts of the world have predominantly made use of conventional ways to collect data like a questionnaire or personal interactions. Such methods have always had their set of limitations. Many vulnerable topics which can lead to biases are not taken into consideration. Respondents may pursue to present themselves in a way that is socially acceptable by not disclosing their actual feelings and experiences (Middleton and Jones, 2000; Paulhus and Reid, 1991; Smith, 2007).

Keeping the above said background, this present study was conceived. It aimed at examining the experiences of tourists from other countries who visited India on a heritage tour. A different mechanism of user generated content and methodology of Netnography were employed to examine if there was any bias by social desirability. The study desired to unleash the other reasons for studying the market enticement for heritage tourism in India.

Hence, the aforementioned exploratory study evaluated 3986 online reviews given by international tourists with a specific reference to heritage tourism.

6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Identify both positive and negative factors of heritage tourism in India.
2. Wring qualitative acumen into the undisclosed factors by the international tourists.

One of the best approaches that may expedite in waiving out some innate social bias in the research of visitors is netnography (Ulosov, 2012). Reviews on TripAdvisor, Travelocity, Expedia and Yelp were considered for the study because of the rich data and understanding into the evaluation of a travel product or experience. TripAdvisor has exponentially grown as a congregation place for sharing consumer reviews related to experiences of tourism (Gretzel&Yoo, 2008). Because of the analogous anonymity of online platforms, the reviews can be far away from biases. This makes the approach of netnography acceptable. Online reviews have no limitations. For example, a questionnaire way of data collection cannot capture a candid comment, experiences, pictures and perceptions (Kladou and Mavaragani, 2015; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Hence sites like TripAdvisor is gaining importance and captivating the attention of both academic and industry researchers because of their convenient access (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Also the many consumer insights can be collected. (Hodgson, 2007).

7. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Heritage tourism looks at the planning of tourism in a more all-inclusive way. It ratifies that regional society has identified important elements of their places so imperative that such places need to be preserved and passed on to the upcoming generations. This type of tourism also designates that individuals are devoted to care for such recognized elements.

In total, heritage tourism refers to a comprehensive concept which aims at covering varied compilation of phenomena (Tweed & Sutherland, 2007 as cited in Trinh 2010). Heritage tourism is a practical, intriguing and continuous process which associates inhabitants, social groups, institutions and government bodies.

An important concern with respect to businesses and destination marketing agencies is directly related to the satisfaction which becomes the end result of a tourist experience. Fulfillment or a pleasant behavior can lead to an effective and constructive post purchase actions like customer allegiance and repetitive buying, endorsements to peers, intensified destination impression (Chen and Chen, 2010; Kim et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2015; Ryu et al., 2012; Walker and Moscardo, 2016; Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Zeithaml et al., 2006).

Satisfaction connects to an emotional mental state that is shaped by the favourable utilization experience and the other side for dissatisfaction (Babin and Harris, 2014). The expectancy theory on which a lot of satisfaction studies are based suggests that people get involved in experiences by expecting the fulfilment of a specific need or wish (Lee et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2016) or it may be certain features (Zhao et al., 2016). Hence, satisfaction depends to a greater extent on

those factors which is perceived to have been performed.

In the view of Wall and Mathieson (2006), social tensions among host neighborhood and tourists can shape up in developing countries because of currency issues. Social conflicts can creep up as a result of movement of people from one place to the other which may sometimes have impact on culture. Tourists find and attach value in engagement with hosts and heritage tourism (Holder and Ruhanen, 2017) along with knowledge that is mutual spoken of about environment, natural atmosphere and legitimacy of the experience (Ali, 2009; Joned Donald Strategy partners, 2009; Ruhanen et al., 2015a).

Tsai et al., (2016) stated that the change in global climate patterns have sustained many changes since 1990s which has led to change in weather along with cajoled disaster that has been the root cause for many disasters. Such situations causes severe menace to communities which depend on their natural environment and ecosystem for the development of tourism.

Some of the international tourists in the past who have shown interest in Heritage tourism have shared that they were not exposed to any advertisement or marketing (<http://tourism.gov.in/overseas-marketing>). A study carried out by Ruhanen et al., (2015a) states that tourists had very little awareness and were unable to recall any advertising of Heritage tourism experiences or products. EspinoAbascal (2014) concluded that past experience, word of mouth communication and research by one own self about heritage tourism has a greater impact when compared with that of any marketing or advertisements.

The inconsistency and divergence in the research findings with regard to market enticement of Archeic tourism in India establishes the need for more relevant and fixate research in this field. Keeping the issue of social appeal bias that has been a concern in the previously carried out studies, a more rigorous approach of netnography was made use of to check the intersperse lens path to gather better understanding into the topics of discussion.

8. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

User Generated Content (UGC) was found to be profoundly applicable source of data for the study of tourism. This technique has been gaining a lot of importance among academicians, market researchers and industry experts for exploring the travel related purchases or decisions. Netnography has been made use of to delve into trends and behavior of visitors (Lu and Stepchenkova, 2015), destination facets (Stepchenkova et al., 2013), e-complaints in hospitality industry (Sari et al., 2013), feedback of dining experiences (Mkono, 2013), cruise services satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2015). Netnography can help in identifying and furnishing rich data that has “not prearranged the concerns or impedes them in free expression of their impressions” (Lu and Stepchenkova, 2015 : 125). The reviews from customers

offers meaningful acumen into their experiences and level of satisfaction (Mauri and Minazzi, 2013; Zhou et al., 2014) and also a treasured and authentic source of data (Smith et al., 2005; Yoo and Gretzel,2012).

There are certain limitations with relation to authenticity of social media platforms for the collection of data. Issues have been pointed out about online reviewers of spurious online reviews reported by competitors and also organizations paying for influencing and positive reviews (Ayeh et al., 2013; Mawer 2016; Mkono 2016). TripAdvisor has brought in a lot of changes in their review fairness and deceit disclosure systems TripAdvisor, 2018). This research aims at reflecting the tourism experience of archaic tourism of international tourists in India. Every “Heritage Tourism” business which consisted of reviews posted online were selected to be a part of the sampling frame.

9. SAMPLING STRATEGY

It included 47 individual tourism organizations which catered to monuments (12), culture and art units (19), exclusive attractions (10), accommodation (6). The tourist organizations were from North (16), East (12), West (09), South (10). It included rural, metropolitan and capital cities too. Keeping in mind the magnanimity of rich data, the present study was restricted to reviews from international visitors and the time frame considered for the study was 18 months (December 2017 – March 2019). 7324 reviews from international visitors were collected, coded to be analysed qualitatively. Keeping the objectives of the study, both favourable and unfavourable data was considered for coding. Open coding was the mechanism used to have a broad category of reviews with a classification of favourable, unfavourable and neutral.5587 were coded as favourable, 1087 showed up as unfavourable and 650 neutral. A certain number of reviews in which the reviewer doesn’t express any favourable or unfavourable experience was treated as neutral and was kept away from more analysis. Example of a neutral review is where the review simply talks about a mere stating of an aspect of the total experience like “we had to stop for a while and had a cup of coffee”. Braun and Clarke (2006), carried out the mechanism of open coding manually by studying, labelling and classifying data files in the form of codes.

The second stage of the research comprised of pivotal coding in which data within both favourable and unfavourable codes went on to get further analysed to becoming themes. Apart from the neutral reviews, 6674 reviews were left for analysis. 8 themes were recognized within the set of reviews that were favourable like “Heritage guide”, “Native culture”, “Heritage connections”, “Learning experience”, “natural setting”. 5 Themes that were a result of unfavourable reviews were “Service, professionalism, authenticity, natural environment and quality”.

Exhibitive quotes under both the categories are as follows:

Code	Category 1: Favourable quotes and suggestive quotes	
	Count	Suggestive quote
Heritage Guide	1854	“The heritage land owners become an important part of explanatory tours combining many aspects.” “Amazing guide, very good knowledge about heritage places and funny too”
Native Culture	927	“Will stay alive in my heart forever” “The rich culture of this place is reflected in the tasty food too”.
Heritage connections	849	“Small but very deeply connected community to heritage” “Raju explained about the rare inhabitants but most important conversation was the deep sense of connection with the land.”
Learning experience	621	“Continuous learning with fun” “So many learnings to last a lifetime”
Pure environment	506	“Amazed by the beauty of monuments and mountains” “Every stone in the monument had lots of stories to narrate which made us understand the land better”.
Convenience	414	“Very easily accessible to all amenities” “Isolated yet connected”
Special thoughts	322	“Was a complete introspection day” “Understood how we take our heritage and culture for granted”
Pricing	94	“Worth every penny spent” “Slightly expensive but surely do not regret my decision”.

Code	Category 2 :Unfavourable quotes and suggestive quotes	
	Count	Suggestive quote
Service	455	“We reached the destination at the promised time to find that the booking was cancelled. Very Unprofessional” “The guide did not have any proper information. Completely dissatisfied with the trip”
Price	267	“The price was too high for a very small experience in the toy train”. “Paid a bomb and not worth even half the amount”.
Authenticity	193	“The tour operator did not disclose anything as it was a secret according to him”. “Free shows back in England teach us more than this!!”.
Natural environment	113	“Extremely hot and my kids completely disliked the whole trip”. “Too much of walking and I hated it”.
Culture	59	“Men do not talk to women as its against their culture”. “Sacrificing animals in the name of culture is no good”

It is needed for the researcher to be independent in coding procedure to make sure that there is coherence, certainty and neutrality (Thomas, 2006). The most important aspect is to ensure the reliability of coded themes keeping the availability of humongous data availability in mind. Hence its very important to establish a robust process of coding. It required steady revision and clarification of codes and sub-codes.

10. FINDINGS

It was found from the reviews of international visitors of Heritage tourism events and participation that they have had an intensely positive response. 80% of the total 6674 reviews were coded under the category of 8 favourable themes. So, this points out that reviewers were predominantly happy or regarded their heritage tourism experience in India positively. Positive aspects correlated with Heritage Guides (1854), Culture (927) and heritage connections (849) were very evident in the study. Learning experience (621) and special thoughts (322) were also viewed as favourable. For example, there was one review which read, " Guides were very humanistic in their approach. He helped me carry my little one as we had to walk a long distance and even helped us with cool drink in his own money. A beautiful gesture which can never be forgotten". The personal traits of the guide along with his competence were very often voiced; "kind", "friendly", "passion", "hardworking", were some of the terms that were seen in the theme reviews. The front line employees certainly have a very important role to play in "make or break" an experience (Zeithaml et al., 2006), this study is certainly a positive one for heritage tourism businesses as they are conveying positive actions which are well taken by the tourists.

The native culture of Heritage tourism was also seen as favourable by the reviewers online. Example, "Special", "memorable", "daily routine of fishermen", "celebrating the family outing", were seen as "exciting experience" to many people. Therefore it is promising to find out that indigenous communities have the same goals and objectives to get into the tourism segment with a view to sharing their cultural values (Walker and Moscardo, 2016).

20 % of the reviews had a negative outlook towards heritage tourism experience. Reviewers unleashed dissatisfaction with service (455) and price (267). Many reviewers have expressed their comments in a negative way like "very hot", "doesn't hold good in western context", "language barrier", "irritating", "not worth the money", "cheap quality". Hence, this finding throws light on the areas of improvement for heritage tourism experience. Walker and Moscardo (2016) highlight the need for adequate interpretation and better learning experience to spur positive modification in foreign tourists experiences. This has a deeper role to play in improving overall development in tourism segment.

It was also seen that tourists were unhappy with the inadequate service expectations, rectitude and expertise. Example one review was "the guide is 100 % a bad communicator". Another stated with regard to professionalism as "Did not keep up the time. Kept us waiting for 45 minutes and was dressed only in lungi and chappal, no shirt or shoes". So, if things have to be better with respect to tourism business, improvement of consistent service delivery, training of staff and also the quality of amenities matter a lot (Ruhanen et al., 2015b).

11. CONCLUSION

The underlying motto of this study was to check for social desirability bias in data collection methods which has concealed the "real" or hidden reasons for not engaging more

in Heritage tourism experience. The new methodology used to collect data has been presumed to impact demand for Heritage tourism experiences (Chang et al., 2005; Ruhanen et al., 2015a; Smith, 2007).

This study was exploratory in nature. It aimed to check if social bias can be reduced by the analysis of reviews online. Online reviews are flagrant for being gloomy and arbitrary (Sparks et al., 2016). So, it means that Heritage tourism is doing a good job with positive reflections by the reviewers.

The research states that there is a disparity between those people who take part in the heritage tourism experience and those who do not. It does not seem like the demand may decrease due to the discontented tourists who end up spreading adverse word of mouth, but can surely have an impact with regard to the marketing messages that may not impact on foreign tourists adequately which will have a direct influence on their ability to make decisions.

This exploratory study did not unearth the complete scenario through the findings but the outcomes strongly suggest some relevant contributions. For those businesses that are in Heritage tourism, clear distinction with respect to what is workable and what needs to be improved upon can be seen. An enduring work on training and development of staff to capitalize on desirable response to guides while lessening the negatives are surely an essential way to start. There is an extended need for the analysis of certain businesses. New approaches to marketing that be taken advantage of the positive participation of visitors needs to be researched and made use of in a better manner. In this connection, the user generated content will throw open the helpful observation of Heritage tourism products and its related experiences.

The government should make sure that local community should be taken into confidence while developing heritage tourism for better satisfaction. This will in turn aid in the holistic development of tourism. The tourism segment should be able to generate more sustainable kind of employment opportunities which will attract the local youth to take up tourism as a serious profession. Local community should be actively involved in planning and advancement of the destinations.

12. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Usage of online data review may act as a major limitation to this study. The data set was confined to the reviews of international tourists who had taken part in heritage tourism experience in the past which might have been "converted" at some point in time. Some of the negative reviews also contribute to important insights. The study was confined to a sampling frame of tourists taking part in heritage tourism only. Any consequential change because of laws, eco system and any other challenges established under this study will have limited applicability to its results

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