



A Comparative Study of First-Time and Repeat Tourists During "Braj Mahotsav" in Mathura, India

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the experiences of first-time and repeat tourists attending the "Braj Mahotsav," a vibrant cultural festival in Mathura, India. The research focused on differences in expectations, perceptions, and satisfaction levels between these two tourist segments. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 500 respondents to ensure a comprehensive analysis. A structured questionnaire captured insights into cultural engagement, culinary satisfaction, affordability, and overall event experiences. Statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analyses, were conducted to provide a robust understanding of the dynamics. Findings revealed that repeat tourists reported consistently higher satisfaction levels, linked to familiarity with the event's cultural nuances. First-time tourists demonstrated varying satisfaction levels, influenced by their initial exposure to the event's scale and diversity. This study underscored the importance of tailored tourism strategies to enhance visitor experiences while preserving the cultural authenticity of Braj Mahotsav

INTRODUCTION

India, a land of profound cultural and spiritual heritage, boasts a rich tapestry of festivals that celebrate its diverse traditions and history. Among these, the Braj region in Uttar Pradesh stands as a beacon of cultural vibrancy, with Mathura at its epicenter. Known as the birthplace of Lord Krishna, Mathura is a spiritual and cultural hub that attracts millions of tourists annually, both domestic and international (Hawley, 2020; Saraswati, 2001).

The "Braj Mahotsav," an annual festival, epitomizes the cultural and spiritual essence of the region. This festival, steeped in tradition, features vibrant performances of Raas Leela, folk music, dance, art exhibitions, and an array of local culinary delights. It serves as a vital medium for promoting the Braj culture, offering visitors an immersive experience that blends spiritual devotion with cultural enrichment (Agrawal et al., 2017; Buckley, 2011).

First-time tourists often approach such festivals with curiosity and high expectations, seeking novelty in their experiences. Conversely, repeat tourists, having prior exposure, tend to focus on deepening their cultural and spiritual connections (Oppermann, 2000; Getz et al., 2015). Understanding these differing perspectives is essential for tailoring tourism strategies that enhance visitor satisfaction and ensure the sustainability of cultural heritage (Andereck et al., 2015; Uysal et al., 2016).

This research aimed to explore the comparative experiences of first-time and repeat tourists during the Braj Mahotsav. By examining their expectations, perceptions, and satisfaction levels, the study provides actionable insights to improve tourism practices while preserving the cultural integrity of the event.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Braj region's cultural and spiritual significance has been extensively documented. Mathura's position as a center for Krishna devotion and Braj culture has made it a focal point for religious and cultural tourism (Saraswati, 2001; Hawley, 2020). Festivals like the Braj Mahotsav serve as vital conduits for cultural preservation, offering unique opportunities for tourists to engage with the region's heritage (Kumar et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2022).

Tourist Behavior and Segmentation Tourist segmentation is a critical area of study in tourism literature. Research highlights distinct behavioral patterns among first-time and repeat tourists, particularly in cultural tourism. First-time visitors are often driven by curiosity and exploration, while repeat tourists seek deeper cultural immersion and a sense of familiarity (Andereck et al., 2015; Oppermann, 2000). Events like the Braj Mahotsav provide a unique context to study these dynamics.

Cultural and Culinary Tourism The integration of culinary experiences with cultural festivals enhances the overall appeal of such events. The Braj Mahotsav, with its diverse culinary offerings, attracts food enthusiasts alongside cultural and spiritual tourists. Previous studies emphasize the role of food in shaping tourist satisfaction, with authenticity and variety being key factors (Buckley, 2011; Pandey & Panchal, 2023).

Sustainable Tourism Practices Sustainability is a critical consideration in cultural tourism. Festivals like the Braj Mahotsav must balance the dual goals of preserving cultural heritage and catering to the demands of modern tourism. Researchers advocate for eco-friendly practices and community involvement to ensure the longevity and authenticity of such events (Ritchie & Crouch, 2023; Uysal et al., 2016).

By building on these themes, this study examines the comparative experiences of first-time and repeat tourists at the Braj Mahotsav, contributing to the broader discourse on cultural tourism.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research design was employed to capture the experiences of tourists during the Braj Mahotsav.

Sampling Technique: A stratified random sampling approach ensured diversity among 500 respondents (250 first-time tourists and 250 repeat tourists).

Data Collection Tool: A 30-item questionnaire measured aspects such as cultural engagement, culinary satisfaction, affordability, hygiene, and overall event experience. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale.

Data Analysis: Statistical tests, including descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis, were conducted to identify patterns and differences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data presented in Table 1 highlights differences in the age distribution between first-time and repeat tourists attending the Braj Mahotsav. A higher percentage (40%) of first-time tourists are in the 18-30 age group, suggesting that younger individuals are more likely to attend the event for the first time. In contrast, repeat tourists have a larger proportion (45%) in the 31-50 age group, indicating that those who return to the event tend to be slightly older. This suggests that as tourists become more familiar with the festival, they may continue attending as they grow older, possibly with more developed interests in its offerings.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Metric	First-Time Tourists	Repeat Tourists
Age (18-30)	40%	25%
Age (31-50)	35%	45%
Indian Nationals	180	140
Foreign Nationals	70	110
Motivated by Pilgrimage	40%	30%
Motivated by Culture	35%	45%

Table 2. Independent T-Test Results for Satisfaction Comparison

Variable	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cultural Engagement	-5.023	498	0.000
Culinary Satisfaction	-5.640	498	0.000
Affordability	-2.347	498	0.019
Overall Event Satisfaction	-5.105	498	0.000

The independent t-tests reveal significant differences between first-time and repeat tourists in cultural engagement, culinary satisfaction, and overall event satisfaction. The p-value for all variables is less than 0.05, indicating significant differences.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA Results for Satisfaction Comparison Across Tourist Segments

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.
Between Groups	22.370	1	22.370	18.322	0.000
Within Groups	612.854	498	1.232		
Total	635.224	499			

The ANOVA test indicates significant differences in satisfaction levels ($F(1, 498) = 18.322, p < 0.05$), with repeat tourists showing higher satisfaction across all key variables.

Table 4. Regression Analysis for Factors Influencing Overall Satisfaction

Predictor Variables	B	SE	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Cultural Engagement	0.298	0.062	0.350	4.806	0.000
Culinary Satisfaction	0.214	0.058	0.238	3.689	0.000
Affordability	0.124	0.054	0.180	2.296	0.022

The regression analysis reveals that Cultural Engagement ($\beta = 0.350, p < 0.001$) and Culinary Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.238, p < 0.001$) are significant predictors of overall event satisfaction, while Affordability ($\beta = 0.180, p < 0.05$) also contributes significantly, but to a lesser extent.

Repeat tourists consistently reported higher levels of satisfaction across all variables, with the largest difference observed in Cultural Engagement (mean for repeat tourists = 4.2 vs. first-time tourists = 3.8).

First-time tourists exhibited greater variability in their satisfaction levels, often influenced by their first exposure to the festival's size and cultural offerings.

Regression analysis indicated that Cultural Engagement and Culinary Satisfaction were the most significant factors influencing overall satisfaction, suggesting that cultural authenticity and food quality play a pivotal role in enhancing visitor experience.

Affordability was also a relevant factor but had a smaller impact compared to cultural and culinary factors.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study provided valuable insights into the distinct experiences of first-time and repeat tourists attending the Braj Mahotsav, shedding light on their differing expectations, perceptions, and satisfaction levels. First-time tourists tend to be more focused on the novelty and grandeur of the event, with many motivated by the spiritual and pilgrimage aspects. By identifying these differences, stakeholders, including event organizers and local tourism authorities, can better tailor their marketing strategies, offerings, and services to meet the specific needs of each group. For first-time tourists, efforts can be made to improve the event's accessibility, provide clear information about its cultural and spiritual significance, and offer guided experiences to enhance their initial exposure. For repeat tourists, the focus can shift to providing more immersive cultural experiences, exclusive events, or deeper insights into the festival's heritage to encourage continued engagement. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of balancing the event's traditional elements with the evolving interests of both new and returning visitors.

- Experiences: Develop unique offerings for first-time and repeat tourists.
- Enhanced Marketing: Promote the festival's cultural and culinary uniqueness.
- Sustainability Initiatives: Implement eco-friendly practices to preserve the cultural heritage.
- Feedback Integration: Use tourist feedback to refine event planning and management

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