

Exploring Travel Preferences and Behaviours among Indian Tourists: An Empirical Study of Kolhapur, Maharashtra

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Abstract

This research investigates travel preferences and behaviours of Indian tourists visiting Kolhapur, Maharashtra. Utilizing a structured questionnaire and analyzing primary data collected from 300 respondents. The study evaluates tourist demographics, motives, information sources and experience levels. Hypothesis testing explores relationships between age and travel purpose and information source and travel experience. The findings highlight the dominance of online research as an information source, leisure and pilgrimage as principal travel purposes and the significant share of young and middle-aged travellers. The study also offers recommendations for stakeholders in Kolhapur's tourism sector, based on a quantitative and analytical review of tourist behaviours.

Keywords: Indian tourists, travel preferences, travel behaviour, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, tourist motivation, information source, empirical study

1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism in India has seen a transformative surge over the last decade, largely propelled by the rapid expansion of the middle class, technological advancements and robust improvements in nationwide infrastructure. With greater disposable incomes, Indian consumers have demonstrated an increasing

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appetite for travel, both domestic and international. The proliferation of smartphones, widespread use of online travel agencies and the accessibility of digital payment systems have further simplified the travel planning and booking process. This digital empowerment allows prospective tourists to research, compare and choose destinations and services with unprecedented convenience and transparency.

Kolhapur, situated in southwestern Maharashtra, stands out as a vibrant tourist destination for several reasons. Its rich historical tapestry is evident in landmarks such as the Mahalaxmi Temple, New Palace, Panhala Fort and Rankala Lake, making it a significant stop for religious pilgrims, heritage enthusiasts and leisure travellers alike. The city's cultural festivals, art, unique cuisine and handicrafts further broaden its appeal. Additionally, Kolhapur's role as a gateway to popular wildlife sanctuaries and the Western Ghats attracts nature lovers and adventure seekers.

Given this backdrop, comprehending the travel preferences and behaviors of tourists visiting Kolhapur is essential for a spectrum of stakeholders. Local businesses—including hotels, restaurants and tour operators—must align their offerings with the changing needs and expectations of modern travellers. Policymakers can leverage empirical tourism research to frame targeted infrastructure projects, environmental sustainability initiatives and urban development policies. Marketers and destination managers can craft campaigns that accurately reflect insights about tourist motivations, media consumption and decision-making paths, thereby enhancing engagement and overall satisfaction.

This research paper thus endeavors to deliver a comprehensive empirical analysis of tourists coming to Kolhapur. Through structured data collection and interpretation, the paper investigates patterns such as frequency of visits, underlying travel motives (e.g., leisure, pilgrimage, business, or family), key influencers and information sources throughout the planning process and critical decision-making criteria ranging from accommodation preferences to perceived safety and budget constraints. Leveraging both quantitative data and hypothesis-driven analysis, the study aims to

bridge the gap between tourist expectations and the services offered. The outcomes are intended not only to contribute academically but also provide actionable insights for sustained growth, differentiation and enhanced experiences within Kolhapur's dynamic tourism sector.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recent trends suggest technology-driven influences in travel planning and booking, aligning with global digital adoption patterns. Online platforms and mobile applications have transformed how tourists gather information, make reservations, and engage with destinations. This technological integration enables real-time decision-making and increased traveller autonomy, further shaping tourist expectations and satisfaction (Hossain et al., 2022).

A study by Kumar and Patil (2021) emphasized the impact of evolving travel behavior in tier-2 and tier-3 cities in India, noting a distinct shift toward experiential and sustainable tourism practices among younger demographics. These travellers are increasingly seeking authentic local experiences, eco-

friendly accommodations, and immersive activities, reflecting a broader national and global movement toward sustainable development.

Numerous studies have dissected the evolving motivations and behaviours of Indian tourists. Research highlights include the growing role of the Internet and social media as travel information sources, the rise of younger and middle-aged travellers, and the increasing diversity in travel purposes, ranging from leisure and pilgrimage to business and education. These studies demonstrate that Indian tourism consumption patterns are rapidly aligning with global trends, with an emphasis on convenience and personalized experiences (Verma & Chandra, 2018; Singh et al., 2020).

Research by Reddy and Menon (2019) highlighted the importance of destination image and word-of-mouth in influencing tourism choices, particularly in emerging destinations with growing digital connectivity. The study finds that positive online reviews, social media recommendations, and influencer content significantly boost interest and trust in less-established tourist locations, proving crucial for regional tourism growth.

Existing literature on spiritual tourism underscores pilgrimage as a recurrent theme among Indian domestic tourists. Pilgrimage travel is deeply embedded in Indian society, contributing not only to local economies but also to the preservation of religious and cultural sites. This type of tourism

draws travellers from various backgrounds and age groups, highlighting the spiritual and communal aspects of travel within the country (Shinde, 2007).

3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the primary travel motives among these tourists.
2. To assess the main sources of travel information used by tourists.
3. To evaluate the relationship between age and travel purpose.
4. To evaluate the relationship between information source and travel experience.

Hypotheses of the Study

Ho1: There is no association between the respondent's age group and their travel purpose.

Ho2: There is no association between the primary source of information and the respondent's travel experience.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed an empirical, quantitative research approach to investigate the travel trends and preferences of tourists visiting Kolhapur. The study mainly focuses on primary data. A sample size of 300 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling based on age group and travel purpose distribution. This sampling method allowed for a representative sample that captures the diversity of tourists visiting Kolhapur.

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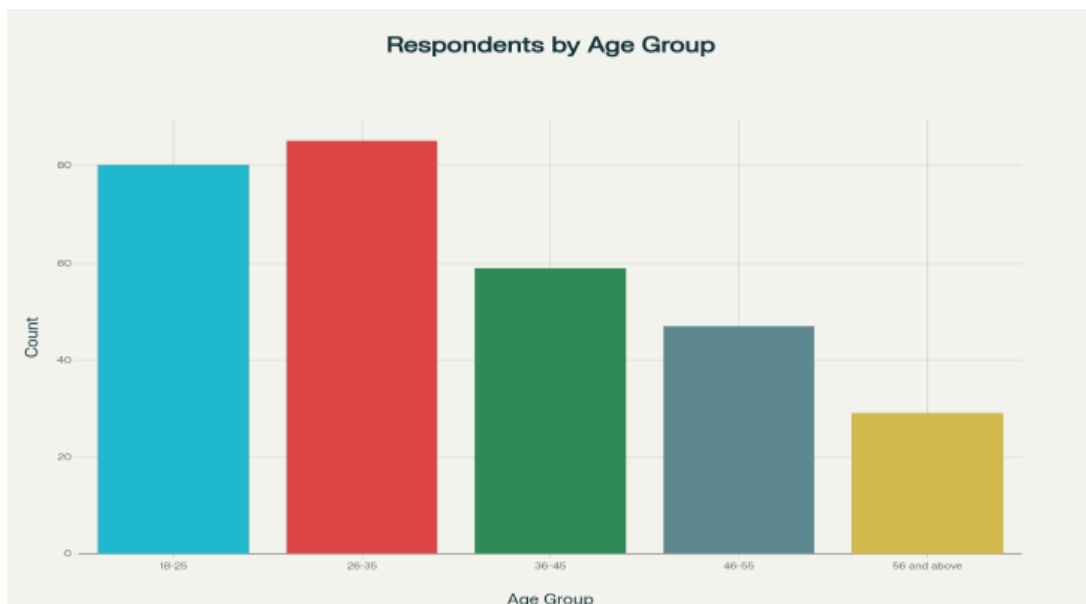
A structured questionnaire was used as the research instrument, comprising majorly close-ended questions on demographic profile, travel purpose, information sources and travel experience. The questionnaire's design enabled efficient data collection and analysis. Frequency distributions and bar charts were used to summarize the data, while chi-square hypothesis tests were employed to examine the relationships between variables. This analytical approach provided valuable insights into the characteristics and behaviours of Kolhapur tourists, informing recommendations for tourism stakeholders.

5 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Demographic Distribution

Table 1. Age Group Distribution

Age Group	No. of respondents
18-25	80
26-35	85
36-45	59
46-55	47
56 and above	29



(Source: Primary Data)

Graph 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age Group

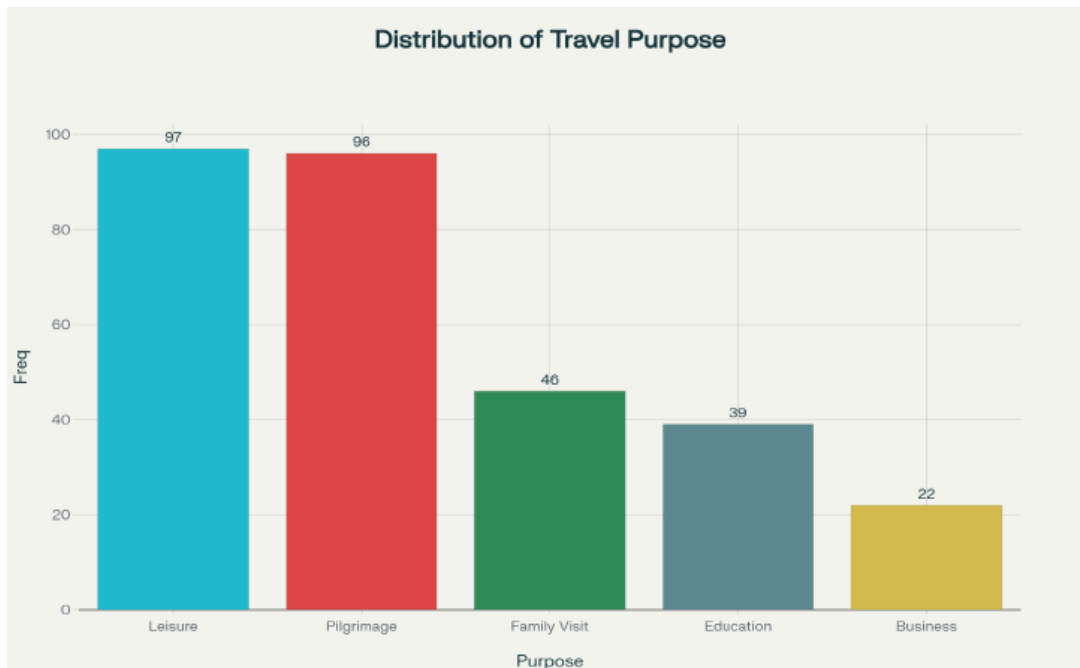
Interpretation: The majority of respondents are between 18 and 35 years, indicating active travel interest among youth and young adults. This demographic trend suggests that Kolhapur's attractions and

experiences resonate with a younger audience who are likely drawn to its cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and natural beauty.

Travel Purpose

Table 2. Travel Purpose Distribution

Travel Purpose	Number of respondents
Leisure	97
Pilgrimage	96
Family Visit	46
Education	39
Business	22



(Source: Primary Data)

Graph 2: Distribution of Travel Purpose among Respondents

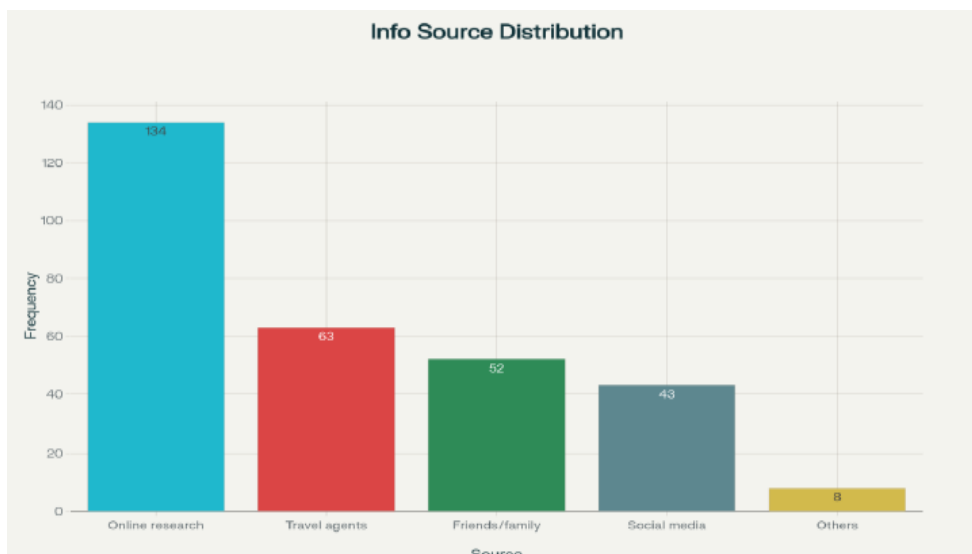
Interpretation: Leisure and pilgrimage are nearly equally dominant motives followed with family visit, education, and business. This suggests that Kolhapur offers a diverse range of attractions and experiences that cater to different interests and purposes. The city's rich cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and spiritual sites are likely to be major draws for both leisure and pilgrimage tourists.

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Information Source

Table 3. Information Source Distribution

Information Source	Number of respondents
Online research	134
Travel agents	63
Friends & family	52
Social media	43
Others	8



(Source: Primary Data)

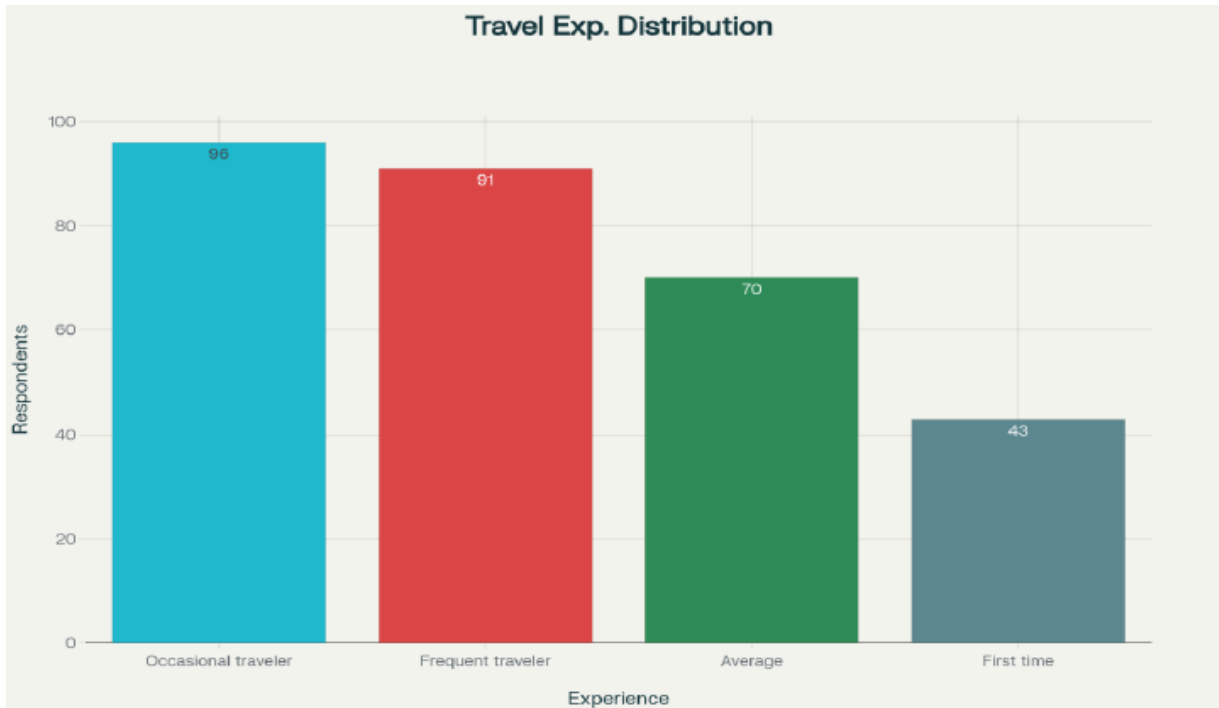
Graph 3: Distribution of Information Source among Respondents

Interpretation: Digital platforms have revolutionized the way we access information, with online research surpassing traditional sources in popularity. This shift is particularly evident in the tourism industry, where travellers now rely heavily on online reviews, social media, and search engines to plan their trips.

ravel Experience

Table 4. Travel Experience Distribution

Travel Experience	No. of respondents
Occasional traveller	96
Frequent traveller	91
Average	70
First time	43



(Source: Primary Data)

Graph 4: Distribution of Travel Experience among Respondents

Interpretation: Most respondents are either occasional or frequent travellers, signaling an experienced tourist base. This suggests that Kolhapur attracts visitors who are familiar with traveling and have certain expectations regarding the quality of their experience.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no association between the respondent's age group and their travel purpose.

Calculations of Hypotheses Testing

Table 5: Hypothesis 1

Test Used	Observed Value	Degree of freedom	P-Value
Chi- square test	12.84	16	0.684

(Source: calculated using SPSS 22)

The observed Chi-square statistic (χ^2) for this test was calculated to be 12.84 with 16 degrees of freedom. The p-value was 0.684. Since this p-value exceeds the commonly accepted significance level of 0.05, it shows that the data do not provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. So, it is concluded

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that there is no statistically significant association between the respondent's age group and their travel purpose. This means that the choice of travel purpose (whether leisure, pilgrimage, business, education, or family visits) is independent of the age category respondents belong to in this study.

Hypothesis 2: There is no association between the primary source of information and the respondent's travel experience.

Calculations of Hypotheses Testing

Table 6: Hypothesis 2

Test Used	Observed Value	Degree of freedom	P-Value
Chi- square test	12.84	12	0.408

(Source: calculated using SPSS 22)

The observed Chi-square statistic (χ^2) is 12.48 with 12 degrees of freedom. The p-value is 0.408. Since this p-value exceeds the standard significance level of 0.05, it indicates insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. So it is concluded that there is no statistically significant association between the primary source of information and the travel experience of the respondents. This means that regardless of how experienced a traveller is, they tend to rely on similar channels for obtaining travel information.

6 FINDINGS

- Majority of respondents are in the 18–35 age group, reflecting travel trends among youth. This age group represents a highly active segment in tourism, driven by curiosity, disposable income and social media influence. The preferences of younger travellers often set market trends and demand innovative experiences.
- Both leisure and pilgrimage serve as primary motives for travel to Kolhapur. This dual nature underscores Kolhapur's diverse appeal as a destination combining cultural, spiritual and recreational attractions. It provides opportunities to target different traveller segments effectively.
- Online research is the leading source of travel information, followed by travel agents and recommendations from friends and family. Digital platforms empower tourists with easily accessible and timely information, influencing their planning and booking behaviours. The reliance on close social circles and agents indicates a mix of traditional trust-based and modern digital methods.
- Most visitors classify themselves as occasional or frequent travellers. This suggests a balanced mix of experienced tourists as well as newcomers, highlighting the city's growing popularity. It also indicates potential for repeat visits and loyalty-building through positive experiences.
- No significant association was found between age and travel purpose or information source and travel experience. This finding implies that travel motivations and methods of gathering

information are relatively consistent across different demographic groups. Marketing strategies can thus be broadly targeted without excessive segmentation concern.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Tourism marketers should focus digital campaigns on young and middle-aged groups, using online research platforms and social media. Targeted advertisements and engaging content on platforms like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube can capture the attention of these tech-savvy travellers. Influencer partnerships and virtual tours may further boost engagement and interest.

Travel agencies and policymakers could create packages that cater to both leisure and pilgrimage tourists. Customized itineraries that combine cultural tours, local food experiences and visits to pilgrimage sites can enhance the overall tourist experience. Offering flexible package options will cater to diverse needs and budgets.

Kolhapur tourism stakeholders should enhance online content about attractions, focusing on visual storytelling, interactive maps and reviews. High-quality images, videos and virtual reality experiences can stimulate interest and help tourists make informed choices. Timely updates and multilingual content will extend the city's reach to broader audiences.

Regular feedback collection from tourists can further help in service improvements. Implementing digital feedback systems via apps or websites will capture real-time visitor experiences. This continuous input can identify service gaps early and foster a culture of responsive, customer-first tourism management.

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