

TOURIST SATISFACTION IN HOMESTAY BUSINESSES IN UTTARAKHAND: KEY DRIVERS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the antecedents that determine tourist satisfaction in homestay businesses in Uttarakhand, India, specifically the service quality, cultural tourism, and sustainability. The study is based on data collected through 250 respondents in the Garhwal and Kumaon areas; thus, it considers a mixed-method research approach based on the thematic coding of both quantitative and qualitative research. The results indicate that the quality of hospitality services such as cleanliness, responsiveness of the staff, and provision of necessary facilities have a direct relationship with the satisfaction of the tourists (H1). Additionally, cultural and local experiential marketing aspects, such as food availability and human relations, have a positive impact on the experience of the tourist as a whole (H 2). Properly applied waste management practices and pro-environmental activities do not only increase satisfaction, but also strengthen environmental stewardship. The regional analysis shows that Garhwal is doing better than Kumaon; therefore, more resources should be budgeted in the later region. The paper also highlights the critical role of homestays in promoting sustainable tourism since they combine quality services, intensified cultural experience, and well-developed environmental conservation strategies. Some of the recommendations aim at strengthening the service delivery, standardization of cultural products and promotion of sustainable tourism, which will improve customer satisfaction and improve the rural economy.

Keywords: Homestay Business, Tourist Satisfaction, Sustainable Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Homestay businesses HBs have come to become a dominant feature in the larger tourism sector, providing itinerants with customized and authentic experiences of local culture as well as playing an indisputable role in the socioeconomic development of rural destinations (Kumar et al., 2025), and as a result of this action have come to be known as vital sub-sectors in the overall tourism sector (Kumar et al., 2025).HBs provide guests with connections to customs, cuisine, and lifestyles rather than simply providing accommodations as a conventional hotel does(Yasami et al., 2017). In addition to improving tourist quality, it adds value to the process by fostering social and economic development in host communities through employment opportunities and the expansion of the regional historic sites market(Joko, 2019). The homestay sector has risen by leaps and bounds in Uttarakhand, a state famous for its magnificent landscapes and rich cultural heritage(S. Kumar & Giri, 2024)&(S. Kumar, 2020). The Uttarakhand Tourism Department reported in 2024, there were 5,157 registered HBs, a reflection of the growing popularity of this sustainable accommodation model (SAM) (<https://uttarakhandtourism.gov.in/>). Sustainable tourism has been a primary driver of homestays in the state, supporting eco-friendly methods and increasing community engagement in the tourism value chain(Hills & Bengal, 2023)&(Giri et al., 2024). HBs depend on the tourist satisfaction (TS)(Streimikiene et al., 2021). It decides whether or not customers will come back if they will promote positive word of mouth about your product or service, and whether or not your firm will be a long-term success(S. Kumar et al., 2026). Quality of hospitality services and the authenticity of cultural

experiences are essential in generating the overall satisfaction of tourists(Keawkunti, 2018). Understanding and improving these characteristics are necessary to support sustainable expansion(Maindola et al., n.d.) of the homestay sector in line with the principle of sustainable tourism(Brahma & S. Tripathi, 2020).

The goal of this study is to identify significant drivers of TS in the HB sector of Uttarakhand and to evaluate their implications for sustainable development(Giri et al., 2024). The research seeks to promote the long-term viability of HBs by offering practical insights to improve service quality and enrich the tourist experience(Joko, 2019). In addition, the study enhances the broader discussion on how tourism may be exploited as a vehicle for inclusive rural development without compromising economic growth, culture preservation and environmental protection(S. Kumar & Giri, n.d.).

2. Objectives

1. To determine the important factors in influencing tourist satisfaction in homestay businesses.
2. To explore how cultural and local experiences can improve the tourist experience.

3. Hypotheses

1. H1: Hospitality services quality affects significantly the tourist satisfaction.
2. H2: Homestays provide positive influence to the tourist satisfaction through cultural and local experiences.

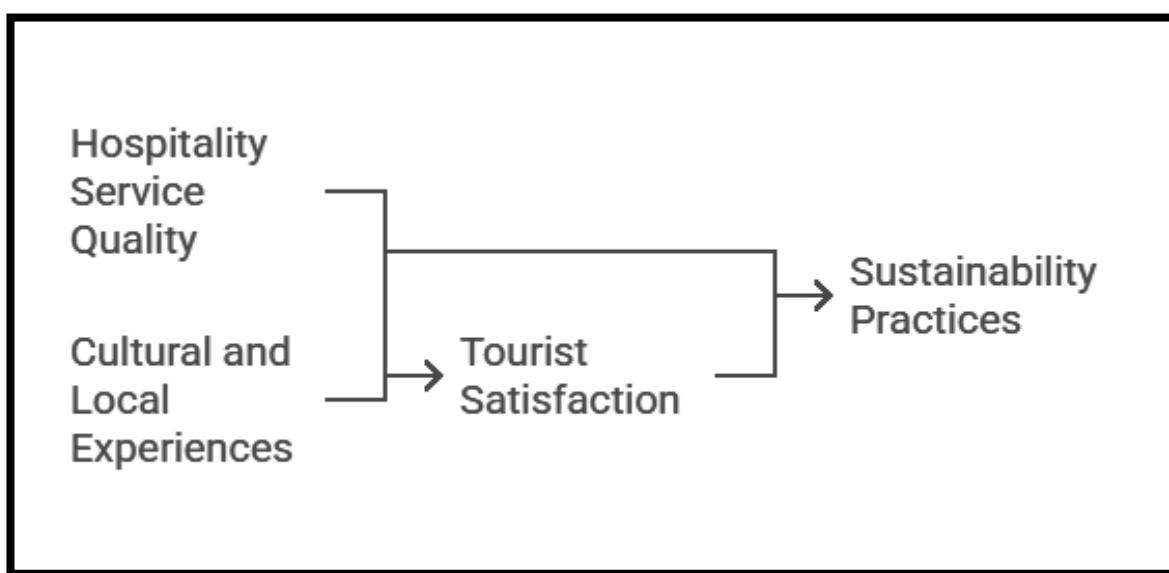
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist satisfaction is an important component of the tourism success model defined as the match between the perceived expectations of the tourists and the experiences they have on their tour (Al-Laymoun et al., 2020). They are based on factors like, service delivery, individualized experiences, and cultural experiences through things like food, fairs, and people (Thapa & Malini, 2017). The homestay market has implications in rural development since it is an emerging market contributing to the hotel industry income and stimulating culture and sustainable practices in the region (Yasami et al., 2017). Studies show that happy tourists are more inclined towards supporting environment friendly measures hence the support conservation standards and hence the support of wellbeing of the community(Batool et al., 2024). Several examples of cultural experiences and sustainability in homestay models come from the regions such as Kerala-India and South-East Asia, which may help to set best practice examples for Uttarakhand tourism development (Kumaran et al., 2019). The existing literature in support of this view calls for a more integrationist approach in which service quality, cultural tourist experiences, and sustainability come together to improve tourist satisfaction.

5. Conceptual Framework: Tourist Satisfaction in Homestay Businesses

This study examines the relationships between hospitality service quality, cultural and local experiences, tourist satisfaction, and sustainability within homestay businesses in Uttarakhand.

Conceptual Framework: Tourist Satisfaction in Homestay Businesses



1.

Hospitality Service Quality encompasses both tangible (infrastructure, cleanliness) and intangible (staff behavior, responsiveness) elements.

Cultural and Local Experiences: Involves interactions with local traditions, cuisine, festivals, and communities.

2. Dependent Variable:

Tourist Satisfaction- Represents the fulfillment of tourists expectations and their overall evaluation of the homestay experience.

3. Mediating Variable:

Sustainability Practices- Reflects eco-friendly behaviors local community support, and environmental conservation influenced by tourist satisfaction.

4. Hypotheses-

H1:- Hospitality service quality positively impacts tourist satisfaction.

H2:- Cultural and local experiences positively influence tourist satisfaction.

The theoretical framework argues that improving the quality of service and enhancing cultural experiences can be used to increase the tourist satisfaction hence triggering the sustainable tourism practices. This model provides a conceptual framework to the study of the interwoven roles of quality, culture, and sustainability in the effort of achieving holistic and integrated development of tourism.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In undertaking this study focusing on factors that influence tourist satisfaction in homestay enterprises in Uttarakhand, the following research approaches were used; qualitative and quantitative. To carry out this study purposively, 250 respondents who have had a homestay in Garhwal and Kumaon regions were selected. A type of non-probability sampling method useful for appointed cultural domains is purposive sampling and this affords the researcher the opportunity of selecting participants based on specific features important for research.(Patton, 2002). To supplement this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of respondents to gain deeper insights into their experiences and observations of sustainability practices. Thematic analysis was applied to this qualitative data to identify key patterns and insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition to this, some of the respondents were interviewed using semi structured questionnaires with a view of gathering further details concerning their experience as well as observation on sustainability practices. This qualitative data was further analyzed using thematic analysis to discover general patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Descriptive statistics were used to explore the quantitative data to determine the presence of relationships and frequencies in the data set, while Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesized relationships in the study. The collected responses in the interview were analyzed qualitatively with the purpose of creating themes and sub-themes. The combination of both research methods allowed to conduct a detailed study of the antecedents of tourist satisfaction and the connection they have with sustainable tourism.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current study aims to question the aspects of tourist satisfaction determinants in homestay businesses in Uttarakhand based on theories of service quality, cultural exposure, and sustainability issues. A total of 250 respondents were surveyed and quantitative statistical analysis was done and thematic qualitative analysis.

7.1 Demographics of Respondents Analysis

Table: 1 Demographics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n=250)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	138	55%
	Female	112	45%
Age Group	18–24 years	25	10%
	25–45 years	150	60%
	46–60 years	75	30%
Tourist Origin	Domestic	175	70%
	International	75	30%
Previous Homestay Visits	First-time Visitor	137	55%
	Repeat Visitor	113	45%

Gender: The gender balance in the sample size is almost equal thus ensuring a holistic representation of views among both boys and girls despite a slight majority of boys. Such equality signifies a fair interaction with the homestay facilities that represent a wider range of perspectives in society.

Age Group: The preponderance of the age group 25-45 years of age is an indicator that the age group of working professionals and young adults forms the major demographic foundation of homestay utilisation. This kind of concentration is in line with the theories that propose that this cohort of life-stage market is focused on experiential travel opportunities, although with the flexibility to support unorthodox accommodation options.

Tourist Origin: Domestic tourists will be the largest number of visitors highlighting the natural attraction of homestays in Uttarakhand to the locals. However, foreign tourists continue to show a high level of presence,

mostly due to the abundance of the cultural experiences that the region has to offer, which makes the dual nature of homestays as both domestic recreational resorts as well as cultural crossroads in the world.

Past Experience: The fact that first-time and repeat visitors are almost equal highlights a dual role of homestay facilities to attract new visitors and guarantee loyalty. This equilibrium explains why there is a sustainable model in which the first favorable experiences open the path to a repeated patronage which promotes the long-term sustainability in the competitive hospitality environment.

Table:2 Questionnaire Design, Objectives, Hypotheses, and Results

Section	Sample Questions	Objective Addressed	Hypotheses Supported	Quantitative Results
Demographics	- What is your age group?	Contextual understanding of tourist profiles.	Not directly linked.	Majority (60%) aged 25–45; 70% domestic tourists; 45% repeat visitors.
	- What is your country of origin?			
	- Have you visited Uttarakhand before?			
Hospitality Service Quality	- Rate the cleanliness of the homestay (1–5).	Objective 1: Determine key factors influencing tourist satisfaction.	H1: Hospitality service quality significantly affects tourist satisfaction.	78% rated cleanliness as 4 or 5; staff responsiveness scored a mean of 4.3; amenities averaged 4.1.
	- Was the staff responsive to your needs? (1–5)			
	- Rate the quality of provided amenities (e.g., Wi-Fi, parking).			
Cultural and Local Experiences	- Did you participate in local cultural activities? (Yes/No)	Objective 2: Explore how cultural and local experiences improve the tourist experience.	H2: Cultural and local experiences positively influence tourist satisfaction.	72% participated in local activities; 80% rated cultural authenticity as 4 or 5; 85% emphasized cultural importance.
	- Rate the authenticity of these experiences (1–5).			
	- How important are cultural interactions to your satisfaction? (1–5)			
Overall Tourist Satisfaction	- Did your stay meet your expectations? (1–5)	Objective 1 & 2: Overall evaluation of satisfaction influenced by	Supports both H1 and H2.	88% reported satisfaction levels of 4 or 5; 81% were likely to recommend; 75%

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would you recommend this homestay? (Yes/No) 	service quality and cultural experiences.		expressed high revisit likelihood.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How likely are you to revisit? (1–5) 			
Sustainability Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you observe eco-friendly practices during your stay? (Yes/No) 	Explore the indirect link between satisfaction and sustainability initiatives.	Indirectly extends implications of H1 and H2 to sustainability.	68% noticed eco-friendly practices; 79% expressed strong support (4 or 5); 62% linked satisfaction to sustainability.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rate your support for these practices (1–5). 			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would satisfaction motivate you to support sustainable tourism? (Yes/No) 			

7.2 Analysis of Key Drivers of Tourist Satisfaction

Table 3: Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing Tourist Satisfaction

Variable	Coefficient (β)	p-value	Interpretation
Hospitality Service Quality	0.62	<0.001	Strong positive impact on tourist satisfaction.
Cultural and Local Experiences	0.47	<0.001	Significant positive influence.
Other Amenities (Wi-Fi, Parking)	0.21	0.02	Moderately significant.

Hospitality Service Quality: Rose as the biggest concern; 78% of participants considered cleanliness, staff behavior, and amenities as excellent.

Cultural and Local Experiences: Played a big role in satisfaction especially for the foreign visitors.

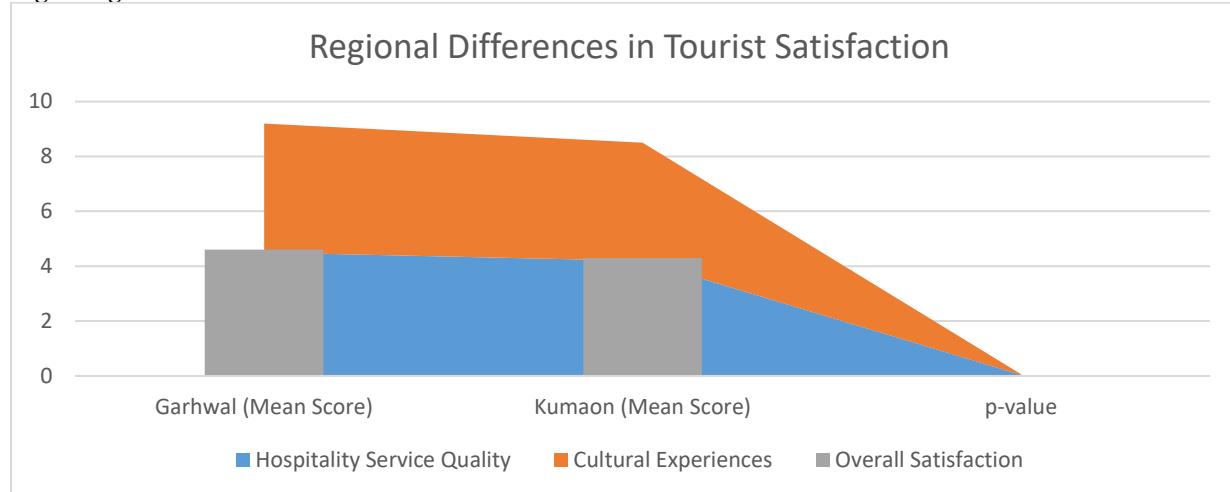
Other Amenities: While important, their effects were considered as relatively less significant as compared to the core service and cultural factors.

7.3 Regional Comparative Analysis: Garhwal vs. Kumaon

Table 4: Regional Differences in Tourist Satisfaction

Dimension	Garhwal (Mean Score)	Kumaon (Mean Score)	p-value
Hospitality Service Quality	4.5	4.2	0.04
Cultural Experiences	4.7	4.3	0.02
Overall Satisfaction	4.6	4.3	0.03

Fig:1 Regional Differences in Tourist Satisfaction



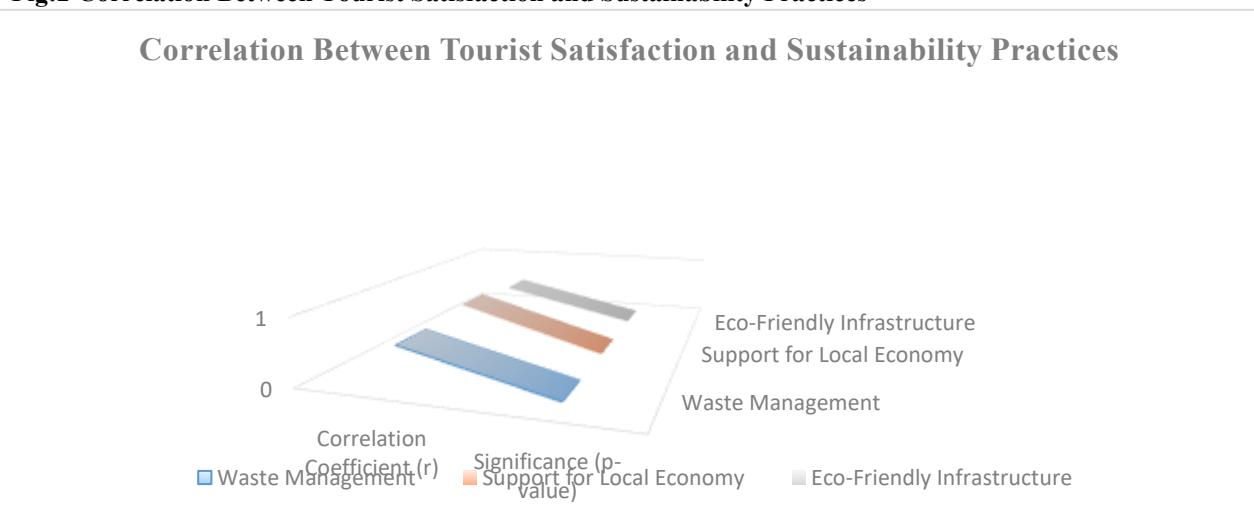
- **Garhwal** performed better across all dimensions due to better infrastructure and organized cultural offerings.
- **Kumaon** showed areas for improvement in service consistency and promotional efforts for cultural activities.

7.4 Sustainability Implications

Table 5: Correlation between Tourist Satisfaction and Sustainability Practices

Sustainability Practice	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Waste Management	0.54	<0.01
Support for Local Economy	0.63	<0.001
Eco-Friendly Infrastructure	0.49	<0.01

Fig:2 Correlation Between Tourist Satisfaction and Sustainability Practices



Findings:

- A clear link exists between tourist satisfaction and their support for sustainability.
- Homestays practicing visible eco-friendly measures were rated higher by tourists.

7.5 Discussion

1. Hospitality Service Quality

The result confirms H1 that there is a positive relationship between service quality and satisfaction. The three main determine factors were cleanliness, staff responsiveness and modern amenities as 78% of the respondents

regarded the service quality as high. Therefore, these results are in concordance with previous studies, concerning the significance of the service quality in the tourism sector. Staff training and resource improvement especially in Kumaon region also can further improve satisfaction.

2. Culture and Locality

Testing H2, both cultural and local engagement received an above-average rating and were found to have a positive impact on satisfaction. Eighty percent of the respondents highly appreciated cultural integrity stating that traditional food and people's hospitality were the most memorable aspects. These preferences can be well exploited by homestay operators in developing cultural packages for tourists, which enhances satisfaction apart from augmenting the cause of cultural tourism. Further improvement can also be made in dealing with the feedback with reference to the variation in cultural programming to enrich the experience especially for the foreign visitors.

3. Sustainability Implications

The study shows a good correlation between satisfaction and support to sustainability. Results obtained from the study showed that tourists who noticed environmental conservation measures such as waste disposal and exploitation of renewable energy sources perceived satisfaction and support community based conservation. These findings prove the importance of homestays in relation to satisfaction of sustainability objectives hence fostering the cause of environmental conservation and empowering the rural inhabitants.

4. Regional Differences

Garhwal scored higher than Kumaon in general rating, especially in terms of infrastructures and the highly synchronized cultural troupes in the same survey. Kumaon, in its turn, needs specific investments in the quality of provided services and their promotion to reduce the current gap. Performing more marketing of its niche products and making them more accessible can appeal to more people.

5. Practical Implications

Service Quality: In the view of the analysis, there are two key areas that need to be addressed so as to enhance satisfaction; consistency and staff training.

Cultural Engagement: It is suggested that homestays may be differentiated through standardisation and promotion of cultural activities.

Sustainability: Including some observable sustainable measures complements tourists' expectations and the current trends.

Regional Development: There should be a fair combination of infrastructural investment and marketing in Kumaon.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, the present investigation aimed at identifying key factors that affect the tourist satisfaction in Uttarakhand homestay business with focus on hospitality service quality, cultural offerings and sustainability concern. Key findings include:

H1: Hospitality service quality greatly determines the satisfaction of the tourists with special reference to cleanliness, receptiveness of the staff and the amenities that are available.

H2: Cultural and local experiences have a positive impact on satisfaction especially through real life interactions and cultural activities.

The findings for sustainability included a very strong correlation with satisfaction which means that satisfied tourist supports eco-friendly and community-supporting practices.

Regional variations pointed out that Garhwal was comparatively superior in terms of service delivery and cultural aesthetics to Kumaon.

These results support the idea that homestay companies are critical to sustainable tourism and that traditional cultural experience and quality services are complementary.

8.1 Recommendations

Enhance Service Quality: Organize orientation for the workers and ensure the homestays are clean and equipped with the necessary facilities.

Promote Cultural Activities: Promote and sell cultural tourism products and services such as cultural performances, events, craft demonstrations, fairs and traditional foods and drinks to various tourists.

Adopt Sustainable Practices: On the basis of tourist preferences, concentrate on those environmentally friendly activities that can be easily observed, including waste disposal, use of renewable energy resources, and support of local economy.

Regional Development: It is suggested that more investment should be made on infrastructures and marketing for Kumaon region in order to minimize the gap and increase its attraction.

Continuous Feedback: Gather and analyze feedback from tourists to update the services offered and enhance tourists' level of satisfaction.

Accomplishing these recommendations will help homestay operators in Uttarakhand to increase tourist satisfaction and ensure sustainable tourism for the growth of rural standards.

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