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## Determinants influencing tourist selection of rural tourism destinations using Garrett Ranking Technique: Evidence from Supi village, Uttarakhand

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**ABSTRACT:** Tourism in rural areas has been recognized as one of the important strategies to promote sustainable rural development, create job opportunities, and preserve culture and traditions in rural areas. The State of Uttarakhand has vast possibilities to develop rural tourism due to its rich geographical and cultural heritage. However, it is important to understand what factors are responsible for the selection of rural tourism destinations by tourists to effectively plan and manage tourism in the region. The present study aims to explore the socio-economic characteristics and travel patterns of tourists, their awareness about rural tourism in Supi village in Kapkot tehsil in Bageshwar district in the State of Uttarakhand, and to identify the factors responsible for selecting the tourism destination in rural areas. The study was carried out in Supi village in Kapkot tehsil in Bageshwar district in the State of Uttarakhand. The sample size consisted of 120 tourists using a multi-stage sampling technique. The study found that natural beauty and environment, culture and traditions, and hospitality of local residents were the most important factors responsible for selecting the tourism destination in rural areas. These results indicate the need for preserving the natural landscape, culture, and basic tourism infrastructure in promoting rural tourism in the region. The study is found to be useful in providing insights to policymakers and tourism planners in promoting rural tourism in the Himalayan region.

**Key words:** Choice of destination, Garrett ranking technique, Rural tourism, Supi village, Tourist preferences, Uttarakhand

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world, and it is one of the major contributors to economic development and growth, job creation, and sharing of culture and ideas. The World Tourism Organization states that tourism has been identified as playing an important role in supporting regional development and improving regional livelihoods (UNWTO, 2020, 2021). Recently, because of increased environmental concerns and the need to provide tourists with unique experiences, tourists are increasingly opting to engage in alternative forms of tourism rather than traditional tourism. (OECD, 2010, 2020). Alternative forms of tourism include rural tourism, which involves tourist activities in rural areas, thus providing tourists with opportunities to get exposures to rural culture, traditions, lifestyles, and agriculture while at the same time promoting sustainable development. (Lane, 1994, 2009; Lane and Kastenholz, 2015).

Rural tourism has been identified as one of the key strategies for rural development in developing countries like India. It has been recognized to generate non-farm employment opportunities, rural

entrepreneurship, and check rural out-migration (Sharpley and Roberts, 2004; Singh, 2017, 2018). Aside from this, rural tourism has also been identified as a means of diversifying rural economies and creating new income opportunities for rural residents (Chandel and Kanga, 2020). The Government of India has recognized the importance and potential of rural tourism in India and has been promoting it through the initiatives taken by the Ministry of Tourism (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2023), focusing on the development of village tourism with community participation in rural areas to promote sustainable management of natural resources (Ashley and Roe, 2002).

Uttarakhand, being one of the Himalayan states in India with rich biodiversity, scenic beauty, rural landscapes, and rich cultural heritage, has tremendous potential for rural tourism development. The rural areas in the Himalayan range provide tourists with a unique experience in terms of Agri-tourism, homestays, local cuisine, and involvement in local farming practices, which can provide a better

experience for tourists in terms of experiential learning (Lane and Kastenholz, 2015). Considering the potential of rural tourism in the Himalayan region, several villages in Uttarakhand have been recognized under the Best Tourism Village Programme, which aims to promote rural tourism for sustainable rural development in harmony with natural and cultural resource conservation (Government of India, 2024).

Among the emerging rural tourism destinations in the Himalayan region, the village of Supi in the district of Bageshwar is identified as an emerging rural tourism model for rural tourism and rural tourism development, including agri-tourism. Rural tourism in the village of Supi offers tourists an opportunity to experience rural lifestyles, along with other tourism activities. These emerging rural tourism destinations offer tourists an opportunity to have a peaceful experience, unlike other tourism destinations (Singh, 2018).

The factors that influence the choice of tourist destinations include natural beauty, accessibility, safety, service quality, cultural experiences, and costs of traveling, among others. Understanding the above factors is crucial for enhancing tourism planning, marketing strategies, and infrastructure development (Crompton, 1979; Prayag and Ryan, 2012). Past literature has also indicated that experiential factors such as environmental quality, cultural authenticity, and interacting with local communities may be more significant for tourists choosing their destinations for rural tourism than physical infrastructure (Kastenholz, 2010; Lane and Kastenholz, 2015). Besides, factors such as destination image, tourist satisfaction, and perceived value are also crucial factors that influence tourists' choices of destinations (Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Sharpley and Roberts, 2004).

Though the importance of rural tourism has been emphasized in the country, empirical studies concerning the preferences of tourists along with the prioritization of the determinants of tourism have been limited, particularly in the rural areas of the Himalayas. The significance of the determinants of

tourism, along with their prioritization, cannot be overemphasized for the policymakers in the tourism industry. Garrett ranking technique has been employed for the purpose of finding the determinants of tourism concerning the selection of the tourism destination in rural areas of Supi village in Uttarakhand. The present study was conducted with the following objectives to analyse the socio-economic profile, travel characteristics, and awareness of rural tourism among tourists visiting Supi village in Bageshwar district of Uttarakhand and to identify and rank the determinants influencing tourists' selection of rural tourism destinations using the Garrett Ranking Technique.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### ***Research Design***

The study employed a descriptive research design to investigate the determinants that affect tourists' selection of rural tourism destinations. The determinants were ranked using the Garrett Ranking Technique.

### ***Study Area***

The study was carried out in Supi village located in Kapkot tehsil, Bageshwar district, Uttarakhand. The village has emerged as a rural tourism destination because of its beautiful Himalayan location, Kumauni culture, and homestay initiatives. Supi village has achieved recognition under the Best Tourism Village Programme of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, promoting Agri-tourism and rural tourism development.

### ***Sampling Procedure and Sample Size***

The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique. Supi village was chosen because of its potential for tourism development. Based on average monthly tourist flow, three major homestays were identified: Sarmul Darshan Homestay, Mandeep Homestay, and Pailaag Stay.

The total sample size of 120 tourists was allocated to these homestays using Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) sampling. Simple Random Sampling was used for each homestay to ensure equal probability of selection. The allocation of sample is

presented in Table 1.

### ***Data Collection***

Both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were collected by using a structured questionnaire and administering it to tourists. The data collected include socio-demographic profile, travel behaviour, and determinants of tourist destination selection. Secondary data were collected by referring to tourism reports, government publications, and research articles. The study followed standard research procedures of data collection and analysis as suggested by Kothari (2004).

### ***Identification of Determinants***

After referring to literature and stakeholders, ten determinants of tourist destination selection were identified, which include natural beauty, cultural authenticity, accessibility, accommodation facilities, safety, cost affordability, cleanliness, local cuisine, hospitality of local people, and social media influence. The respondents were asked to rank these determinants according to their relative importance.

### ***Analytical Techniques***

Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used to describe tourist characteristics. The Garrett Ranking Technique has been used to analyse ranked data and determine the priority of determinants influencing tourist selection (Garrett and Woodworth, 1969). The formula is:

$$\text{Percent Position} = \frac{100 (R_{ij} - 0.5)}{N_j}$$

Where:  $R_{ij}$  = Rank given for the  $i$ th factor by the  $j$ th respondent;  $N_j$  = Number of factors ranked by the  $j$ th respondent

The percent positions were then converted into Garrett scores, and this conversion was done with the help of Garrett conversion tables. The scores obtained for each factor were summed, and the mean Garrett score was calculated. The determinants were ranked according to the mean scores, and the highest score indicated the most influential determinant in the selection of tourists' destinations.

### ***Reliability and Validity***

The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of tourists to ensure clarity and reliability. Necessary modifications were made before final data collection.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Participation of respondents was voluntary and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Respondents were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes and their anonymity would be maintained.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the analysis of the data collected from 120 tourists visiting Supi village, Bageshwar district, Uttarakhand. The results are discussed in terms of the socio-economic characteristics of respondents and the determinants influencing tourists' selection of rural tourism destinations using the Garrett Ranking Technique.

### ***Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents***

Understanding the socio-economic characteristics of tourists is important for identifying travel patterns, preferences, and motivations associated with rural tourism destinations. The distribution of respondents according to gender, age, education, occupation, and place of origin is presented in Table 2.

The findings of the result reveal that the number of male tourists was more compared to female tourists. The proportion of male tourists was 61.67%, while the proportion of female tourists was 38.33%.

In terms of the age group of the tourists, it was revealed that the majority of the tourists belonged to the age group of 25-35 years (35%), followed by the age group of 36-50 years (28.33%). This shows that rural tourism is more popular among young tourists.

In terms of the educational qualifications of the tourists, it was revealed that the majority of the tourists were graduates (45%), followed by postgraduates (33.33%). This shows that rural tourism destinations attract more graduate tourists

who know the concept of sustainable tourism. In terms of the occupation of the tourists, it was revealed that the majority of the tourists belonged to the private sector (31.67%), followed by the self-employed (21.67%), students (20%), etc. This shows that the majority of the tourists visiting the rural tourism destinations belong to the private sector. Nearly 48.33% of the tourists belonged to metropolitan cities.

On an overall basis, it can be inferred that the socio-economic profile indicates that rural tourism destinations like Supi village attract young, educated, and urban tourists.

**Travel Characteristics and Awareness of Rural Tourism among Tourists:** The knowledge of behaviour and level of awareness of tourists is important in understanding the factors that affect the selection of a particular destination. The characteristics of tourists visiting Supi village in terms of purpose of visiting the destination, companions for visiting the destination, stay

duration, and sources of information were analysed. In addition to this, the level of awareness of tourists was also measured. The distribution of respondents in terms of variables is presented in Table 3.

From the results, it is evident that the majority of tourists (60%) visited Supi village for leisure and vacation purposes. This indicates an increase in demand for nature-based rural tourism products. The majority of tourists visited Supi village with their friends (38.3%) and families (35%); thus, rural tourism destinations are popular with tourists traveling in groups.

From the results, it is evident that 45.8% of tourists were fully aware of rural tourism. Moreover, social media and online platforms were identified as the major sources of information on rural tourism destinations by 40%.

**Determinants Influencing Tourist Selection of Rural Tourism Destinations**

The tourists were asked to rank ten determinants that

**Table 1: Allocation of sample using PPS**

Homestay	Average Tourists per Month	Proportion (%)	Sample Allocated
Sarmul Darshan Homestay	210	42%	50
Mandeep Homestay	170	34%	41
Pailaag Stay	120	24%	29
Total	500	100%	120

**Table 2: Socio-economic profile of tourists visiting Supi village (n = 120)**

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	74	61.67
	Female	46	38.33
Age (years)	Below 25	24	20.00
	25–35	42	35.00
	36–50	34	28.33
	Above 50	20	16.67
Education	Undergraduate	18	15.00
	Graduate	54	45.00
	Postgraduate	40	33.33
	Others	8	6.67
Occupation	Private sector employee	38	31.67
	Government employee	22	18.33
	Business/self-employed	26	21.67
	Student	24	20.00
	Others	10	8.33
Place of Origin	Metro cities	58	48.33
	Tier-2 cities	34	28.33
	Small towns	28	23.34

**Table 3: Travel Characteristics and Awareness of Rural Tourism among Tourists (n = 120)**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Purpose of Visit	Leisure / Vacation	72	60.0
	Nature Exploration / Trekking	26	21.7
	Cultural Experience	14	11.7
	Research / Education	8	6.6
Travel Companions	Friends	46	38.3
	Family	42	35.0
	Solo Travel	20	16.7
	Organized Tour Group	12	10.0
Duration of Stay	1–2 Days	52	43.3
	3–4 Days	41	34.2
	5 Days and Above	27	22.5
Source of Information	Social media / Internet	48	40.0
	Friends / Relatives	36	30.0
	Travel Blogs / Websites	21	17.5
	Travel Agencies	15	12.5
Awareness of Rural Tourism	Fully Aware	55	45.8
	Partially Aware	43	35.8
	Not Aware Earlier	22	18.4

**Table 4. Garrett Ranking of Determinants Influencing Tourist Destination Selection**

Determinants	Total Garrett Score	Mean Score	Rank
Natural beauty and environment	9414	78.45	I
Cultural authenticity	8712	72.60	II
Cleanliness and hygiene	8318	69.32	III
Safety and security	8016	66.80	IV
Hospitality of local residents	7650	63.75	V
Cost affordability	7224	60.20	VI
Local cuisine experience	6888	57.40	VII
Accommodation facilities	6558	54.65	VIII
Accessibility and transport	5892	49.10	IX
Social media/online reviews	5382	44.85	X

affect their decision in visiting the rural tourism destination. The Garrett ranking technique was used to score each determinant and find their relative importance and is presented in table 4.

The results of the Garrett ranking technique show that natural beauty/environmental quality was given the highest mean score (78.45), showing that natural beauty is the most important determinant for tourists in their choice of rural tourism destinations.

The second most important determinant was cultural authenticity (72.60). Tourists visiting destinations seek cultural experiences in terms of rural lifestyles. Cleanliness/hygienic conditions (69.32) were the third important determinant. It shows that tourists are becoming aware of environmental health and

hygiene issues, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Safety/security was also a determinant for tourists in their choice of rural tourism destinations.

Factors like hospitality of locals and affordability were rated moderately high; thus, it was evident that friendly locals and cost-effectiveness were essential in rural tourism. It was found that accessibility and social media were rated lower in importance; thus, it was evident that tourists who opted for rural tourism were willing to travel longer distances and were influenced by experiential rather than social media promotions.

It was found that experiential, environmental, and cultural factors were of primary importance in comparison to infrastructural factors in influencing

tourists to select rural tourism destinations.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that rural tourism has tremendous potential for promoting rural development, creating employment opportunities, and preserving culture and traditions of rural areas. The study results of Supi village in Kapkot tehsil of Bageshwar district show that tourists are attracted to the natural beauty and peaceful environment of the region, along with its culture, traditions, and the hospitality of the local residents. The socio-economic characteristics of tourists also reveal the increasing awareness and interest of tourists in rural tourism destinations of the Himalayan region of India. Therefore, it is essential to preserve the natural beauty of the region, protect the culture and traditions of the region, and improve the basic tourism infrastructure of rural areas for promoting rural tourism. The results of the study are useful for policymakers and tourism planners in formulating effective strategies for promoting rural tourism in Uttarakhand.

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