

A Thematic Analysis of Push and Pull Factors Influencing the Destination Image of Mumbai

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025, 28(02), 2236-2244

Publication history: Received on 15 October 2025; revised on 21 November 2025; accepted on 24 November 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2025.28.2.3945>

Abstract

Tourism destinations are shaped by a combination of motivational forces that attract tourists, influence their perceptions and impact their visit decisions. This study examines the impact of push and pull factors on the destination image of Mumbai, one of most dynamic urban tourism hubs of India. Thirty domestic tourists who had recently visited Mumbai in past year were interviewed. A Thematic analysis was employed manually to identify the themes and subthemes emerging from the participants' responses. The findings reveal that key push factors include business opportunities, spirituality and meeting friends or relatives whereas the prominent pull factors comprised of Bollywood associated glamour, shopping, culinary diversity and an astonishing nightlife. However, Mumbai's unique culture and history were identified to be a blend of push and pull factors motivating the tourists to visit the city. The study discovered major challenges faced by tourists such as traffic congestion, pollution, lack of hygiene and infrastructure constraints that negatively affect the city's destination image. The managerial implications focus on improving infrastructure, mobility enhancement, tourist specific mobile apps, urban hygiene, garbage management, aesthetic management and a creation of culture specific and spiritual experiences specially curated for domestic tourists to strengthen Mumbai's position as a leading urban destination for all social classes and demographics.

Keywords: Mumbai tourists; Push factors; Pull factors; Destination image; Visit intentions; Thematic analysis

1. Introduction

Tourism which is also described as a smokeless industry plays a pivotal role in employment generation, regional development, and economic diversification. In India, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, etc. domestic tourism forms the foundation of the tourism economy, contributing substantially to GDP and local livelihoods [1]. India's domestic travel has grown consistently due to improved infrastructure, affordable transportation, and the rising aspirations of a middle-class population seeking leisure, cultural, and experiential travel opportunities.

Mumbai which is recognized as the City of Dreams, embodies the essence of India's cosmopolitan spirit. As India's financial and entertainment capital, Mumbai presents an amazing blend of colonial heritage, architectural landmarks, vibrant festivals, and state of the art, urban experiences. The Gateway of India and the UNESCO-listed Victorian & Art Deco Ensemble coexist with the Dhobi ghat, dharavi slums, Bollywood glamour, etc. The city's diversity comes with a free combination of challenges like traffic congestion, overcrowding, and inconsistent infrastructure that may negatively impact the tourists' visit intentions.

All human decisions are strongly influenced by various motivational factors. Similarly, tourist motivations can also be divided into the Push–Pull framework that provides an established foundation for analyzing these motives. Push factors arise from internal psychological needs like relaxation, novelty-seeking, and self-fulfillment whereas the pull factors

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stem from external destination attributes such as attractions, culture, and infrastructure. The alignment of these factors directly shapes a destination's image, ultimately affecting tourist satisfaction and their visit/revisit intentions.

1.1. Research Problem

Mumbai is one of the most dynamic metropolitan destinations of the world. It attracts a diverse mix of domestic tourists who are drawn by its cultural vibrancy, economic opportunities, and entertainment appeal. However, despite its strong national and global visibility, its tourism demand fluctuates, and visitors often hold mixed perceptions of the city's overall image. Existing research has largely examined tourist motivations and destination image in isolation. It offers limited understanding of how push and pull factors jointly shape the perceived destination image of Mumbai. This gap limits the destination planners from developing strategies that matches the tourists' expectations. Hence, there is a need to explore how push and pull factors influence domestic tourists' perceptions and intentions to visit or revisit Mumbai. Addressing this problem will provide deeper insights into the dimensions of Mumbai tourism and contribute to a better destination image.

1.2. Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the body of literature on urban and domestic tourism by contextualizing the Push–Pull model within Mumbai's unique socio-cultural landscape. By examining the links between motivation, destination image, and tourist behavioral intention, the findings will help policymakers and tourism planners develop targeted strategies for destination marketing, experience design, and sustainable urban tourism. Furthermore, this study will serve as a reference point for future research exploring tourist motivation and image perception even in other metropolitan destinations of India.

1.3. Objectives of the study

- To identify the major push and pull factors that motivate domestic tourists to visit Mumbai.
- To examine how these motivational factors, influence the destination image of Mumbai.
- To understand how the perceived destination image shapes tourists' intentions to visit or revisit Mumbai.
- To identify key challenges and constraints experienced by domestic tourists in Mumbai.
- To propose strategic measures for improving Mumbai's destination image and enhancing domestic tourism demand.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept of Tourism

Tourism is the second largest service industry in the modern world, which is consistently progressing in the service sector. The growing significance of tourism industry may be gauged from the increasing number of destinations along with the parallel growth in the travel and hospitality sectors. It contributes to employment generation, socio-economic growth, and cultural exchange. Defined by the World Tourism Organization [1], it involves the movement of people to destinations outside their usual environment for leisure, business, or other purposes. In India, domestic tourism dominates the national tourism framework, driving regional development and fostering cultural cohesion [2]. Scholars such as [3] and [4] opined that tourism extends beyond mere recreation, it is also an expression of social behavior, lifestyle, and aspirational mobility.

2.2. Push and Pull Motivation in Tourism

The Push–Pull Motivation Framework proposed by [5] and later refined by [6] remains central to understanding the tourist behavior. Push factors refer to internal psychological motives such as relaxation, escapism, or novelty-seeking, while pull factors relate to external attributes of the destination, such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, safety, or infrastructure [7] [8]. Together, these forces shape tourists' decision-making processes and their perception of destination attractiveness. Recent research has expanded the model's application. [9] found that in Egypt, rest, relaxation, and novelty-seeking acted as key push factors, while safety, cultural richness, and accessibility served as major pull factors influencing domestic tourists' revisit intentions. Similarly, [10] highlighted that European millennials traveling to Southeast Asia were motivated by self-development and cultural exploration as push factors while scenic beauty and local cuisine were pull motivators. Studies across Asia [11] [12] reaffirm that aligning destination offerings with tourists' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations enhances satisfaction and loyalty.

2.3. Applications of Push and Pull Framework to Mumbai Tourism

Mumbai, India's financial and entertainment hub, represents a complex urban tourism destination where motivations intertwine with emotional and cultural appeal. Push factors encouraging domestic travel to Mumbai include:

- **Escapism and Relaxation:** Many visitors seek respite from routine urban life through leisure experiences along the city's beaches and coastal promenades [13] [14].
- **Ambition and Aspiration:** Mumbai's identity as the City of Dreams and the heart of Bollywood motivates travelers driven by career ambitions or fascination with fame [15].
- **Social Connections:** Visiting friends and relatives remains a major component of domestic tourism in India. [16] [17].
- **Spirituality:** Pilgrimage sites such as Siddhivinayak Temple and Haji Ali Dargah serve as religious motivators [9]

Complementing the push factors are pull factors as follows:

- **Cultural Heritage:** Historic landmarks like the Gateway of India and CST station reflect Mumbai's colonial legacy [18].
- **Bollywood and Entertainment:** Film-based tourism has become a strong pull factor, reinforcing Mumbai's glamorous image [19] [20]
- **Festivals and Events:** The city's festive spirit, from Ganesh Chaturthi to Kala Ghoda Festival, enhances its experiential value [21].
- **Culinary Diversity and Shopping:** Mumbai's eclectic food culture and market experiences appeal to domestic travelers seeking authentic urban adventures [22]

2.4. Mumbai's Destination Image, push/pull factors and Tourist Intentions to Visit/Revisit

The destination image is a composite of tourists' beliefs, impressions, and emotional responses toward a place [23]. It influences not only the initial decision to visit but also satisfaction and future behavioral intentions [24]. Although earlier studies distinguished between cognitive (knowledge-based) and affective (emotion-based) image components, recent research focuses more on the holistic perception that integrates both [25]. Mumbai's destination image is strongly shaped by its vibrant cultural mix, dynamic economy, and its lifestyle diversity. Push motivations such as the desire for novelty, social belonging, and stress relief combine with pull factors like cultural/historical landmarks, nightlife, shopping and culinary variety to construct a very distinctive image. Infrastructural enhancement, improved connectivity, and digital tourism promotion are essential for sustaining Mumbai's appeal. [1]

Empirical evidence shows that a positive destination image enhances satisfaction and revisit intention [26] [27]. Push and pull motivations significantly influence the perceived destination image in the Indian domestic tourist's context thereby influencing the tourist visit intentions [11].

2.5. Literature Review Gap

While an extensive research validates the Push-Pull framework globally, very limited empirical work explores how push/pull factors impact Mumbai's destination image and affect domestic tourist visit/revisit intentions. Existing studies either focus on specific motivators (such as Bollywood, slum or food) or general tourism trends in any country. None of them have tried integrating motivational and image-based constructs with its destination image of Mumbai. Very limited work has examined the dynamics of Mumbai, where culture, heritage, lifestyle and business and much more, coexist. This study, therefore, bridges this gap by examining how internal motivations and external attributes together shape the destination image of Mumbai which in turn leads to their visit/revisit decisions.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to receive a thorough understanding of the motivations that influence the domestic tourists to visit Mumbai. The approach allows for the exploration of the respondents' experiences, emotional triggers, and prime factors underlying their travel decisions. A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants who could be easily accessed would give time and consent for the interviews. The sample comprised domestic tourists who had recently visited Mumbai in past one year. The diversity in age, gender and educational background was ensured by the researcher. Data was collected through unstructured interviews that were designed to capture detailed responses on tourists' motivations, experiences, challenges and suggestions. A pilot study was conducted with five participants to refine the interview guide and ensure clarity and relevance. Following necessary

revisions, 30 participants were interviewed between 1 Aug 2025 to 30 Oct 2025. Each interview lasted between 20 to 30 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or via virtual platforms, depending on the participants' convenience and comfort.

4. Data Analysis Technique

The data collected through structured interviews were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, which involved systematic coding of interview data to identify recurring patterns, themes, and relationships between push and pull factors influencing destination image of Mumbai. A Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework [28]. It involved familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing, defining, and naming. Responses from thirty participants were coded manually to identify recurring patterns and meanings related to tourist travel motivations, experiences, and perceptions of Mumbai. The initial codes were grouped into conceptual categories, which were then classified into six themes: Push Factors, Pull Factors, Dual Motivation (Push + Pull), Challenges Faced, Areas for Improvement, and the Destination image of Mumbai. These themes collectively capture the multidimensional nature of Mumbai as perceived by the thirty respondents.

4.1. Thematic Data Analysis and Findings

The following is the table of the respondents' demographics.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 30)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	15	50
	Female	15	50
Age Group	29–44 yrs. Millennials	12	40
	45–60 yrs. Gen X	18	60
Educational Background	Graduate	10	33
	Post Graduate and Above (Ph.D./Professional)	20	67
Primary Purpose of Visit	Business/Job related	8	26.6
	Visiting Family/Friends	5	16.6
	Experiencing Culture/Food/Shopping	7	23.3
	Spiritual	6	20
	Others	4	13
Sample Size		30	100

Table 1 presents the demographic composition of the thirty participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews for this study. The sample reflected an equal gender distribution, with fifteen males and fifteen females, ensuring balanced representation. A majority of the respondents (60%) belonged to the Generation X cohort (aged 45–60 years), while the remaining 40% were millennials (aged 29–44 years). This age mix allowed for insights from both experienced and relatively younger domestic tourists, enriching the diversity of perspectives on Mumbai's tourism experience. In terms of educational attainment, two-thirds (67%) of the participants were postgraduates or professionals holding advanced degrees, while one-third (33%) had completed undergraduate education. This indicates a well-educated sample, typical of urban domestic travelers with higher travel awareness and discretionary spending power.

The primary purposes of visit to Mumbai were varied, reflecting multiple motivational drivers. Business and job-related travel constituted 26.6% of the sample, while 23.3% visited primarily to experience the city's culture and food. Shopping (20%) and visiting family and friends (16.6%) were also common reasons, whereas 13% identified Bollywood and nightlife as their main attraction. This heterogeneity of purpose highlights Mumbai's multifaceted appeal as a destination combining professional opportunities, cultural immersion, leisure, and entertainment.

The demographic overview establishes a diverse, yet informed participant base, offering a balanced mix of age, gender, and their travel purposes. Such heterogeneity enriches the qualitative depth of the study as capturing multiple perspectives on Mumbai's tourism experience was possible. Building on this demographic context, the subsequent thematic analysis explores the underlying push and pull factors, perceived challenges, areas for improvement, and the overall destination image of Mumbai as perceived by the respondents.

Table 2 Thematic Analysis of Push–Pull Factors and Challenges in Mumbai Tourism

Theme	Sub Theme	Key Responses
Push Factors	Business/Office Visiting Family & Friends Spiritual	P1:I come for work but I end up exploring Mumbai too. Especially the food and shopping. P4:My children live here, so I visit quite often. P14: I came for darshan at Iskon Temple
Pull Factors	Shopping & Street Markets Culinary Diversity Bollywood & Nightlife	P5:We love long drives at night, dine out, do everything than we cannot in our city. P9:It's full of places to eat and shop. P12:We wanted to visit Film City and the Gateway. P17: I wanted to see Shahrukh Khan's House and eat at Shilpa Shettys restaurant. P10: Something new to eat everytime I visit here. P20: Coming to Mumbai for wedding shopping is our family ritual.
Dual Motivation (Push + Pull)	Culture and History as Core Identity	P24: The history draws you to it, and the city keeps you hooked here. P25: The architecture is just awesome. P29: Kalaghoda festival, amazing to see that vibrant view of Mumbai.
Challenges	Weather & Climate Traffic & Distance Transport Connectivity Hygiene & Sanitation Overcrowding Garbage Management	P23: The humidity makes sightseeing tough. P28:Traffic and distance waste half the day. P27:Just too many people are there, everywhere. P11:Mumbai is amazing but, very smelly.
Improvement	Urban cleanliness, aesthetic mgt., traffics and mobility mgt.	P30: Not even one toilet was clean or nonsmelly. P13: Mumbai has less empty clean green spaces. P6: Not many buses cover all tourist spots. P7: We need integrated apps for bus, train, metro.
Destination Image	Safe Vibrant 24x7 Busy Helpful locals Dynamic	P2: Does Mumbai sleep? P3: We feel safe always wherever we are. P8: Mumbai locals are extremely helpful and friendly. P15: Everytime I come, I see a new trend.

The thematic analysis of the interviews revealed multiple dimensions shaping domestic tourists' motivations and perceptions of Mumbai as a tourist destination. The findings indicate that both internal (push) and external (pull) factors play an extremely important role in constructing the city's overall image and its attractiveness as well. Among the internal motivations, business-related travel and visiting family and friends were very dominant. P1 mentioned, "I come for work but I end up exploring Mumbai too. Especially the food and shopping" highlighting how business trips often extend into leisure experiences. Similarly, P4 proudly said, "My children live here, so I visit quite often." suggesting that social connections strongly influence repeat visit patterns. P14 stated clearly that she came for darshan at Iskon Temple, and also visited many more.

Tourists frequently mentioned the following pull factors like shopping, culinary diversity, and Bollywood nightlife as key motivators. P9 described Mumbai as "full of places to eat and shop," P5 jokingly said "We love long drives at night, dine out, do everything than we cannot in our city." P12 remarked "We wanted to visit Film City and the Gateway" highlights the importance of cinematic and heritage attractions. P17 clearly said "I wanted to see Shahrukh Khan's House and eat at Shilpa Shettys restaurant." P10 excitedly said, "Something new to eat every time I visit here" whereas P20 proudly said, "Coming to Mumbai for wedding shopping is our family ritual".

Mumbai's vibrant culture and history emerged as a unique dual theme influencing both internal desire and external attraction. P24 reflected, "The history draws you to it, and the city keeps you hooked here," and P25 added, "The architecture is just awesome." The sensory experience of the city, as P29 was in awe of the Kalaghoda festival and said "Kalaghoda festival, amazing to see that vibrant view of Mumbai".

The respondents highlighted several barriers that negatively influence the tourist experience and hence satisfaction levels. P23 pointed out "the humidity makes sightseeing very tough," while P28 expressed his frustration that "traffic and distance waste half the day" and P 27 said "just too many people, everywhere." Hygiene and sanitation concerns were echoed by P11, who remarked, "Mumbai is amazing, but very smelly," P30 complained, "Not one toilet was clean," drawing attention to hygiene, garbage management and sanitation concerns. P13 commented "Mumbai has less empty clean green spaces." P6 and P7 emphasized the need for better coverage and integration of transport services, with suggestions for "apps linking bus, train, metro, etc everything or every ticket in one card that's rechargeable easily".

Mumbai's image remained positive and has scope for further improvements due to the following observations. Tourists still described Mumbai as vibrant, safe, dynamic, and 24x7 alive. P2 said "Does Mumbai sleep?" P3 affirmed, "We feel safe always wherever we are.." P8 added, " Mumbai locals are extremely helpful and friendly", truly reflecting the warmth and inclusiveness that define the city's character. P15 said, "Every time I come, I see a new trend."

The findings portray Mumbai's destination image as multifaceted, a unique blend of history, culture and modernization. The city continues to attract domestic tourists through its unique economic, cultural and historical identity. Still, infrastructural and environmental improvements remain necessary to sustain its image as India's most dynamic urban tourism hub. While its vibrancy, safety, Bollywood attractions and variety of temples were repeatedly praised, the findings underscore the importance of improving infrastructure, mobile apps, hygiene, and culture based tourism to strengthen its competitive positioning. The city's paradox; *chaotic yet charismatic, crowded yet comforting*, defines its unique destination image.

To better visualize the interconnections between the key themes identified through the thematic analysis, a conceptual diagram was developed to illustrate the relationship among push and pull factors, challenges, areas for improvement, and the overall image of Mumbai as a tourist destination.

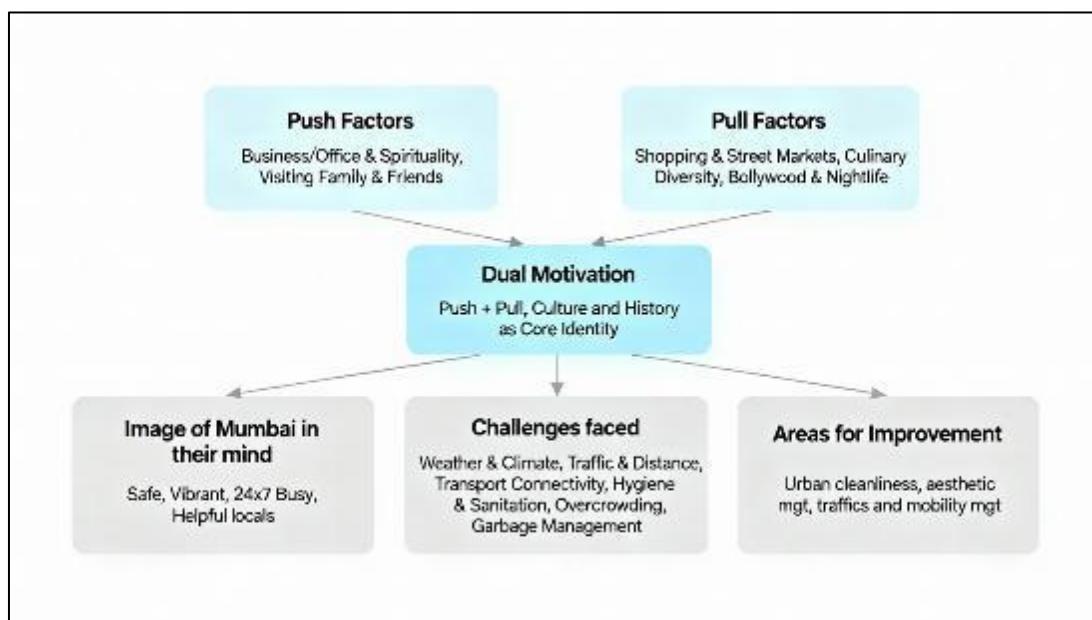


Figure 1 Conceptual representation of the Thematic Analysis

As shown in Figure 1, both push and pull factors interact dynamically to shape tourists' perceptions and experiences of Mumbai. Cultural and historical elements serve as the central link between motivation and destination image, while challenges and areas for improvement highlight critical aspects that influence satisfaction and revisit intentions.

Limitations of the Study

Given its qualitative nature, the findings of this study may not be statistically generalizable to all domestic tourists or destinations in India. The sample size was limited to 30 respondents within the 29–60 age group, and the scope of the study focused exclusively on Mumbai city. The results provide valuable insights that can guide further quantitative research and policy formulation.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative study has identified the major push and pull factors that motivate the domestic tourists to visit and revisit Mumbai. The study discovered that business/official travel, visiting friends/relatives and spirituality act as key push motivators. The presence of family and social networks adds a layer of familiarity and trustworthiness to the city, thereby balancing the thrill of new spiritual or other experiences with a sense of comfort. Availability of lot of diverse tourist day packages, events, festivals or spiritual experiences will tempt these visitors to actively involve themselves in some or the other tourist products available for all age groups. In fact, tourists will plan their business or family visits as per the experiences they plan in Mumbai. Shopping, culinary diversity, vibrant city life and Bollywood fame serve as dominant pull factors to visit Mumbai. They satisfy tourists by offering varied experiences catering to their taste buds, shopaholic behavior, emotional or novelty seeking desire, etc. Culture and heritage of the city emerged as dual motivators, reflecting that tourists still crave for culture and history as a major reason to visit a city. Both the push and pull factors shape Mumbai's destination image as a safe, vibrant, culturally/ historically rich, and full of Bollywood glamour. All these collectively construct and reinforce Mumbai's destination image in the minds of the domestic tourists.

It is to be noted that when tourists perceive the destination image aligning with their interests, they are more likely to decide to visit Mumbai. After they visit, they compare their actual experiences to the expected ones and if the experience meets or exceeds the positive image, it reinforces satisfaction and revisits. A well-established destination image that evokes emotional connection, nostalgia, a sense of thrill or novelty, increases the likelihood of repeat visits. A strong, positive destination image reduces perceived risks thereby making tourists confident in their choice to return. Despite a strong positive image, the study highlighted persistent challenges that the city faces such as humidity, traffic congestion, sanitation, and overcrowding. These are the ones that hinder future visits to the city. To sustain its competitive edge over nearby substitutable destinations like Pune, Mumbai's tourism strategy should prioritize hygiene, mobility management, garbage management, leveraging on use of AI apps and create rich historic/cultural experience enhancement tours for the domestic tourists. Strengthening these dimensions will reinforce Mumbai's destination appeal as a multifaceted urban destination that seamlessly blends history, culture, entertainment and much more.

5.1. Managerial Implications

An improved connectivity between the city's key attractions is must to encourage more tourist flow. Polarization of the attractions create traffic congestion and overcrowding, to avoid it, an equitable distribution of tourism activities across Mumbai can be planned. Creation and proper marketing of user friendly mobile apps specially designed for the tourists is the need of the hour. Sustainable traffic management can be created to ease the travel within the city. There is a need for focused efforts on sanitation, garbage management, public restrooms, and green spaces to enhance visitor satisfaction. Travel agencies should focus on curating more heritage walks across all zones of Mumbai rather than focusing only on the South Mumbai. Tour managers can focus on creating and marketing specialty, novelty and culture immersed tours specially designed as per the needs of the domestic tourists. Curating special day trips focused only on religious sites for senior citizens or families would help increase the tourist influx and spending in the city. Organizing food and shopping festivals in low tourist seasons could cover for the slack tourist season if planned and executed well. Mumbai can have a unique marketing mix curated considering major pull and push factors motivation tourists to visit/revisit. Many events are already in planned or are in the pipeline, planners should understand that creating a penetrative awareness for the same in entire Maharashtra especially is a must for increasing tourist flow to Mumbai. Outskirts of Mumbai like Navi Mumbai, Panvel, Ulve, etc. could be developed into Tourist hubs as well. Policy makers cannot ignore the importance of involving the Mumbai locals and small businesses in tourism initiatives to preserve the city's authenticity and its unique character.

5.2. Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies could extend the current research by employing quantitative or mixed methods to discover more about the relationships between push–pull factors, emotions, and satisfaction among domestic tourists. Comparative studies across more Indian metropolitan destinations such as Delhi, Chandigarh, Vishakhapatnam or Bengaluru may offer deeper insights into regional variations in urban tourist behavior. Research could examine how artificial intelligence and digitalization can be harnessed to reshape Mumbai's destination image and visitor engagement over time.

Compliance with ethical standards

Statement of Ethical approval

All participants provided a consent before participating in the study. Their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. Their participation in interview was totally voluntary and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research. The researcher declares no conflict of interest with any person or organization.

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