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Influence of Social Interaction on Customer Experience in Tourism Industry

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Abstract

Customer experience has always been a pivot around which every industry revolves. Customer experience refers to sum total of beliefs, perception, feelings & emotions a person develops over a period of time. It is the entire customer journey in which the Customer experience is built up. Social Interaction is one of the contributing factors of customer experience. Social interaction occurs when two or more people communicate with each other intentionally or unintentionally. The level of interaction decides the customer experience. Tourists are the people who travel and visit a place (location) other than their usual surroundings for leisure purposes. The more friendly & helpful interaction a tourist encounters at the destination, the better his/her experience and vice-versa. Various factors influence the customer experience in the customer journey, but the paper focussed on only one factor i.e. social interaction. The paper consists of three objectives in which the first two objectives check the influence of social interaction based on gender and age-group of tourists during the onsite phase of customer journey, and the last objective is to find out the influence of Social interaction on customer experience during the onsite phase of customer journey. The questionnaire was prepared for conducting a survey, Kruskal-Wallis test and Spearman's Rank correlation analysis was performed to check the proposed hypothesis.

Keywords: Social Interaction, Customer Experience, Tourist, Onsite phase, Customer Journey.

Introduction

Man is a social animal; he wants to live in a society where he can interact with other fellow beings, exchange his ideas and views, and be accepted by others. Therefore, the concept of social interaction comes into existence. Social interaction occurs when two or more people communicate with each other intentionally or unintentionally. The level of interaction decides the customer experience. Customer experience is subjective as it is different from person to person and is dynamic. A person can have a different experience by visiting the same place at some other time. Customer experience is the accumulation of one's perception that he/she has regarding the place beforehand, feelings that he/she develops while visiting the destination after interaction with various touch points, and what remains with them post-visit a destination. It begins when a person searches for a product or service, making him purchase according to his requirements and finally terminates at the post purchase, i.e., after-sales service. It is the entire customer journey in which the customer experience is built up. Depending upon the customer's experience, she will have loyalty towards service providers and make referrals & recommendations. Customer satisfaction is the core outcome or the product of experience, which further leads to trust, loyalty, intention to revisit, word of mouth, and willingness to recommend. In the case of products, after-sales service generates customer satisfaction towards a particular brand, ultimately leading to customer experience.

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The destination image forms in the tourist's mind during his journey because of his interaction with the local people and their culture. The more friendly & helpful interaction a tourist encounters at the

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destination, the better her experience and vice-versa. Social interaction is one of the contributing factors to customer experience. Tourism is the act of traveling away from home for recreational, leisure or business purposes. Tourism is a service industry where the running of operations serves to facilitate experiences (Leif Selstad, 2007). It is an industry that generates revenue for the country and provides job to millions of people. Tourism provides growth as well as boosts the economic activities of the country. Tourists are the people who travel and visits a place (location) other than their usual surroundings for leisure purpose. Nowadays, people want to visit a destination and live the life of locals and experience their local culture keeping aside the typical touristy schedule. As a result, they (tourists) are now interacting more with the local people as they prefer to stay at homestays despite staying at regular hotels and lodges, thereby enhancing their knowledge about the destination, local people and their values and beliefs.

Literature Review

Interaction refers to the linkage between a customer and a provider (Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1982). Social interaction (S.I.) is a chief constituent of leisure activity (Auld & Case, 1997). Social interaction is the main reason for participating in leisure activities (Crandall, Nolan & Morgan, 1980; de Grazia, 1962; Iso-Ahola, 1980, 1989; Kaplan, 1960; Samdahl, 1988, 1992; Auld & Case, 1997; Erose Sthapit, 2013). The essential component of leisure is social interaction (Iso-Ahola, 1980). While socially interacting with the local people of the place, tourists can enhance their knowledge about them and better understand them as locals and find out how they are also culturally different from them(Jong-Hyeong Kim, 2014). Experiencing the local culture at the destination is considered a motivational factor by the travelers (Richards, 2002; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Jong-Hyeong Kim, 2014). Social Interaction plays a role in creating a memorable tourism experience (Jeongmi (Jamie) Kim and Daniel R. Fesenmaier, 2015). Tour experiences are are continuously mediated through social interactions and social relationship (Selstad, 2007). It is evident from the studies that social interaction makes the travel experience more memorable. Nowadays, tourists are interested in exploring the destination and living the life of locals by involving themselves in the local's lifestyle, keeping themselves away from experiencing the typical tourism settings (Brown, 2005; Jong-Hyeong Kim, 2014). Tourists are searching for destinations that are different and unique from their surroundings regarding their local culture, customs and traditions (Rojas and Camarero, 2008; Eny Endah Pujiastuti et al., 2017). Local people at the destination are developing their places as tourist places that showcase their lives, the community in which they live with their, culture & customs. The tourists also get the chance to encounter folk culture, handicrafts, local cuisine, & have interacted with the residents of the place (Eny Endah Pujiastuti, Umar Nimran et al., 2017). Traveling to the destination and visiting places other than typical tourist attractions provides tourists an opportunity for social interaction with the local people and an authentic experience (Mohamad, Nur, et al., 2014). Social interaction enhances the tourists' knowledge and understanding of various perspectives they encounter during their trip. The core of tourists' experience is their interaction with the locals (Murray et al., 2010). Tourists interacting with the local people of the destination build a memorable tourism experience as local culture is the main component of a memorable tourism experience (Kim, 2009). Visitors who experience the local culture during their holiday can recollect better their memories associated with the place and add to their knowledge and understanding (Kim et al., 2010). Canadian Tourism Commission, (2004) stated that meeting with the local people for a short period or a long day forms an essential part of the tour package. Han, X., Praet, C. L., et al., (2019)

believed that social interaction contributes to extra enjoyment, social development, engagement in the experience, stimulation of thoughts, feelings, and creativity, and generating positive appraisals and memorable experiences. Tourist experience should be seen as formed through the interaction of the tourists with the physical environment and with other people, including residents and fellow tourists (White and White, 2008). Prior studies related to tourist experience have concluded that social interaction plays an important role in tourist experiences (Han, X., Praet, C. L., et al., 2019).

Carneiro, M. J., Eusebio, C., et al., (2018) stated that the host–tourist interaction has a vital role in the experiences of both the actors in the process, offering residents opportunities to know people from different cultures, to increase socialization opportunities and skills, to reduce isolation and expand social networks, to increase business opportunities, and to raise residents' pride in their place of residence. Social contact can be assumed as a personal encounter between tourism actors, such as tourists and hosts in the tourism sector. In this context, understanding these encounters is relevant for sustainable tourism development. As there is not enough information on how precisely and successfully one can measure tourist-host interactions under situations like when encounters between tourists and hosts can occur during their purchase of goods and services, or tourists ask for information, or when tourists and hosts go to the same place of visit (De Kadt, 1979).

Social interaction is a vital rationale for travel (Crompton, 1979). Social interaction does not mean making long term bonds or friendships with the destination's locals; instead, it means friendly meeting with all the people they (tourist) had met during their trip. Social interaction facilitates travellers to make stronger social bonds with travel colleagues and establish friendships with companions and local people. This factor adds a new dimension to customer experience, enhancing tourists' memory of experiences. Therefore, motivating tourists to mingle with locals and maintaining pleasurable interactions with fellow travellers on their tours is crucial for a memorable travel experience. Larsen and Jenssen, (2004) were also of the opinion that social interaction is an essential factor that lasts longer in the memory of tourists. Therefore, Social Interaction in the context of this study is a social exchange (of ideas, thoughts, beliefs, culture, etc.) between two or more individuals. It is a dynamic sequence of social actions between individuals or groups who modify their actions and reactions due to actions by their interaction partner(s). It forms an integral part of customer experience as when tourists interact with the locals during the journey, a social exchange takes place between them, which may modify their actions and reactions and lead to a memorable tourism experience. It enables tourists (customers) to gain a deeper insight into the local culture and enhance their existing knowledge. It can be planned or accidental, and symbols constitute a significant portion of communication occurring during social interactions. The opportunity of social interaction and the quality that a tourist (customer) encounters determines the level of customer experience. The quality of social interaction is reflected in the form of tourists' impressions of the local people and their culture. The opportunity for social exchange, impression about locals & their culture, improved understanding of locals & their culture, quality of social exchange has emerged as dimensions of social interaction which define it extensively.

Customer Experience (CX)

Schmitt, (1999) was one of the scholars who emphasized the importance of customer experience. Customer experience is multidimensional, consisting of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial & social components (Schmitt, 1999, 2003; Verhoef et al., 2009). Barnes et al., (2014) listed the components of tourist experiences as sensory, affective,

behavioural and intellectual factors. Experience is the total, affecting customers physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually (Mossberg, 2007). Oh et al., (2007) described tourism experience as positive and negative emotions which play an important role in creating memories. Customer experience is evolved through a collection of touch points during various phases of a customer's purchase journey or customer's decision process (Pucinelli et al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009). Customer experience incorporates various touch points i.e. point of contact between customer and firm (Homburg et al., 2015; Schmitt, 2003). Customers include themselves in creating memories and emotions (Zakrisson & Zillinger, 2012). Poulsson and Kale, (2004) defined tourism experience as an act of co-creation between a service provider and a consumer where the consumer perceives value during the encounter and in the subsequent memory of that encounter. The co-creation of customer experience can be described as the tourist's involvement in designing, creating and delivering an experience product (Kirpalany, 2011; Selstad, 2007). In the co-creation process of customer experience, an individual tourist's engagement in co-creation activities can enhance customer experience (Gentile et al., 2007). Tourist play an active role in creating their own experience (Kastenholz, Carneiro, et al., 2015). Experiences are of unique economic value for customers and have memorability and sustainability (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999). Tourists' many interaction with the destination's environment influence the tourism experience. Only the level of traveller's involvement at the place decides her tourism experience (Huang and Hsu, 2009). Tourism experience is the synthesis of products and services consumed by the tourist and social interaction with the local community (Cetin & Yarcan, 2017). Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, (2012) discuss involvement, meaningfulness, social interaction, hedonism, happiness, pleasure, relaxation, stimulation, refreshment, spontaneity, knowledge, challenge, sense of separation, timelessness, adventure, personal relevance, novelty, escaping pressure, and intellectual cultivation as elements of the tourist experience. The tourist experience is the strong individual travel-related occurrence retained in the tourist's mind (Larsen, 2007). Peak experience emerges when a traveller encounters a novel, unique experience inclusive of surprise element in it (Arnould and Price, 1993). The attributes of the destination have a major role in getting tourists satisfied, leading to positive future behavior like recommending the destination to others (Ozdemir, Aksu et al., 2012). The emotions resulting after experiencing the attributes of the destination can be so impactful that tourists can get attached and become loyal to the place and visit it time and again (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001) and recommend it to others (Cetin & Dincer, 2014). Customer experience comprises an intention to repeat and a willingness to recommend it to others (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Walls et al., (2011) believed that traveller experience is a multidimensional construct resulting from an interaction of internal factors, such as emotion and cognition of the traveller, and external factors, such as human interactions, physical experiences and situational factors. Pine & Gilmore, (1998) stated that tourists reach an adequate level of experience after participating and involving themselves in the activities at the destination. From an organizational viewpoint, customer experience functions in a physical environment and social interaction. Carbone and Haeckel, (1994) also assessed that experiences can be formed by offering physical environment and social interactions during service encounters by the organizations. The literature has backed the significance of social interaction and physical environment as factors influencing customer experiences (Baker, 1987; Bitner, 1992; G. Cetin and F.I. Dincer Brocato, et al., 2012; Huang, Scott, et al., 2012; Schmitt, 2003; Smith, 1994; Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003; Turley & Milliman, 2000; Walls, 2009; Yuan & Wu, 2008). Numerous authors have mentioned the importance

of social interaction. The customer experience process, which is dynamic and iterative, begins from pre-purchase (including search), then proceeds to purchase and finally ends post-purchase (Katherine N. Lemon & Peter C. Verhoef, 2016). Hence, the Customer (tourist) experience can be understood as an amalgamation of dynamic, sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual (cognitive) impressions gained as a result of consumption of products and services and interactions with various touch points- both organic(living) and inorganic (non-living), encountered during the entire customer journey. It results in multidimensional blend of sentiments, which is actually the subjective reality of the customer (tourist) as they act as its co-creator and attach an economic value to it. It commences with the future outlook of the pre-visit phase, sustains through the interactive on-site visit phase and culminates with the reflective frame of mind at the end of the post-visit phase. In these phases, customer experience reflects concretely in terms of destination image formation, generation of customer satisfaction, memorability, and effective purchase decision making, the intent of repetition and willingness to recommend on the part of customer. Customer experience during the on-site visit phase is reflected in hedonism, involvement, refreshment, social interaction, knowledge, meaningfulness, & novelty attained by the customer as an abstract construct.

The study is making an exploratory start in addressing plural gaps in the literature by focusing on the influence of social interaction based on gender and age-group of tourists during the on-site phase of the customer journey. Previous studies such as Shen, K., Yang, J. et al., (2022); Armenski, T., Dragicevic, V. et al., (2011) have addressed the concern which stated the influence of tourists' behavior on the residents of the destination. However, no study has possibly addressed the influence of social interaction on the tourism experience from a tourist's viewpoint (Han, X., Praet, C. L. et al., 2019). In addition, there is a limited number of studies analysing the influence of social interaction on customer experience (Carneiro, M. J., Eusebio, C. et al., 2018).

Research Methodology

The study's research design is exploratory cum descriptive in nature. The study aims to compare the social interaction influence on the gender of tourists and the age group of tourists during the on-site phase of the customer journey. It further aims at finding out the social interaction that influences customer experience during the on-site phase of the customer journey. The study is exploratory in nature while understanding and finding the influence of social interaction on customer experience during the on-site phase of the customer journey in relation with age and gender of the customers. The study is descriptive in testing the hypothesis with quantifiable collected data which was tested with suitable statistical tools for objective findings.

Objectives

The study comprises the following objectives, which are as follows:

- To compare the social interaction influence based on the gender of tourists during the on-site phase of the customer journey.
- To analyse the social interaction influence based on the age-group of tourists during the on-site phase of the customer journey.
- To find out the influence of social interaction on customer experience during the on-site phase of the customer journey.

Hypothesis

The study has formulated the following hypothesis, keeping in mind the objectives of the study:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is a significant difference

in social interaction influences between the gender of tourists during the on-site phase of the customer journey.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): There is a significant difference in social interaction influences among the age-group of tourists during the on-site phase of the customer journey.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): There is a significant relation between social interaction and the customer experience during the on-site phase of the customer journey.

Sampling Plan

The convenience sampling method was used to select the respondents. Three hundred ten respondents provided their responses, and their responses were analysed using SPSS. Population for this study was defined as total tourist inflow in Varanasi, and the sample frame for the study was domestic tourist inflow in Varanasi, while individual domestic tourist in the city of Varanasi is the sample unit of this study. Data collection took place between 1st October, 2021-20th November, 2021.

The profile of respondents is given below:

Table 1: Respondents Profile

Gender	% of Respondents
Male	46
Female	54
Age Group	% of Respondents
18-24	18
25-34	34
35-44	20
45 & above	28
Ocupation	% of Respondents
Students	17.3
Service Sector	33.5
Business	24
Home-maker	22
Retired	3.2
Educational Qualification	% of Respondents
Intermediate	6
Graduate	46
Post Graduate	44
Doctorate	4
Travel Companion	% of Respondents
Spouse	16.5
Friend	21.1
Family/Relatives	50
Business Partner	0.7
Alone	8.5

Data Collection Tool

The study was conducted to know about the influence of social interaction on customer experience. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert type scale with 5 indicating strongly agree and 1 indicating strongly disagree while collecting respondents' opinions. Tourists were asked to give their response in situ, based on previous research (Campos et al., 2015; Quinlan Cutler and Carmichael 2010; Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003) stating that any investigation of tourist interaction should be conducted during the actual tourism experience as strong emotions, and meaningful memories occur during this time.

Analysis and Findings

Sample for the study was heterogeneous in nature and was lacking normality therefore, Kruskal-Wallis test, a non-parametric test, was adopted for testing hypothesis 1.

Table 2 : Kruskal-Wallis Test

RANKS			
GENDER		N	MEAN RANK
SI	0	139	149.60
	1	171	160.30
Total		310	

TEST STATISTICS [a, b]	
	SI
Chi-Square	1.098
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.295

a. Kruskal-Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: GENDER

In the above Table 2 of Ranks, the Gender column consists of two numbers, 0 and 1, where 0 represents male, and 1 denotes female. Among the total respondents of 310, who participated in the survey, 139 were males and 171 were females. The above table shows that the Kruskal-Wallis H test, one of the non-parametric tests, is implemented as the collected data was not normally distributed and heterogeneous. This test compares two or more independent samples with equal or different sample sizes. The test states if the p-value is less than or equal to the significance level, then the null hypothesis is not accepted, and it is concluded that all group medians are not equal. Unlike the above, in this case, the p-value which is 0.295, much more than the significance level of 5%, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is accepted, stating that there is no significant difference between social interaction influences based on the gender of tourists during the on-site phase of the customer journey.

For hypothesis 2, Kruskal-Wallis test results are given below:

Table 3: Kruskal-Wallis Test

RANKS		
AGE-GROUP (years)	N	MEAN RANK
SI 1	56	150.60
2	105	157.57
3	62	162.45
4	87	151.21
Total	310	

TEST STATISTICS [a, b]	
	SI
Chi-Square	0.801
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.849

a. Kruskal-Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: AGE-GROUP

In the above Table-3 of Ranks, the Age-Group column consists of four classifications where, 1 represents 18-24 years of age, 2 signifies 25-34 years of age group, 3 denotes 35-44 years of age and lastly, 4 represents 45 or older years of age group. Kruskal-Wallis test is used above to check the influence of Social interaction on the age-group of tourists, where it is found that the p-value is more than the significant level of 5%, which is 0.849.Therefore, it is concluded that the null hypothesis is accepted, stating there is no significant difference between social interaction influence based on the age-group of tourists during the on-site phase of the customer journey.

The study opted for Spearman's Rank Correlation test for testing the hypothesis 3.

Table 4: Spearman's Rank Correlation between Social Interaction and Customer experience

Statement code	Statements	Mean	p-value at 5% significance level	Spearmans rho (ρ)	Interpretation
Item1	I got a chance to interact with local people during this trip.	4.03	0.000	0.439	Moderate positive relationship
Item 2	I met with local people during the trip.	3.96	0.000	0.401	Moderate positive relationship
Item 3	It was not easy to interact with the locals.	3.80	0.001	0.382	Moderate positive relationship
Item 4	I got various opportunities to experience the local way of life.	3.81	0.000	0.375	Moderate positive relationship
Item 5	The locals were friendly towards me.	3.76	0.000	0.360	Moderate positive relationship
Item 6	I found the locals generous.	3.68	0.067	0.294	Weak positive relationship
Item 7	The locals were hospitable.	3.89	0.000	0.214	Weak positive relationship
Item 8	I have a good impression about local people.	3.90	0.000	0.301	Moderate positive relationship
Item 9	I learnt new things about local culture while interacting with the locals.	3.95	0.000	0.295	Weak positive relationship
Item 10	I was able to closely experience the local culture on this trip.	3.53	0.094	0.195	Weak positive relationship
Item 11	I never felt like an outsider at the destination.	3.66	0.405	0.047	Weak positive relationship
Item 12	I had a warm interaction with the locals.	4.05	0.000	0.207	Weak positive relationship
Final Item	Overall influence of Social interaction on Customer experience	3.835	0.000	0.541	Strong positive relationship

From the Table 4 above, it is clear that the null hypothesis (H_o) is rejected as all p-value is (less than) < 0.05 except in the case of Item 6 and Item10, where the p-value is (more than) > 0.05 i.e. 0.067 and 0.094 respectively. The reason behind it is that respondents have come across the locals whose behaviour might not be welcoming and hostile towards the tourists. There exists a moderate positive correlation (r= 0.439) between Item 1 and CX. Similarly, there is also a moderate positive relationship between Item 2 and CX, Item 3 and CX, Item 4 and CX, Item 5 and CX with r=0.401, r=0.382 r= 0.375 r= 0.360 and r=0.32 respectively. The relationship between Item 6 and CX, Item 7 and CX has a weak positive correlation with r= 0.294 and r=0.214, respectively. There is a moderate positive relationship between Item 8 and CX with r= 0.301, and a weak positive correlation r= 0.295 exists between Item 9 and CX. Similarly, there is also a weak positive correlation between Item 10 and CX and Item 11 and CX as well as between Item 12 and CX with r= 0.195, r= 0.047

and r= 0.207 respectively. Finally, there exists a strong positive relationship r= 0.541 between Overall Social interaction and Customer experience. This is supported by the study of Tanja Armenski, Vanja Dragicevic, et al., (2011) which stated that the interaction quality between locals of the destination and the tourists contribute to their experience and perception of tourists towards the visited place.

Discussion

The present study has not found out the influence of social interaction based on the gender of tourists and different age-group of tourists during the on-site phase of the customer journey in Varanasi city. Further, it was analysed that social interaction positively influences customer experience during their - visit to Varanasi city. The items with statement code Item 6 and Item 7 have a weak positive correlation with customer experience. It could be that people were trying to avoid face-to-face interaction with anyone as they were afraid of the worst-hit pandemic, Covid-19. Further, the auto drivers and the rickshaw pullers might have charged exorbitant prices and delivered the wrong information regarding the place, and there is a possibility that the priests at the Ghats have also asked for a considerable amount from the tourists in the name of performing pujas. All these incidents deliver an inferior image of the city which should be taken care of by providing qualified, updated spot tourist guides, providing fair fare chart to tourists, priests should be able to explain the puja to tourists since the majority of the population do not know the Sanskrit language. As auto drivers, rickshaw pullers, etc., are the ones who firstly interact with the tourists, they should be provided with the correct basic information about the city after conducting some compulsory awareness programs being conducted by the U.P tourism and other such institutions in collaboration with the RTO of the city. Item 9, Item 10 are also showing weak positive correlation. The reason is that the city lacks a proper infrastructure that can give the glimpse of the city and to the tourists, the right direction.

The local government should develop some convention centres which organises local fairs, and exhibitions from time to time portraying and selling the G.I products of the city, giving a flavour of the city to the tourists. Varanasi is famous for its Classical music Gharanas, as many renowned musicians were from this city, and therefore, musical performances should be included in the tourists' itinerary, which could attract them and draw their attention towards it. The Items11 and Item12 also showed weak correlation, as there is a possibility that tourists might not have felt like engaging themselves with the locals as the majority of them are not able to understand their language, are not adequately dressed and are involved in chewing tobacco, & spitting on the roads. It could have resulted in strong correlation if locals were neatly dressed, had the basic information about the city, and adequately communicated the query to the tourists. Item1, Item 2, Item 3, Item 4, Item 5, and Item 8 have moderately positive correlation with customer experience. It could be the lack of proper interaction between locals and tourists. The local administration should promote more hygienic local food joints, and tea points as every tourist wants to enjoy the local food of the place, and these are the places where they come across local people and enrich their knowledge and exchange their views. Apart from the reasons mentioned above, the city needs to be improved on many grounds. The local administration should run some awareness campaigns which creates awareness among people about hygiene and sanitation. The RTO should impose penalty for wrong parking on the roadside and for breaking traffic rules and regulations. In this way the traffic system of the city would be smooth and well managed. The local administration should take care that proper sign boards are there in the city otherwise it might be troublesome for tourists. Further, it should set up information desks/kiosks at

every few miles for helping and clearing the queries of the tourists. Some NGOs should come forward by volunteering their services for keeping the temples and the Ghats clean. The local administration should appoint full time sweepers for keeping the public toilets hygienic & clean. The tourism department of the city should set up proper shopping arcades which charge suitable price from the tourists. The disciplinary action should be taken by local administration for littering of the garbage on roads. The local transport corporation should provide comfortable and safe local transport facility at nominal charges. Global pandemic was also the reason for weak and moderate correlation as many local day to day activities of the city like taking a holy dip in the Ganges, worshipping at temples by the locals, washing of cloths by the washer-man at the Ghats were stopped by the local administration which is also the touch-points of interaction between the tourists and the locals of the city.

Conclusion

Social interaction is one of the contributing factors to customer experience. Based on the research, it was found that there is no gender discrimination during the on-site phase of the customer journey for social interaction with tourists. Secondly, it was also found that there exists no discrimination for tourists of different age-groups during the on-site phase of the customer journey. Thirdly, it was also noted that social interaction positively influences customer experience during the on-site phase of the customer journey. If the tourist does not communicate or interact with any locals, he/she will not know the local tradition and culture of the place as well as, he/she will not be able to acquaint himself/herself with the knowledge of the destination, which generates a negative image of the city in the tourist's mind. Therefore, social interaction is essential for enhancing tourists' experience at the destination.

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