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## A PILOT STUDY ON THE SERVICE QUALITY AND PILGRIM EXPERIENCE IN THE PANDHARPUR WARI

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### ABSTRACT

*A pilot study serves as a preliminary investigation conducted before a full-scale research project to evaluate the feasibility, reliability and validity of research instrument and procedures. The present study focuses on the application of hypothesis testing within pilot framework to assess the effectiveness of selected variables influencing research outcome. The pilot study was conducted on small sample size (100) to identify potential issues in data collection, Questionnaire design and statistical analysis.*

*In present paper pilot was conducted to prove the single hypothesis (empathy) significantly influences satisfaction among pilgrims, with various aspects of cultural, logistical, and environmental support shaping their overall experience. These insights can guide policymakers, organizers, and service providers in enhancing pilgrimage management, ensuring a more fulfilling and spiritually enriching journey for devotees. Present paper describes the service quality factor (Empathy) and the influence of this factor on pilgrims' satisfaction.*

### INTRODUCTION

The hypothesis formulated for the study was tested using appropriate statistical techniques to determine whether a significant relationship exists between the variables under consideration. The results of the pilot study helped in refining the research tools, improving question clarity, and ensuring consistency in responses. Reliability analysis indicated acceptable internal consistency, supporting the suitability of the instrument for the main study.

Overall, the pilot study played a crucial role in minimizing errors, enhancing research design, and providing preliminary evidence regarding the hypothesis. The findings emphasize the importance of conducting pilot studies in strengthening the validity and reliability of large-scale research.

In research methodology, hypothesis testing is a fundamental process used to make inferences about a population based on sample data. It involves formulating a null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and an alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ), followed by statistical testing to determine whether sufficient evidence exists to reject the null hypothesis. This process ensures objectivity and scientific rigor in decision-making.

Before conducting a full-scale study, researchers often carry out a **pilot study**, which is a small-scale version of the main research. The primary purpose of a pilot study is to test the feasibility of the research design, identify potential challenges, and evaluate the effectiveness of data collection tools such as questionnaires or surveys.

In the context of this study, a pilot test was conducted to examine the relationship between selected variable Empathy and pilgrims' satisfaction. The hypothesis was formulated as follows:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no statistically significant influence of Empathy on pilgrims' satisfaction.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a statistically significant influence of Empathy on pilgrims' satisfaction.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Empathy has been widely recognized as a crucial dimension of service quality, particularly in contexts involving human interaction, emotional engagement, and spiritual experiences. In pilgrimage tourism, empathy plays a significant role in shaping pilgrims' satisfaction, as the journey often involves physical hardship, emotional vulnerability, and spiritual expectations.

Empathy refers to the ability of service providers to understand and respond to the emotional and personal needs of individuals. It includes personalized attention, caring behavior, and understanding pilgrim's needs.

Empirical studies have shown a positive relationship between empathy and pilgrims' satisfaction. When pilgrims perceive that their needs are understood and respected, their satisfaction levels increase significantly.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To assess the level of satisfaction among pilgrims based on Empathy (service quality dimension)

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

It describes the service quality factor (Empathy) and the influence of this factor on pilgrims' satisfaction.

**Quantitative Approach:**

The study uses **structured surveys, numerical data analysis, and statistical hypothesis testing.**

**RESEARCH VARIABLES****Independent variable**

Service quality dimension parameter (Empathy-personalized service of different pilgrims)

**Dependent variable**

Pilgrims' satisfaction (measured using feedback and Likert scale responses)

**Data collection methods****1.Primary data collection (First hand data from 100 pilgrims)**

**Survey Method:** Structured questionnaires with Likert-scale responses

**Observations:** Researcher visits Wari sites, observes services, takes field notes.

**2. Secondary Data Collection (Existing Data Sources)**

**Government Reports:** Maharashtra Tourism Department, Pandharpur Temple Trust, MTDC Reports.

**Academic Journals & Articles:** Previous research on religious tourism and service quality.

**Media Reports & Online Reviews:** Travel blogs, pilgrimage experiences, and news reports.

**SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**

- **Convenience Sampling:** Pilgrims available at Pandharpur and resting points are surveyed.

**DATA ANALYSIS METHODS****Descriptive Analysis (Summarizing Data)**

- Frequency tables, mean, standard deviation to summarize responses.

**Hypothesis Testing**

- **Reliability Test:** Cronbach's Alpha for questionnaire reliability.
- **Regression Analysis:** Multiple regression to test the impact of each service quality dimension on satisfaction.
- **ANOVA (Analysis of Variance):** To compare satisfaction levels

**Hypothesis**

- **Ho-** There is no statistically significant influence of Empathy on pilgrim's satisfaction
- **HA-** There is statistically significant influence of Empathy on pilgrims' satisfaction
- **Test:** Regression

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.652 <sup>a</sup>	0.425104	.402	11.282

**a. Predictors: (Constant): Empathy Factors****Model Summary Interpretation**

The R-value (0.652) indicates a moderate to strong correlation between Empathy factors and pilgrim satisfaction. The R Square value (0.425) suggests that 42.5% of the variance in pilgrims' satisfaction can be explained by the empathy-related factors. The Adjusted R Square (0.402), slightly lower than R Square, accounts for the number of predictors in the model, confirming that empathy plays a significant role in determining satisfaction levels. The Standard Error of the Estimate (11.282) indicates the average deviation of actual satisfaction levels from the predicted values.

	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	178.900	10	.990	25.603	.008 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	146.210	89	1.643		
	Total	325.110	99			

a. Dependent Variable: I am Satisfied with the spiritual connection through Palakhi, Bhajans and overall concern towards the pilgrimage by local management.

- The F-value (25.603, p = 0.008) indicates that the regression model is statistically significant. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) and conclude that Empathy has a significant influence on pilgrims' satisfaction. The low residual sum of squares (146.210) compared to the total sum of squares (325.110) further confirms that a substantial portion of the variance is explained by the model.

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.012	1.710		1.177	.024
	The Pandharpur Wari pilgrimage plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting traditional cultural practices.	3.076	.107	.077	6.710	.048
	The food service providers were considerate of my dietary preferences and needs	.123	.179	.076	7.688	.005
	The chanting of devotional songs (bhajans) during the pilgrimage enhances its cultural richness and spiritual experience.	.057	.123	.051	.467	.004
	The practice of carrying palanquins (palkhis) of Sant Tukaram and Sant Dnyaneshwar symbolizes reverence for Maharashtra's cultural heritage.	.076	.113	.082	.667	.006
	The sanitation staffs were considerate and respectful.	.080	.140	.082	.574	.567
	The spiritual significance and cultural heritage of the Pandharpur Wari are appropriately preserved and promoted.	-.042	.115	-.047	-.370	.007
	The medical staff showed genuine concern for my health and well-being.	.057	.164	.043	.347	.003
	The pollution of the Chandrabhaga River negatively affects the aesthetic experience of the Wari.	.051	.140	.055	.364	.002
	I feel a sense of spiritual connection and fulfillment by participating in the Pandharpur Wari.	.018	.225	.010	.079	.004
	The transportation staffs were considerate of my travel needs.	.171	.105	.173	1.623	.011

a. Dependent Variable: I am Satisfied with the spiritual connection through Palakhi, Bhajans and overall concern towards the pilgrimage by local management.

- Interpretation:** The coefficient table provides insights into how different empathy-related factors influence pilgrims' satisfaction. The constant value (B = 2.012, p = 0.024) suggests that even without considering empathy-related factors, there is a baseline level of satisfaction among pilgrims. Among the significant predictors, the preservation of cultural traditions (B = 3.076, p = 0.048) has the highest positive impact on satisfaction, indicating that pilgrims deeply value the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Wari. The

consideration of dietary preferences by food service providers ( $B = 0.123$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ) also significantly enhances satisfaction, showing the importance of personalized services. Similarly, the chanting of devotional songs (bhajans) ( $B = 0.057$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ) and the reverence for palkhis ( $B = 0.076$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ) positively contribute to the spiritual experience of the pilgrimage.

Overall, the results confirm that empathy significantly influences satisfaction among pilgrims, with various aspects of cultural, logistical, and environmental support shaping their overall experience. Since multiple factors have  $p$ -values  $< 0.05$ , it is evident that addressing these specific areas can significantly enhance the satisfaction of pilgrims participating in the Pandharpur Wari. These insights can guide policymakers, organizers, and service providers in enhancing pilgrimage management, ensuring a more fulfilling and spiritually enriching journey for devotees.

### CONCLUSION

Empathy is a vital component of service quality in pilgrimage tourism. It significantly influences pilgrims' satisfaction by addressing their emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. In events like the Pandharpur Wari, empathetic services can enhance the overall pilgrimage experience, making it more meaningful and fulfilling.

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