

An Evaluation of Female Tourists' Satisfaction in Agritourism through Importance-Performance Analysis

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Introduction

Agri-tourism, a subsector of rural tourism, involves visitors participating in agricultural activities, experiencing local culture, and immersing themselves in the natural environment of rural areas. Agritourism combines agriculture and tourism and offers tourists an experiential journey that boosts economic activity and impacts both farm and community income (Malkanthi and Routray, 2012). Agri-tourism plays an important role in supporting rural communities and promoting sustainable livelihoods, hence improving their way of life (Tucker, 2022). Local farmers and communities can generate additional income and diversify their economic activities by opening up their farms and agricultural spaces to visitors, preserving rural traditions and promoting the conservation of natural resources and indigenous farming practices. Both scholars and policymakers have unequivocally acknowledged the significance of multifunctionality within the spectrum of agriculture (Potter and Burney, 2002).

Satisfaction is crucial in shaping tourist choices, spending patterns, return visits, and establishing enduring connections with destinations and services (Bagri and Kala, 2015). Among various studies on customer satisfaction, identifying customer satisfaction factors is essential because it can affect resource allocation on different service attributes for satisfaction improvement (Matzler and Sauerwein, 2002). *Tourist satisfaction* is a multidimensional construct influenced by various factors such as service quality, destination attributes, cultural interactions, and personal expectations. In agri-tourism, these factors gain distinct dimensions as tourists engage in agricultural activities, interact with local communities, and experience the authenticity of rural life. Prior studies have demonstrated the significance of tourist satisfaction in ensuring repeat visits and contributing to positive word-of-mouth recommendations and overall destination success (Fornell et al., 1996; Oliver 1997). As agri-tourism gains traction, it becomes imperative to understand and assess the satisfaction of different tourist segments, particularly factors that enhance their experience.

Tourism activity undergoes a gendered construct in its creation, presentation, and evident consumption (Pritchard, 2014). It is crucial to acknowledge that gender plays a crucial role in all aspects of tourism, highlighting its importance in shaping tourism-related developments and activities (Ghanian et al., 2017). While it may be usually assumed that contemporary travel patterns of both genders exhibit less divergence compared to the past, the gender-specific disparities concerning travel and tourism remain significant (Collins and

Tisdell, 2002). Essentially, tourism, which includes leisure travel and the industries that support it, revolves around human interactions and is influenced by both global and local gender dynamics, and in turn, it also has an impact on them (Swain, 1995). In this light, understanding the preferences and interests of prospective tourists from a gendered perspective becomes important for formulating and promoting tourism enclaves (Remoaldo et al., 2020b). The absence of gender-specific considerations highlights bias towards male-centric perspectives within tourism research which tends to engulf female behaviour within the context of dominant male paradigms (Westwood et al., 2000). Disregarding gender in the design, promotion, and operation of tourism ventures can reduce their effectiveness and compromise the satisfaction and engagement of diverse clientele in the tourism industry.

The research on female tourist satisfaction can explore the quality of experiences that agri-tourism centres offer female visitors, such as participation in agricultural activities, cultural immersions, and exploring rural culture, traditions and celebrations. Understanding how these experiences influence their satisfaction is crucial to creating more tailored and enriching agri-tourism products. This study aims to bridge this gap by comprehensively evaluating female tourists' experiences and satisfaction levels in the vibrant setting of agri-tourism in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Maharashtra. The study advocates for a more equitable representation of female tourists in the tourism literature and holds practical implications for agri-tourism operators, policymakers, and destination managers in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

Research Objectives

1. To study the demographics of the women travellers in agritourism attractions in Mumbai Metropolitan Region.
2. To examine the importance and performance of the agri-tourism destination attributes in overall tourists' satisfaction using the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA).

Literature Review

Agri-tourism, a distinct and evolving niche within the broader scope of rural tourism, has gained considerable attention as a sustainable form of tourism that intertwines agricultural experiences with leisure and recreation (Dernoi, 1983; Prayag et al., 2013). It involves visitors engaging in various activities on operational agricultural landscapes, allowing them to immerse themselves in

the agrarian way of life and gain understanding into the interconnectedness of farming and tourism (Bramwell and Lane, 2000; Yang et al., 2010).

Agri-tourism provides a unique opportunity for female tourists to engage in hands-on activities and gain insights into agricultural practices. A study conducted by Djeri et al. (2017) revealed that a higher proportion of females were willing to recommend the destination to their friends and family than their male counterparts. However, they also share their negative experience with their family and friends, whereas males boycott the destination. This observation can be kept in mind while curating loyalty-increasing strategies. Enhancing tourist satisfaction is one of the primary functions of a tourism destination and a prerequisite for developing strategies leading to the destination's improved attractiveness and competitive positioning (Dmitrovic et al., 2009). In the tourism industry, tourists evaluate performance of the destination attributes which may eventually evoke emotions and satisfaction as responses (Biswas et al., 2020)

The Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) framework is a widely used method for assessing tourist satisfaction and identifying areas for improvement in the tourism industry. Martilla and James (1977) proposed this technique as a simple graphical tool that helps in examining customer satisfaction and management strategies. Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) is a method to measure member perception of the level of importance and level of service attribute performance (Musa et al., 2010). It provides a structured approach to evaluate the significance of various attributes or factors (importance) to tourists and how well they are perceived to be delivered (performance) by a destination, product, or service. IPA helps identify areas where improvements are needed to enhance overall satisfaction and prioritize resource allocation for maximum impact. The Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) has emerged as a widely embraced and extensively documented management tool within the domain of tourism studies (Oh, 2001; Fuchs and Weiermair, 2003; Janes and Wisnom, 2003; Ziegler et al., 2012; Lai and Hitchcock, 2015; Wang et al.;2022). Many studies have employed IPA to assess tourist satisfaction across destinations, attractions, and services. For example, in the context of rural and agro-tourism, IPA has been used to identify critical factors influencing visitor satisfaction and prioritize improvements. Research focused on evaluating female tourist satisfaction in various tourism contexts has highlighted the significance of catering to female travellers' unique needs and preferences.

Despite the growing body of literature on female tourist satisfaction, there is a notable gap in agri-tourism in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region of Maharashtra. While existing research has explored factors influencing female

tourists' satisfaction in urban and cultural destinations, more attention should be directed towards understanding their experiences in agri-tourism settings. This gap is particularly relevant given the unique attributes of agri-tourism, including its rural and nature-based characteristics, which may necessitate a different set of considerations for female tourists. The studies conducted in different tourism contexts have primarily focused on factors like accommodation quality, service, and cultural experiences. The specific attributes of agri-tourism, such as farm activities, rural environment, and engagement with local communities, still need to be explored regarding their impact on female tourist satisfaction.

While agri-tourism has gained attention in the research literature, there remains an evident research gap about female tourists' preferences and satisfaction levels (Osti and Cicero, 2018). Addressing this gap is essential, as female travellers represent a substantial and influential demographic within the global tourism landscape.

Methodology

Study Site

The Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) combines city life with farming traditions, making it an interesting place to study agritourism. The region includes five districts: Thane, Mumbai City, Mumbai Suburban, Raigad, and Palghar. Among the city bustle, there are farms where tourists can experience farming life wherein they provide a unique opportunity for tourists to engage in activities such as harvesting crops, tending to livestock, and participating in traditional agricultural practices.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was carefully structured, comprising four distinct categories (a) Facilities, Services & Location, (b) Activities & Shopping, (c) Surrounding Environment, and (d) Staff Members. Within these categories, sixteen variables were subjected to assessment, evaluating both their importance and performance scores. The selection of these factors was validated through discussions held with two tourism professors and a select group of agritourism operators. This comprehensive approach ensured that the chosen elements were theoretically sound and resonated with practical industry insights. Participants were asked to rate the importance and performance of various attributes using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all important, 5 = Extremely important for importance; 1 = Not at all satisfied, 5 = Extremely satisfied for performance). Female Agritourists were also asked to provide information on their socio-economic demographics (i.e., age, gender, education, marital status,

occupation, and residency) and travel characteristics (i.e., lengths of stay, accompanying person, frequency of visits).

Additionally, the reliability of the questionnaire was substantiated through statistical measures, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 for the importance assessment, signifying robust internal consistency. Likewise, the performance evaluation demonstrated even higher reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

The study's sampling methodology adopted a non-probability approach, utilizing snowball sampling due to the exploratory nature of agritourism in the study area. Data was collected through distribution of self-administered questionnaires to female tourists who have experienced agritourism, accessible in electronic format. A cohort of precisely 70 female agritourists actively contributed to the survey. Research was conducted during the high season to ensure maximum cooperation and participation in the study area in the period spanned from August 23rd to September 29th.

Data Analysis

IBM SPSS 27 was used for statistical analyses.

Data was analyzed using the following techniques:

- Descriptive Statistics: Summarizing demographic information, expectations and satisfaction scores.
- Importance Performance Analysis (IPA): Calculating the importance and performance scores for each agri-tourism attribute to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Results

Socio-economic Demographic Profile

The findings of the socio-economic demographic attributes of the female visitors are displayed in **Table 1**. According to the findings presented in Table 1, the socio-economic demographic attributes of female visitors to agritourism sites show a varied profile. The majority of female agritourists fall within the age bracket of 26-40, accounting for 44.3% of the respondents. The educational background of female agritourists varies, with a significant proportion holding undergraduate degrees (52.9%) and 40.0% have pursued postgraduate studies, indicating a well-educated traveller segment. A smaller percentage has either a high school education (2.9%) or a doctorate (2.9%). Regarding occupational diversity, the "Private Sector" group emerges as the

largest, comprising 32.9% of respondents, indicative of their inclination towards seeking leisure and relaxation through agritourism. Students represent 22.9%, while homemakers account for 18.6%. The data shows a nearly even split between married and unmarried female agritourists, with 47.1% and 52.9%, respectively. Most female agritourists are from urban areas, constituting 91.4% of the sample. A smaller portion of respondents (8.6%) belong to rural areas, reflecting the strong interest of urban residents in agritourism experiences.

Table 1: Socio-economic Demographics of Female Agritourists

Demographics Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-25	12	17.1
26-30	31	44.3
31-40	18	25.7
41-50	6	8.6
51 or above	3	4.3
Educational Level		
< High School	1	1.4
High School	2	2.9
Undergraduate	28	52.9
Postgraduate	37	40.0
Doctorate	2	2.9
Occupation		
Entrepreneur/Freelancer	11	15.7
Private	23	32.9
Government	5	7.1
Student	16	22.9
Homemaker	13	18.6
Marital Status		
Married	33	47.1
Unmarried	37	52.9
Residential Sector		
Urban	64	91.4
Rural	6	8.6

Travel Choice

The travel information of female tourists presents a comprehensive picture of their travel patterns and preferences (Table 2). The majority of female agritourists, accounting to 70.0%, are first-time visitors to agritourism attractions, highlighting a strong interest in exploring and experiencing agritourism. A significant portion, 40.0%, travels with friends, suggesting that agritourism destinations provide an appealing setting for group experiences and social interactions. Family-oriented visits are also common, with 34.3% of the sample visiting with family members. Nearly 12.9% of respondents travel with their spouses and a comparable percentage, 12.9%, of female agritourists prefers to travel alone. In terms of duration, 47.1% opt for a one-night stay at agritourism attractions indicating a preference for short getaways and day trips. About one-third of female agritourists, 32.9%, opt for a day trip. Approximately 15.7% choose to stay for two to three nights. A smaller percentage, 4.3%, stays for more than three nights.

Table 2: Travel Information of Female Agritourists

Travel Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Number of Visits		
First time	49	70.0
2-3 times	16	22.9
More than 3 times	5	7.1
Accompanying Person(s)		
Family members	24	34.3
Friends	28	40.0
Spouse	9	12.9
Travelling Alone	9	12.9
Number of Nights Staying at Agritourism Attraction		
1 night	33	47.1
2 nights	11	15.7
More than 3 nights	3	4.3
Day trip	23	32.9

Importance Performance Analysis of Female Tourist Satisfaction in Agritourism

Table 3 is divided into four distinct aspects: "Facilities, Services, and Location," "Activities & Shopping," "Surrounding Environment," and "Staff Members." Under "Facilities, Services, and Location," critical aspects include the comfort of accommodation, cleanliness of accommodation, availability of local transportation, and safety and security. "Activities & Shopping," includes participation in agritourism activities, educational opportunities about agriculture, opportunities to purchase agricultural goods and the chance to experience authentic rural culture. The "Surrounding Environment" encompasses natural beauty and greenery, hygiene and sanitation of the farm environment, the friendliness and courtesy of local residents and road conditions. Lastly, the "Staff Members" aspect includes the helpfulness, friendliness, efficiency, and courtesy of the staff. These aspects are essential in shaping the overall experience of female visitors in agritourism destinations. Understanding the performance of each aspect in relation to its importance helps identify core areas of strength and areas needing improvement to enhance overall experience of tourists.

Table 3 also shows the gap between what tourists value and how satisfied they are with those aspects, measured by the mean difference in IPA. The first category, "Facilities, Services, and Location," is reflected by a grand importance mean score of 4.3 and a grand performance score of 3.24, signifying a mean difference of -1.06. The second aspect, "Activities & Shopping," exhibits a grand importance mean score of 4.24 and a grand performance mean score of 3.08, with a mean difference of -1.17. The third dimension, "Surrounding Environment," reflects a grand importance mean score of 4.26 and a grand performance mean score of 3.7. Finally, the fourth aspect, "Staff Members," shows a grand importance mean score of 4.10 and a grand performance mean score of 3.69. This systematic breakdown facilitates a detailed assessment of the diverse levels of importance and satisfaction associated with each aspect, forming the foundation for a thorough analysis of the study's results.

Table 3: Importance-Performance Means of Agritourism Destination Attributes

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Performance</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>
(a) Facilities, Services & Location			
Comfort of Accommodation	4.24	3.27	-0.97
Cleanliness of Accommodation	4.66	2.90	-1.76
Availability of Local Transportation Services	3.57	3.39	-0.18
Safety & Security	4.71	3.40	-1.31
(b) Activities & Shopping			
Participation in Agritourism Activities	4.33	3.20	-1.13
Agricultural Goods Purchasing Opportunities	4.09	2.96	-1.13
Educational Opportunities about Agriculture	3.99	3.11	-0.88
Opportunity to Experience Authentic Rural Culture (food, costumes, festivals etc.)	4.54	3.03	-1.51
(c) Surrounding Environment			
Natural Beauty & Greenery	4.41	4.24	-0.17
Friendliness and Courtesy of Local Residents	3.77	3.57	-0.2
Hygiene and Sanitation of the Farm Environment	4.36	3.36	-1.0
Road condition to the Destination	4.50	3.63	-0.87
(d) Staff Members			
Helpfulness	4.10	3.76	-0.34
Efficiency	3.94	3.13	-0.81
Friendliness	4.14	3.91	-0.23
Courtesy	4.23	3.97	-0.26

IPA Matrix

Importance Performance Analysis (IPA), proposed by Martilla and James (1977), is a widely used technique in marketing and management research, particularly in the field of service quality assessment. It provides a structured framework for evaluating the perceived importance of various service attributes or factors and their corresponding performance levels as perceived by customers or stakeholders. The main objective of IPA is to prioritize and allocate resources efficiently by focusing on areas that have the highest importance to customers but still perform below their expectations.

The analysis involves two key steps:

1. **Importance Assessment:** In this step, respondents are asked to rate the importance of different attributes or factors related to a service or product. This is typically done using a Likert-type scale, where respondents indicate their level of agreement with statements reflecting the importance of each factor. The importance ratings provide insights into the aspects of the service that customers value the most.
2. **Performance Assessment:** In this step, respondents evaluate the actual performance of the service or product across the same set of attributes or factors. Again, respondents use a Likert-type scale to rate the performance of each factor based on their personal experiences. These performance ratings offer insights into how well the service or product is meeting customers' expectations.

Once importance and performance ratings are collected, they are plotted on a two-dimensional grid, resulting in four quadrants:

1. **Concentrate Here (Quadrant I):** Factors in this quadrant are considered critical by customers (high importance), but the actual performance falls short of expectations (low performance). Addressing deficiencies in these areas is crucial for improving overall satisfaction and customer loyalty.
2. **Keep Up The Good Work (Quadrant II):** Factors in this quadrant are both highly valued by customers and adequately delivered by the service or product. These areas represent strengths that the organization should maintain to sustain customer satisfaction and competitive advantage.
3. **Low Priority (Quadrant III):** Factors in this quadrant are neither highly valued by customers nor adequately delivered by the service or product. While improvement in these areas may not have a significant impact on overall customer satisfaction, addressing them can prevent negative perceptions and potential dissatisfaction from emerging.

4. Possible Overkill (Quadrant IV): Factors in this quadrant are perceived as less important by customers, yet the service or product excels in delivering them. While maintaining high performance in these areas is commendable, organizations should carefully consider whether further investment is warranted, as resources may be better allocated to areas of higher importance.

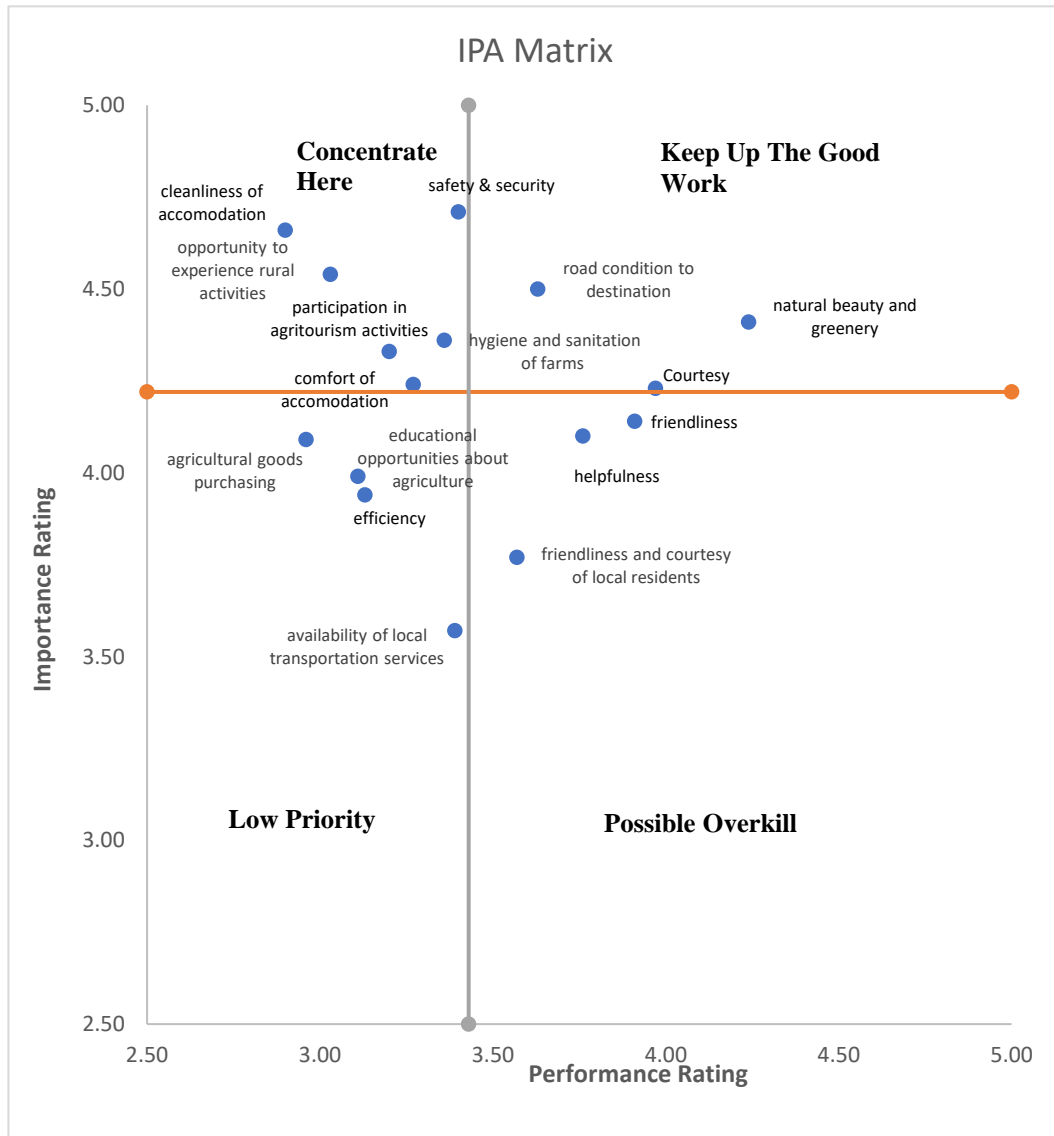


Fig. 1: Importance Performance Matrix- Female Agritourist

The X and Y axes in Fig. 1 are determined by calculating the mean of all the Importance attributes for the X-axis and the mean of all the Performance attributes for the Y-axis.

- a) **Concentrate Here:** "Cleanliness of Accommodation" is particularly noteworthy, as it has been rated highly important but is perceived as lacking in performance. Additional attributes such as "Safety and Security," "opportunities to experience rural activities," "Hygiene and sanitation of farms," "Participation in Agritourism Activities," and "Comfort of Accommodation" are other focal points for improvement.
- b) **Keep up the good work:** Attributes such as "Natural Beauty and Greenery," "Courtesy," and "Road Condition to the Destinations" have emerged as strengths in agritourism attractions. Female agritourists identified these attributes as highly important and were found to perform well in satisfying their expectations.
- c) **Low Priority:** While not highly important to most female agritourists, attributes categorized in the "Low Priority" quadrant should not be entirely disregarded. "Availability of local transportation services" is one attribute that, although not deemed highly important on average, remains necessary for specific segments of travellers. "Agricultural goods purchasing opportunities", "educational opportunities about agriculture", and "efficiency" are additional attributes in this quadrant.
- d) **Possible Overkill:** Attributes in the "Possible Overkill" quadrant are characterized by well-implemented features that do not align closely with the high-priority concerns of female agritourists. Attributes such as "Friendliness," "Helpfulness," and "Friendliness and Courtesy of Local Residents" fall into this category.

Overall Satisfaction of Female Agritourists

The largest segment, comprising 43 (61.4%) of the total respondents, expressed satisfaction with their experience, indicating that a majority found it positive. Meanwhile, 19 (27.1%) adopted a neutral stance, signifying a lack of solid sentiment, which may present an opportunity for enhancing engagement and overall satisfaction. In contrast, a considerably smaller group, accounting for 4 (5.7%), indicated dissatisfaction, suggesting room for improvement in addressing their concerns. An even smaller fraction, approximately 3 (4.3%), reported extreme satisfaction, highlighting that some respondents had exceptionally positive experiences. Lastly, a single respondent, representing 1.4%, conveyed very dissatisfactory feedback, outlining the importance of addressing specific concerns to avoid outlier negative experiences.

Suggestions and Managerial Implications

The prevalence of a well-educated traveler segment suggests an opportunity for stakeholders to leverage this by offering educational agritourism experiences such as workshops, seminars, or farm tours that focus on cooking with local ingredients or sustainable farming. The preference for traveling with friends and family among female agritourists highlights the importance of offering group-friendly experiences. Agritourism operators can develop packages or activities tailored for groups, such as group discounts, workshops such as farm-to-table cooking classes, gardening activities, and livestock care sessions. Additionally, emphasizing cleanliness, comfort, and safety in accommodation facilities can enhance overall visitor satisfaction. With a significant portion of female agritourists being first-time visitors, there is an opportunity to convert them into repeat visitors. Implementing loyalty programs, offering special incentives for returning guests, and organizing seasonal events or festivals can encourage repeat visitation and foster a sense of community among visitors. Collecting feedback from visitors and continuously improving the visitor experience based on their input can also contribute to long-term visitor satisfaction and loyalty. The presence of natural beauty, well-maintained road condition, and courtesy of staff members emerges as key drivers of female visitor satisfaction in agritourism. Therefore, agritourism providers should prioritize efforts to preserve and further enhance these attributes to maintain their appeal to female tourists. Conversely, the attributes categorized under "Concentration" requires immediate attention, particularly the cleanliness of accommodation, which despite being highly important requires improvement in performance. Additionally, focusing on enhancing safety and security measures, increasing opportunities to experience rural activities, participation in agritourism activities, hygiene and sanitation of farms and improving accommodation comfort are crucial for addressing areas of concern and meeting customer expectations effectively. While certain attributes may fall into the "Low Priority" quadrant on average, it is crucial not to disregard their significance entirely. "Availability of Local Transportation Services," though not universally prioritized, remains essential for specific segments of travelers. Similarly, attributes like agricultural goods purchasing opportunities, educational opportunities about agriculture, and efficiency, while not universally high in importance, may cater to niche preferences. Tailoring offerings to these niche segments and improving these aspects could contribute to a more inclusive and well-rounded agritourism experience. Attributes residing in the "Possible Overkill" quadrant, such as "Friendliness," "Helpfulness," and "Friendliness and Courtesy of Local Residents," while well-implemented, do not align closely with the high-priority concerns of female

agritourists. As a result, agritourism providers should carefully evaluate resource allocation for these attributes compared to other areas of greater importance. This may involve reassessing the balance between these well-executed features and other critical aspects of the agritourism experience.

Discussion

Satisfaction plays a pivotal role in destination management, significantly contributing to the destination's overall success. This study, conducted within the context of agritourism attractions in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, offers a comprehensive understanding of female agritourists' preferences and satisfaction. It utilizes the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) framework, a robust analytical tool and identifies areas of strength that need enhancement within agritourism attractions. The socio-economic profile of female agritourists in Pune suggests opportunities for educational experiences and urban engagement. Implementing loyalty programs and gathering feedback can convert first-time visitors into repeat guests further fostering community engagement and long-term satisfaction. While most respondents expressed satisfaction with their experiences, there is still considerable room for improvement, particularly in areas categorized within the "Concentrate Here" quadrant. Several critical areas for improvement have emerged to enhance the overall agritourism experience for female visitors:

1. Addressing concerns related to the "Cleanliness of Accommodation," "opportunity to experience rural activities," "Safety and Security," and "Participation in Agritourism Activities" is paramount, as these were rated of high importance but performed below expectations.
2. Ensuring the "Comfort of Accommodation" aligns with visitor preferences is essential for a satisfying stay.
3. Enhancing "Agricultural Goods Purchasing Opportunities," "Educational Opportunities about Agriculture," and "Efficiency" will contribute to a more fulfilling agritourism experience, even in areas rated as "Low Priority."

By focusing on these critical areas, agritourism providers can tailor their products to meet the unique preferences of female visitors, ultimately enhancing satisfaction levels and strengthening the Mumbai Metropolitan Region's position as a desirable agritourism destination. It is crucial to create unique agritourism experiences (Zhou and Li, 2019), adding value and meeting the growing demand for specialized offerings in this sector. The findings provide actionable insights for destination managers, creating a way for a more inclusive agritourism experience in the region.

Limitation and Future Research

The study focused specifically on female agritourists, providing valuable insights into their preferences and perceptions into their unique preferences and perceptions within agritourism settings. However, it is essential to acknowledge that a more comprehensive understanding of gender differences in preferences and satisfaction levels could have been achieved through a comparative analysis with male visitors. The research was conducted within a specific region or set of agritourism attractions. It is essential to acknowledge that the preferences and priorities of agritourists may vary across different geographic locations, climates, and cultural contexts. The study focused on a specific set of attributes chosen for analysis. There may be other factors not considered in this research that also contribute significantly to the overall agritourism experience. The data was collected over a specific period, and seasonal variations in agritourism activities and visitor preferences may need to be fully captured.

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