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# Tourism as a Socio-Cultural Phenomenon: A Critical Analysis

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## Abstract

Global tourism is based on the movement of people from their usual environment, which makes interaction between people possible. It creates a mutual impact on tourists and the host community by bringing together people of different races, languages, and beliefs. Global tourism leads to a beneficial economic impact on the host country and it also increases the socio-cultural exchange between the host and tourist countries. In this respect, the current paper presents the analysis of tourism as a socio-cultural phenomenon. It presents a critical analysis of earlier findings on the evolution of tourism as a concept and sheds light on cultural and social factors leading to tourism in its present state as well as its social and cultural impacts, positive and negative. Furthermore identifies some sociological and cultural factors that shape the characteristics of tourists and highlights the role of socio-cultural motivations of tourists.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Socio-Cultural Phenomenon, Host Country, Tourist Country

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is a cultural, social, and economic phenomenon that involves movement of people to places or nations away from their day-to-day environment. The activities of these people involving expenditure, for business, leisure, and other purposes involve tourism expenditure (UNWTO, 2021). Economically, over the decades, there has been continued tourism growth. It has become one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world and experienced deepening diversification. The business volume arising from tourism is parallel to those from food products, oil exports, or automobiles. Globally, tourism has carved its niche in international commerce and contributes to growing economies around the world as their main income source (UNWTO, 2021b). International tourists' arrival has been on an increase since 2009 with estimated travelers growing to 1462 million in 2019 contributing to receipts of USD 1,480 billion. However, the trends were not observed in 2020 due to Covid-19 and international travel restrictions (UNWTO, 2020a). In the first eight months of the year 2020, international arrivals witnessed a decrease of 70%. Global tourism is expected to witness a rebound in demand in the third quarter of 2021 (UNWTO, 2020b).

Nevertheless, tourism has been closely linked with regional development and an increase in the number of new destinations across the globe. The interactions between tourists and the local population are known to have an impact on the pattern of the social fabric of the host community. These interactions also impact the material artifacts and cultural and social relations (Scheyvens & Russell, 2012). These dynamics in the global tourism act as a key driver for tourism being a socio-cultural phenomenon (Akova & Atsiz, 2019). The socio-cultural impacts of tourism include the impacts on the host communities as a result of direct and indirect interactions and relationships with the travelers (Amalu et al., 2020). In this respect, the current paper will critically analyze available literature to shed light on the socio-cultural factors that have led to the development of tourism. At the same time, the scholarly papers will also be analyzed to point out the positive and negative socio-cultural implications of tourism.

The socio-cultural value of tourism includes an increase in social capital following an increase in tourists, development of the sense of community identity, a keen sense of linkage with local environments (Ramos et al., 2016). The tourist destination may get positively influenced by the travelers towards acknowledging the differences in the socio-cultural outlook of people from different regions. Global tourism also leads to socio-cultural enrichment of the region by improved understanding of locals other people's habits. This allows the adoption of healthier practices and helps local live healthier lives (Pramanik & Ingkadijaya, 2018). Tourism further enriches the socio-cultural sphere of host communities by increasing prospects for women's participation in the sector including engagement in informal activities. It also helps increase recreation choices for the local population and increase concern among residents regarding their heritage resources (Sroyetch, 2016). Nevertheless, global tourism may also exert negative socio-cultural impacts on host destinations. These include the weakening of the traditional and cultural values by the development and acculturation process. In addition, there may occur changes in the socio-cultural outlook of the host population from aspects of seniority, religion, and family and community relationships. Tourism may facilitate individualism within the host communities where otherwise collectivism is encouraged and appreciated (Sroyetch, 2016). Such changes impact the socio-cultural nature of the host country and may even threaten indigenous identities community fabric, collective conventional lifestyles, morality, and ceremonies (Zhuang et al., 2019). Keeping the positive and negative impact of tourism in mind, this paper will analyze previous research and academic studies to identify patterns of findings and thought on tourism as a socio-cultural phenomenon.

## **2. Aim of the study**

The current study aims to critically analyze the role of socio-cultural factors in the development of tourism. The study also aims to shed light on the positive and negative socio-cultural implications of tourism.

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Type of study and data*

A critical analysis is a heterogeneous approach used to examine the socio-political and historical dimensions of the subject under study (Allen, 2017). The current study is based on the secondary analysis of qualitative data. The method is chosen as it allows reanalysis of data collected and analyzed previously. This will allow the researcher to gain access to a larger dataset and utilize high-quality studies that contain a substantial breadth and involve larger samples (Johnston, 2014).

### *3.2 Selection criteria of studies*

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Critical Review

Type	Criterion
Inclusion	Published between 2011 and 2021
	Research, original studies, meta-analysis, survey, review, systematic review, and empirical analysis
	Search words: Socio-cultural Tourism, social tourism, cultural tourism.
	Studies only in English
Exclusion	Newspaper article
	Editorial discussion
	Studies Lacking supporting evidence in the main text
	Studies not involving socio-cultural impact of tourism.

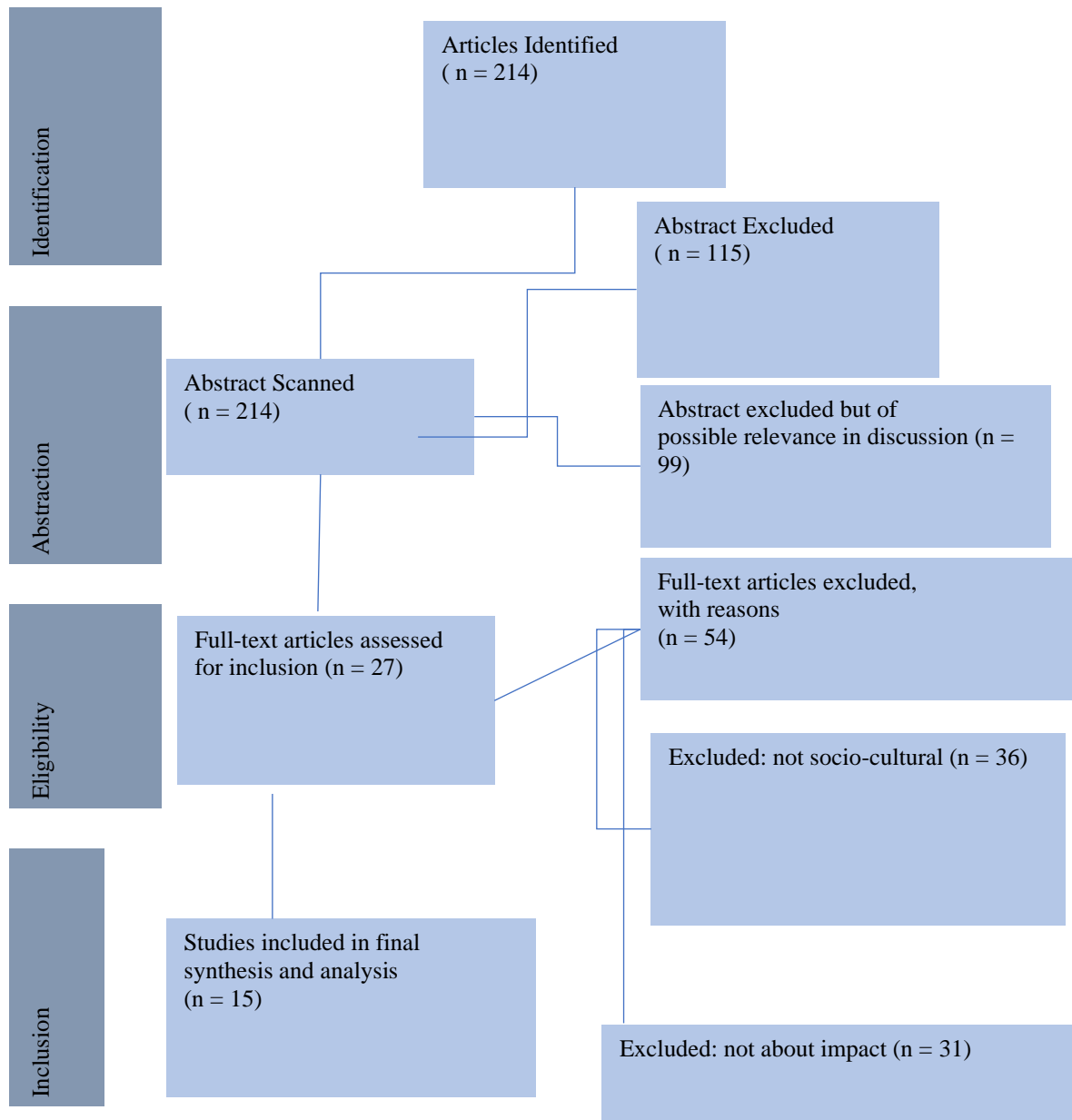


Figure 1: Process of article selection Tourism and Socio-cultural Impact

The review focused on scholarly databases that were searched using the terms described in table 1 published between the period 2011 and 2021. The studies are considered based on inclusion and exclusion criteria and relevant references are recognized to help analyze tourism as a social-cultural phenomenon.

#### **4. Data Analysis**

For the selected studies, data were extracted to form a database with parameters of the year of publication, positive and negative socio-cultural impact of tourism, and findings. These selected studies were then grouped to facilitate critical analysis and cross-study comparison. The analysis allows familiarity with the data and shaping of analysis coherently (Allen, 2017).

##### *4.1 Validity and reliability of data*

To maintain the reliability and validity of data gathered is maintained using the constructs of consistency, neutrality, truth-value, and applicability. This includes strategies for the removal of personal biases that may influence the findings of the study. Care has been taken to ensure the data is transparent and consistent. This is done by representation and comparison of the differences and similarities among different perspectives on the subject under study (Noble & Smith, 2015).

#### **5. Discussion**

##### *5.1 Evolution of tourism concept (Definition and aspects motivating tourism)*

The term tourism is defined by the (UNWTO, 2021) as

*“Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure”* (p.1).

The definition suggests that tourism is a broad concept and encompasses all visitor activities, including both overnight and same-day tourists. Further, tourist activities as per the definition are the pursuit of visitors and activities they indulge in.

Keeping in mind the rapid growth of the industry, Richards, (2015) suggests that one of the aspects promoting the growth of global tourism is an increase in the purchasing power of people. Specifically, the younger population of countries across the globe are influencing these trends with their increased power to spend on traveling and tourism (Arowosafe et al., 2020). Also, advances in technology motivate tourism in regions otherwise unexplored. The growth in information and communication technology has enabled widespread social relations that strengthen the tendency of tourism (Bethapudi, 2013; Hojehgan & Esfangareh, 2011; Morais et al., 2016). Further, Buffa, (2015) suggests that one of the key aspects that promote tourism is the discovery of new cultures, landscapes, inspection of natural and artistic heritage, learning through contact with the local community (L. L. Chang et al., 2014; Tiberghien et al., 2017). In addition, Yousaf et al., (2018) highlighted that the need of people to form relationships also promotes tourism. Tourism enhances the sense of social belonging and confirms an individual’s ability to develop healthy relationships (Hindley & Font, 2018). The need for people to develop bonds with family and increase familiarity with local communities and destinations also motivate tourism (Khalid et al., 2019). Apart from the internal motivator for tourism, there are also push factors. These include the external simulation such as advertisement, beauty of landscape, and socio-cultural differences between host and home countries motivates tourism (Sirisack et al., 2014).

##### *5.2 Factors leading to tourism in its present state*

*a) Social*

Among the social factors that contribute to tourism in various nations in their present state, Kővári & Zimányi, (2011) highlighted the role of perception of safety and security in the region. These include the parameters of reliability of police services, political stability, hazards such as terrorist attacks, and tourists' death and injuries in traffic-related accidents (Kordić et al., 2015; Mastroianni, 2017; Mawioo & Kagiri, 2015). The second social factor is that of health and hygiene. High sanitary conditions, good quality of drinking water, and medical care are some health-based social factors that impact tourism (Jovanović et al., 2015). Also, Vasanicova, (2018) in a study highlighted that the social factor of health contributes to the competitiveness of a region. These also include the density of physician in the area, hospital beds, malaria incidence, and HIV prevalence, are leading contributor to tourism.

Furthermore, Seyidov & Adomaitienė, (2017) suggested the social factors of family, groups, roles, responsibility, and status play a role in leading tourism to its present state. Through these factors, families are exposed to a new lifestyle, personality, ideas, and conception that shape tourism needs (Cuculeski et al., 2015). In addition, age, life cycle, occupation, and social status are also some individual-based factors that influence tourism. Such as the need of people to identify themselves with a social class are influenced by the collective behavior. These include people's choices of tourist destination, mode of transportation, and accommodation (Fratu, 2011). Jin et al., (2016) in a study further highlighted that tourist's expectation of the destination in terms of usage of social resources is also an important factor. If it is considered to surpass the carrying capacity of an area, it impacts tourism negatively. The destination is perceived as crowded and impacts implicit destination choices for people (Alazaizeh et al., 2016). Park et al., (2012) further suggest that the social concept of norms, networks, and social trust facilitates cooperation and coordination in tourism. These help in tourism development and conflict management while effectively supporting local residents and promoting successful tourism development.

*b) Cultural*

Brida et al., (2013) explained the role of cultural factors in tourism. The authors suggest that cultural factors are intrinsically connected to the capacity of the destination to attract tourists. It thus shapes the destination's competitiveness. Among the cultural factors, impacting tourism in its present state includes the presence of monuments and heritage sites. These are cultural epitomes and mirror of society. Presence of monument in a region promotes tourism as it helps to co-join the past with the present. Monuments concretize the past while preserving the testimony of the past glory to shed light on the cultural identity of a community (S. P. Kumar, 2014). In addition, Özel & Kozak, (2012) in a study suggested that cultural motivation contributes to tourism in its present state. These include the parameters of creativeness, knowledge, experience, achievement, rest, socialization, sports, family togetherness, escape, fun and travel bragging. Also, the intrinsic desire to learn about any culture or its particular aspect contributes to cultural push-pull factor in promoting tourism (Correia et al., 2013). Bond & Falk, (2013) further suggested that identity-related desire also contributes to culture-based tourism. It offers tourists an opportunity for self-evaluation, self-reflection, self-exploration, and self-discovery. The heritage and cultural sites further promote tourism based on their ability to allow self-development and self-construction among individuals. It allows exploration and exploration of self-identity that through simple contact with cultures and people (Michael et al., 2020).

However, Richards, (2018) suggested that cultural factors promoting tourism comprise of both tangible and intangible heritage. These are also made of creativity and contemporary practices attached to storytelling, learning, narrative, and identity of a region. Matteucci, (2018) indicated that tourist engagement is essential for culture-based tourism. The creative tourists' experiences tend to motivate tourists to seek to experience authentic aspects of local cultures. These can be enhanced by fostered feelings of togetherness, and a sense of affiliation through tourists' close interactions with local artists and peers. Emotional solidarity and sympathetic understanding towards tourists support tourism (Hasani et al., 2016). Furthermore, the ability of a destination to provide new sensations to tourists allows them to confront their embodied identities by pushing them outside their comfort zones (Xavier Matteucci & Filep, 2017).

### *5.3 Sociological and cultural factors that shape the characteristics of tourists*

Among the sociological and cultural factors that shape the characteristics of tourists, Adam et al., (2019) identified the role of human behavior. The author states that as human behavior alters from time to time they shape the characteristics of tourists as well. The behavior change influences the needs of the visitors and their choice of destination. In addition, Tribe & Liburd, (2016) also indicated that sociological and cultural factors that shape the characteristics of tourists include the parameters of genders, instincts, senses, and values of tourists. Figueroa-Domecq & Segovia-Perez, (2020) in a study suggested that gender shapes the character of tourists as they differ in their choices of leisure activities. The authors also found that independent women travelers are more aware of their need for self-development and have different needs and expectations, such as safety and security.

Additionally, Tribe & Liburd, (2016) also found that the age or lifecycle of the tourists is also significantly important as characteristic. The preferences of tourists are different in the life eras of initial adulthood, medium adulthood, and final adulthood. Similarly, Zhang et al., (2020) also found the role of previous tourism along with tourists' life stage in shaping the characteristics of tourists as a sociological factor. The author found that both these factors contribute to tourists' needs and choices. For example, differentiation in the knowledge and experience of tourists were found to be influential in impacting the cultural and geographic choices of tourists.

Also, Schänzel & Yeoman, (2015) in a study indicated that cultural orientation of family and family togetherness are also sociological and cultural factors responsible for shaping the characteristics of tourists. These tourists focus on promoting family togetherness, creating family memories, and keeping family bonds alive. Dahiya & Batra, (2016) found the ability of an individual to get influenced by opinion leaders to formulate their tourist decision making. Furthermore, Correia et al., (2011) in a study identified the role of national culture in shaping tourists' characteristics. The study highlight that it influenced tourist behavior for example information search, complaining and satisfaction behavior, and their perceptions.

### *5.4 Socio-cultural motivations of tourists*

Among various studies highlighting the role of socio-cultural motivations of tourists, Cheung, (2016) suggest that the level of satisfaction among individuals based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. As per the theory, tourists are motivated by fulfillment of needs and tourists ensure that their psychograph profiles match with their destination preferences. Also, Hurtado et al., (2014) explored other socio-cultural motivations for individuals that promote tourism. These include the opportunity for re-evaluation, self-discovery, opportunity to adopt a different role in different situations, and interaction with different people. Among other, the existing perception of tourists to be unable to participate in some activities at home motivates tourist also act as a motivator. This leads to tourist desires to participate in activities implausible in their usual lifestyle acts as motivation.

Further, Cheung & Fok, (2014) in a study suggested that cultural motivators for travelers include education and novelty. These factors shape tourists' intention to be inclined towards learning about the place of travel, be physically active, learn new outdoor skills, and meet people with similar interests. Also, the tourist characteristic is shaped by their income. Tourists of lower-income groups are motivated by knowledge-seeking, whereas, those belonging to higher income groups travel for motives such as escape, relaxation, and appreciation of nature (Jensen, 2015). Correia, (2014) also found that prestige is a motivation factor that impacts tourists. These include motivation to enhance social standing through travel.

Similarly, Kassean & Gassita,(2013) also identified the motives of escape, rest, and novelty among the motivation for travelers. Other factors identified by the author include nostalgia, self-actualization, escape, social interaction, prestige, and recognition. Paul & Varghese, (2015) also suggested that motivation can be classified as pull factors. The pull motivators for tourists include options for activities, cultural extravaganzas, events, that act as an ideal place for tourism. Opportunity for family bonding and a safe environment also motivates tourists. In addition, positive perception of the destination among the tourist act as motivator. This is shaped by the opinion from relatives and friends, attitude towards the destination, and experience from previous travelling (Said, 2018).

### *5.5 Positive socio-cultural influences of tourism*

To point out the positive socio-cultural impact of tourism, Zhuang et al., (2019) highlighted its role in poverty reduction in the host country. Specifically in the least developed countries, tourism helps in poverty reduction as it is a labor-intensive industry. It allows creation of jobs in remote areas where even unskilled laborers can find jobs in this diverse industry. These include increase in employment opportunities in sectors of transportation services, accommodation, travel agencies, food and beverage establishments, tour operation companies, cultural and natural attractions sites (Aynalem et al., 2016). In addition, the positive impact of socio-cultural tourism includes the benefits to the host communities arising from, development of social networks, improved sense of belonging, enhanced understanding and appreciation for the importance of the local area. These factors lead to an increase in social capital flow along with increase in tourism (Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2016).

In addition, the positive socio-cultural impact of tourism includes community enrichment. Tourism gives local communities the chance to meet people of different cultures, backgrounds, and lifestyles. There takes place demonstration effect in the host country due to mixing of diverse culture from tourists lead to improved lifestyles and practices (Hau et al., 2013). Zaei & Zaei, (2013) further suggested that tourism leads to the betterment of local infrastructure and contributes to positive socio-cultural impact arising from tourism. Other common devices arising include an increase in income level, ameliorated health care, and education resources. Also, tourism helps in the improvement of the regional image of the host country. At the same time, it enhances the infrastructure construction in the region to become conducive for tourists. This further contributed to the improvement of recreational activities and the quality of life of natives (Woosnam & Aleshinloye, 2018; Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2012). Furthermore, Lusetyowati, (2015) identified that tourism helps in the protection of cultural heritage. It is beneficial culturally as it allows accurate interpretation of resources available to the native and creates an authentic visitor experience. This further provides stimulation for an increase in revenues from cultural resources. It further promotes the transmission of cultural and historical traditions that contributes to the protection of local heritage, cultural arts, and crafts (A. Kumar, 2017).

### *5.6 Negative socio-cultural influences of tourism*

Despite there being positive influence of socio-cultural factors on tourism, several authors (Ghaderi & Henderson, 2012; Postma & Schmuecker, 2017; Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2012) have recognized its negative impacts also. Among the negative factors of tourism impacting the living conditions includes racial discrimination as well as those arising from disparities in wealth, income, and discretionary spending. These lead to negative sentiments and social intolerance (Hudson et al., 2020; Tse & Tung, 2020). Other negative influences of tourism on living conditions include resettlement of traditional communities, crime, prostitution, littering, population size, increase in traffic congestion, and traffic accidents (Juan Carlos Monterrubio et al., 2012; Zhao & Li, 2018). Also, tourism can lead to a shortage of goods and services for the native population (Mihalic, 2014). The negative socio-cultural influence of tourism on living conditions also include difficulties of sustainable development, sporadic violence, and absence of shopping establishments and spaces (Hall et al., 2013; Zhuang et al., 2019)

Occasionally the local culture may also get negatively impacted due to tourism, for example, a decline of native culture and social order being disturbed (K. G. Chang et al., 2018). Tourism may even impact the religious and community values of host nations. Such as through the introduction of new food and cuisine negatively impacting the native dietary culture, introduction of drinking rituals, alteration in dress codes (Giampiccoli & Kalis, 2012; Jude et al., 2018; Postma & Schmuecker, 2017). In addition, the negative impact of tourism on socio-cultural setup is also observed on the parameters of the lifestyle of the host region. The breakdown of the conventional relations and family structure (Sroyetch, 2016). The change in behavior further poses a threat to community fabric, ceremonies, collective conventional lifestyles, and morality to threaten indigenous identities (Ghaderi & Henderson, 2012). J. Carlos Monterrubio & Mendoza-Ontiveros, (2014) in a study further observed that tourism might lead to alteration in the behavior of young generations to impact the language and tradition of the host country adversely. Also, there is a risk for the natives to face exploitation and cases of antipathy between the tourists and locals (Kc et al., 2020; Suntikul & Dorji, 2016).



## 6. Conclusion

The current study presents the critical analysis of prevailing literature on tourism as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Previous academic and scholarly findings suggest that tourism includes movement and activities of people within the country or outside its boundaries. Among the social factors that contribute to tourism in its present state, include the perception of safety and security, political stability, and health and hygiene. In addition, the social factors of family, groups, roles, and status shape tourism needs, personality, and ideas to influence tourist behavior. Also, cultural factors play an important role in contributing to tourism. They shape the destination's competitiveness, preserve cultural identity of a community, and fuel tourist need for creativeness, knowledge, experience, achievement, rest, socialization, sports, family togetherness, escape, fun, and travel bragging.

Also, the study identifies some sociological and cultural factors that shape the characteristics of tourists. These include the parameter of human behavior, genders, instincts, senses, and values of tourists. Further, it was found in the study that age or lifecycle also influence tourists' needs and choices. Other sociological and cultural factors identified in the current study include knowledge, experience, cultural orientation of family, and family togetherness. Apart from the factors, there are certain socio-cultural motivations for the tourists. These include satisfaction among individuals based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, opportunity for re-evaluation and self-discovery, opportunity to adopt a different role in different situations, interaction with different people. In addition, nostalgia, self-actualization, escape, social interaction, prestige, and recognition are significant motivators.

Finally, the critical analysis of available literature is used in the study to shed light on the positive and negative influences of tourism in a region. The positive influences include those impacting the living conditions of the host country such as improved public infrastructure, education quality, and employment opportunity. Tourism leads to the amelioration of regional image and contributes positively to people's sense of local and national pride. However, the study also identifies some negative influences of tourism including, increase in crime, prostitution, traffic congestion, lack of sustainable development. These impacts also extend to local social order being disturbed and cultural decline through changes in societal and dietary cultures. In addition, there are chances of contradiction among the community and residents facing exploitation.

## 7. Limitations

This critical review is focused on the subjective knowledge gathered from various literature on tourism as a socio-cultural phenomenon. However, there are some limitations related to the methodology these include the lack of mixed-methods studies. The lack of quantitative data in the study poses a limitation to the present study. In addition, not all studies that have been undertaken on the subject have been analyzed in the present study. Hence, there are some socio-cultural factors of tourism that have not been analyzed in the present study. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized for specific locations.

## 8. Future Scope

To ensure transferability and generalization of results of the current study, a large-scale mixed method approach can be adopted in the future. The inclusion of quantitative data in the study may have highlighted some important findings regarding the role and impact of socio-cultural factors on tourism. As the current study reviewed studies that included a lack of specific information on the subject the reliability and validity of this study can be enhanced by first-hand collection of quantitative and qualitative data. In the future, the study can be further enhanced by taking into consideration the socio-demographic information of tourists to ensure transferability of the results.

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