Comparison of Expectation and Experience Values of Various Agri-tourism Aspects: A Multi-stakeholders' Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Agri-tourism is an emerging rural enterprise, which incorporates both working farm environment and commercial tourism component. The success of any agri-tourism venture mainly depends upon the satisfaction of both the stakeholders in the business. Thus, the present study was conducted to compare the expectations and experience of various agri-tourism aspects of multi-stakeholders. The sample of respondents in the study comprised of forty-five agri-tourism centres drawn from both states (30 from Maharashtra and 15 from Goa). The total number of 200 agri-tourists (visitors) selected, which consist of 100 visitors each from respective states. It followed an *ex-post facto* research design and was purposively conducted in Maharashtra and Goa states. Paired sample T-test shows, altogether seven attributes of agri-tourism such as accessibility, diversity of attractions and activities, rural cuisines, participation in the farming activities, accommodation facility, adequate safety and agri-products purchasing opportunity had statistically significant difference between expectation and experience of the agri-tourists. On the other hand, three pairs of agri-tourism values for hosts (farmers) such as the sale of agri-product, interaction with tourists and tourist behaviour with farmer, family and staff were found statistically significant difference.

Keywords: Agri-tourism, Experience, Expectation, Rural enterprises, Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture and its allied activities are on the brink of a change for both the farmers as well as consumers. A plethora of diversified activities amalgamated with scientific methods of cropping is paving the way for a secure future. Agri-tourism is one such activity where people from outside visit a farm on vacation. Agri-tourism has been defined and labelled in various ways in the literature. Philips *et al.* (2010) provide a typology of definitions of agri-tourism. Agri-tourism may be defined as "rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component" (Weaver and Fennel, 1997, McGehee, 2007). Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) referred to agri-tourism as "any practice developed on a working farm to attract visitors." Agri-tourism is the nascent growing sector in the tourism industry in recent years. The concept has been successfully implemented in states like Maharashtra, Kerala, Rajasthan, Goa, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. It has become a new avenue for earning income for rural farmers. Farm visits, farm stays and trail visits are gradually picking up

amongst tourists to experience something different from clichéd sightseeing packages of a destination. Training on product processing, value addition, marketing, advertising, branding can be offered and organized largely by agricultural extension agencies. Promotion of agro-tourism will also provide opportunities for youth to get ideas to create new livelihood options (Som *et al.,* 2018).

Agri-tourism provides a platform for a mutual learning experience, farmers share their abilities with guests and affirm; in this way, their role as loyal partners in the food chain (Sidali *et al.,* 2007). At the same time, customers recall their memory of the past (a past of more authentic food and forgotten tastes) and rediscover their traditions. The expectation is the probability of the future results and consequences based upon gathered information, previous experience and existing conditions. In other words, expectations can be termed as ideal or desirable aspects of the tourism experience. Expectation takes place before the actual visit to the destination. Tourists tend to imagine and visualise the destination, products and services and experience about their tour. Expectations of the consumer

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from the product are highly influenced by the 'perceived image' of that product by the consumer.

An individual's expectations are confirmed when a service performs as expected, negatively when the service performs worse than expected, and positively when the service performs better than expected (Truong and Foster, 2006). Observing the importance of perception and expectation in satisfaction and overall success of the business, the present study has included 'expectation' as an important variable. It reveals the comparison of expectation and experience of the visitors and agri-tourism hosts whose perceptions bear a lot on the satisfaction of both of them.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in purposively selected Maharashtra and Goa states during 2016-17 to 2018-19 by following *ex-post facto* research design. The sample respondents in the present study comprised of forty-five agri-tourism centres drawn from both states (30 from Maharashtra and 15 from Goa). The total number of 200 agri-tourists (visitors) includes 100 visitors each from respective states selected for the study. Paired sample T-test was used to compare the expected value with the perceived or experienced value of various agri-tourism attributes. The attributes were mainly taken from research conducted by Malakanthi and Routray (2012). Finally 13 pairs of attributes for visitors and 8 pairs of attributes for operators (farmer hosts) were selected to compare the values of expectation and experience of the agri-tourism aspects for respective stakeholders. A semi-structured interview schedule containing appropriate questions for data collection was prepared. The data were collected by personal interview as well as focused group discussion methods. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 17) was used to perform the statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of expectation and experience values of agri-tourism aspects as perceived by the visitors/ agri-tourists: The five point continuum scale ranging very low expectation (1) to very high expectation (5) was used to collect the responses. In the same way, very poor experience (1) to very good experience (5) was also collected on a five point continuum. Paired sample T-test was used to compare visitors' expected value with the experienced value of various aspects of agri-tourism. The

researcher has selected these aspects through review of literature and investigator's discussions with the agri-tourism visitors. The Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation and standard error for all the aspects, respectively.

Table 2 shows the various aspects of paired differences in terms of mean, standard deviation, standard error, 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference, T value and p-value to assess the level of significance. Detailed discussion on each aspect is carried out following the data presented in Table 2.

The data related to paired sample test of agri-tourists depicted in the Table 2 revealed that; Seven attributes of agri-tourism, had statistically significant difference at 5% level between the experience and expectation of the respondents. These attributes are accessibility, diversity of attractions/activities, authentic rural cuisines, opportunity to participate in the farming activities, accommodation facility, adequate safety and agri-products purchasing opportunity. In the case of accessibility, authentic rural cuisine, accommodation and safety the statistically significant difference shows that the respondents' experience regarding these aspects was much higher than their expectations. These results are in line with the results of Malakanthi and Routray (2012).

Whereas, the result shows that the respondent's experience was lesser than their expectations regarding agri-products purchasing opportunity, opportunity to participate in the farming activities and diversity of attractions as well as activities. Although there were some negative opinions of the respondents regarding accessibility i.e. bad roads, lack of connectivity and signage, the general image about rural roads kept their expectation very low (2.97), which made their otherwise low-scoring experience level (3.20), significantly higher. Respondents highlighted their dissatisfaction regarding the lack of variety in the activities and practical experience of farming activities. The similar findings noted by Borlikar (2017).

Comparison of Expectation and Experience values of agri-tourism aspects as perceived by the farmers/ operators: The data in Table 3 and 4 displays comparative study results of agri-tourism operator's expectations and experiences of agri-tourism business. As the result shows, three attributes of agri-tourism business, 'sale of agri-products'; 'interaction with tourists' and 'tourist behaviour with you, family and staff' had their 'p-value' less than 0.05, which means that there is a statistically significant

Table 1: Paired Samples Statistics-Agri-tourists

Aspects of Agri-tourism		Value category	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Attractive and appealing natural attractions	Expectation	4.02	1.008	0.050
		Experience	3.93	0.590	0.029
Pair 2	Facilities	Expectation	3.52	0.862	0.043
		Experience	3.62	0.750	0.037
Pair 3	Clean - Green & Pleasant environment	Expectation	4.05	0.904	0.045
		Experience	3.97	0.740	0.037
Pair 4	Accessibility	Expectation	2.97	0.879	0.044
		Experience	3.20	0.897	0.045
Pair 5	Diversity of attractions / activities	Expectation	3.47	0.907	0.045
		Experience	3.22	0.967	0.048
Pair 6	Working farm & allied activities	Expectation	3.68	1.052	0.052
		Experience	3.57	0.794	0.039
Pair 7	Authentic Rural Cuisine / F & B	Expectation	3.35	1.208	0.060
		Experience	4.15	0.773	0.038
Pair 8	Opportunity to participate in the farming activities	expectation	2.93	1.049	0.052
		Experience	2.78	0.921	0.046
Pair 9	Learning opportunities	Expectation	3.11	0.933	0.046
		Experience	3.04	0.833	0.041
Pair 10	Opportunity to experience rural culture	Expectation	3.20	1.052	0.052
		Experience	3.23	0.804	0.040
Pair 11	Accommodation facilities	Expectation	2.91	0.785	0.039
		Experience	3.59	0.724	0.036
Pair 12	Safety	Expectation	3.79	0.790	0.039
		Experience	4.20	0.590	0.029
Pair 13	Agri-products purchasing opportunity	Expectation	3.09	1.165	0.058
		Experience	2.90	0.798	0.040

difference between the experience and expectation of these attributes. Sales of agri-products as discussed earlier are an untapped area of the agri-tourism venture. Lack of awareness about this issue is reflected in the results, which shows that the experience of the sale of agri-products was more satisfactory than operator's expectation. It was observed that tourists were interested in buying the agri-products as well as processed products like pickles during their stay at agri-tourism centre.

'Interaction with tourists', also has an observed positive experience. The mean difference shows that the experience of operators to interact with the tourists was better than their expectation. Operators, who were from rural areas, assume their agri-tourists, are mainly from an urban background, to be different and difficult to interact with. This was proved wrong with their experience.

The experience of agri-tourism operators' with 'tourist behaviour with farmer, their family and staff', was not up to their expectations. It is observed, that, the irresponsible, insensitive and uninformed tourists, who were not aware or understood the difference between a hotel-resort and an agri-tourism centre, may have caused this experience for the operators. The tourists sometimes fail to realise that, unlike the hotel manager, the operator of agri-tourism was the owner of the farm, and the people serving food to them were not waiters, but the family members of the operator. On the other side, the rationale behind this might also be seen in operator's self-image.

Table 2: Paired samples test of agri-tourists (n=200)

S.No.	Paired Samples (Expectation and Experience)	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
		Mean	S.D.	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference				
					Lower	Upper			
1.	Natural attractions	0.091	1.217	0.060	-0.028	0.210	1.509	199	0.132
2.	Facilities	-0.094	1.107	0.055	-0.202	0.014	-1.703	199	0.089
3.	Environment	0.079	1.165	0.058	-0.035	0.192	1.363	199	0.173
4.	Accessibility	-0.236	1.280	0.064	-0.361	-0.112	-3.723	199	**<.001***
5.	Diversity of attractions / activities	0.251	1.337	0.066	0.121	0.382	3.785	199	**<.001***
6.	Working farm	0.108	1.297	0.064	-0.018	0.235	1.684	199	0.093
7.	Authentic rural cuisine	-0.796	1.482	0.074	-0.940	-0.651	-10.813	199	**<.001***
8.	Participation in the farming activities	0.150	1.437	0.071	.010	0.290	2.107	199	**0.036***
9.	Learning opportunities	0.069	1.273	0.063	-0.055	0.193	1.092	199	0.276
10.	Opportunity to experience rural culture	-0.032	1.388	0.069	-0.167	0.103	-0.465	199	0.642
11.	Accommodation facilities	-0.682	1.174	0.058	-0.797	-0.568	-11.712	199	**<.001***
12.	Adequate safety	-0.406	1.013	0.050	-0.505	-0.308	-8.080	199	**<.000***
13.	Agri-products purchasingopportunity	0.190	1.428	0.071	0.050	0.329	2.675	199	**0.008***

Table 3: Paired Samples Statistics of Operator Expectation and Experience

S.No.	Agri-tourism operation attribute	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error Mean
Pair 1	Income - expectation	3.80	45	0.757	0.113
	Income - experience	3.64	45	0.908	0.135
Pair 2	Sale of agri-products expectation	2.89	45	0.647	0.097
	Sale of agri-products experience	3.40	45	0.580	0.086
Pair 3	Interaction with tourists - expectation	3.22	45	0.765	0.114
	Interaction with tourists - experience	3.60	45	0.837	0.125
Pair 4	Family support expectation	3.84	45	0.601	0.100
	Family support experience	4.02	45	0.583	0.087
Pair 5	Support from farm workers expectation	3.51	45	0.843	0.126
	Support from farm workers experience	3.24	45	0.933	0.139
Pair 6	Tourist behaviour with you, family and staff - expectation	3.93	45	0.688	0.102
	Tourist behaviour with you, family and staff - experience	3.64	45	0.645	0.096
Pair 7	Tourist behaviour at farm/activity site - expectation	3.80	45	0.842	0.126
	Tourist behaviour at farm/activity site - experience	3.58	45	0.543	0.081
Pair 8	Tourist behaviour at Accommodation - expectation	3.76	45	0.933	0.139
	Tourist behaviour at Accommodation - experience	3.58	45	0.812	0.121

Table 4: Paired Samples Statistics of Expectation and Experience

Pair No.	Paired Samples (Expectation and Experience)	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	P Value
Pair 1	Income	0.156	1.147	0.910	0.368
Pair 2	Sale of agri-products	-0.511	1.036	-3.309	**0.002***
Pair 3	Interaction with tourists	-0.378	1.230	-2.060	**0.045***
Pair 4	Family support	-0.178	0.806	-1.480	0.146
Pair 5	Support from farm workers	0.267	1.572	1.138	0.261
Pair 6	Tourist behaviour with farmer, family and staff	0.289	0.944	2.052	**0.046***
Pair 7	Tourist behaviour at farm/activity site	0.222	1.064	1.402	0.168
Pair 8	Tourist behaviour at accommodation	0.178	1.527	0.781	0.439

The farmers were owners of the farm and they have their identity as a 'food provider of the society' in their mind. Thus, the experience of playing the role of a 'service provider' might not be as pleasing as they expected.

In the paired sample T-test for farmer (operators), out of the three pairs, which were found with statistically significant difference, i.e. 'sale of agri-products'; 'interaction with tourists' and 'tourist behaviour with farmer, family and staff', only the last one was negative experience. From the operator's point of view, all the educated urban tourists were expected to be behaving in the much nicer way with their family and staff. The tourists with a lack of understanding of the agri-tourism concept's difference from regular leisure tourism along with farmer's self-image may be the cause of this displeasure among the operators. Although the rest of the tested aspects were found to be with positive experience or without significant difference between the experience and expectation value, support from staff can be seen with a comparatively negative experience value. Lack of motivation, orientation and training to the support staff may be regard as the cause for this.

CONCLUSION

The difference between agri-tourists' expectation and experience is an effective measure to assess the gaps in the delivery of the services provided by the farmers in their field. Here in the present study, it was found that apart from few shortfalls in the diversity of attractions, practical exposure to the farming activities and direct sale of the agri-products at the centre, the respondent's expectations were duly satisfied by their experience. In general, agri-tourism farmers should pay more attention to several aspects of their operations, especially regarding the attributes that were identified as less than their expectation

on the part of the visitors. The farmers' experience regarding attributes likes additional income, support from family and staff and behaviour of agri-tourists was found to be more or less similar to their expectations. In times of mission like doubling farmers' income by 2022, non-farm activities with systematic agribusiness approach must be the top priority for both farmers and policy makers. In this context, agri-tourism is well placed and can be expanded in and extended to remote rural areas. Thus, the findings of this research may be useful in developing policies and undertaking promotional measures to improve the current agri-tourism sites along with setting standards for upcoming ventures.

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