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Homestay Owners preferred Attributes from Online Interview Reviews: an exploratory approach

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Introduction: Homestay accommodation is a subset of accommodation options available as a whole in the commercial sector. It can hence be termed as “tourism related or community managed” wider range of a benefit inducing option. Therefore, a good number of travelers are willing to choose a homestay over any other commercial accommodation option just to get a firsthand experience of the simple lives of host families. They get to experience a culturally inducing interactive stay with the chosen host family. The overall experience of staying in a homestay is unique and extremely rewarding for most tourists as compared to them staying in a hotel or luxury resort.

Genesis of the Problem: Tourism related research has helped in highlighting about tourists itinerary and perspective of homestay, but there is very little research, which exists to procure the homestay owners perspective, priorities, and perception about homestay attributes. Owner reviews can act as a rich source of information with respect to homestay attributes, functioning, performance, operations, management and every other host related factor. This data can be crucial to understand and procure facts about homestay services and management from the host perspective. A limited number of studies have tried to understand owner’s review of homestay building experience and help received by the government. A proper study aiming on host related reviews will help determine the promotional strategies, various attributes like food and hospitality options, communication and cultural exchange between host and guests, training regarding homestay operational methods and tourism development as a whole. This paper thus will aim to concentrate on owner-preferred attributes through online homestay host reviews using questionnaire and interview method.

Survey of Literature:

- i) Chea et al¹ argued that over the years, homestay program has become increasingly in high demand among locals and foreign tourists. Under the Malaysia homestay program, tourists learn about close-knit family relationship, which offers a chance to experience the local daily lifestyle and draws tourists closer to the culture and friendly people of Malaysia.
- ii) Sood², analyzed the current practices of homestay operators and their opinions on various issues. The perspectives of host community who have still not participated in the scheme were also taken into account during the study. The satisfaction level of tourists who stayed in the homestays were evaluated. The tourists who had not stayed in a homestay were asked about the features they would look for in a homestay if they were given a chance to stay in it. The thesis also gives an overview of homestays in similar mountain destinations like Sikkim, Ladakh and Uttarakhand. There are around 400 homestays in Himachal Pradesh and majority of them are in Kullu. In Kullu, the homestays are mainly located near Manali, Naggar, Kasol and Banjar. Operators who had previous experience in hospitality business are mainly running them. However, there are some misconceptions in the minds of operators about a homestay and a hotel. They are striving very hard to make their homestay just like a hotel. Some issues regarding training, marketing, record keeping were identified. Homestays are a secondary source of income for all the operators. There was no incentive offered to the operators for using alternative source
- iii) Macek³ proposed an evaluation matrix that can be used to determine the suitability of developing a homestay program is adopted. The matrix is then applied to a subset of villages in the Johar Valley. The tool developed through this thesis helped to make decisions about the suitability of homestays not only in the Johar Valley, but also in other remote locations in India. His thesis suggested the factors one might consider when determining if a homestay is an appropriate livelihood development strategy in rural and remote mountain locations. The majority of researcher efforts were focused on examining the Johar Valley and a subset of villages located there.
- iv) Home stay tourism, according to Bhan & Singh⁴, is an emerging tourism concept evolved lately in the tourism world. India can be a model homestay for its multi-faceted potentialities. Natural gifts, fabricated heritages ethno cultural richness, innocent social settings, pleasant hospitality and many more unexplored treasures that are dreams for experts of tourism. Homestay tourism cannot prosper sans the convergence of needs of the affluent and the needy based on the premise of demand driven mechanism because it is a need base concept. India can harness the boon of tourist potentiality rampant at the rural areas where government has pro-poor programs. This form of tourism is based on three aspects namely service, facility and attraction. India has a strong position only in attraction

¹ Chea, Ka., & Zhao, Yimin. (2019). A study on the relationship among perceived value, satisfaction and behavior intention on homestay guests. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334327339_A_study_on_the_relationship_among_perceived_value_satisfaction_and_behavior_intention_on_homestay_guests/

² Sood, J. (2012). Potential of home stay tourism in Himachal Pradesh a case study of Kullu District. *Shodhganaga*, xviii, 545p. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/129116>

³ Macek, I. C. (2012). Homestays as Livelihood Strategies in Rural Economies: 106. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/79e5/f147e0f4d1f29c7dcac098db904d497d2053.pdf>

⁴ Bhan, S., & Singh, L. (2014). Homestay Tourism in India: Opportunities and Challenges. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, Vol. 3 (2). Retrieved from <http://www.ajhtl.com>

whereas it is lacking in facility and services. Sustainable tourism takes place if homegrown resources and natural settings are effectively served to the tourism as well as also preserved. Promotion of tourism thus is highly dependent upon the active participation of the private sector and communities where the role of government becomes that of a facilitator.

Research Gap: The home stay initiative by the government exists, but little do homestay owners know about it as revealed in the pilot survey; carried out prior to the data collection. There is little awareness about the homestay promotional activities carried out by the government. There exists a need to understand how the Homestay owners perceive homestay related themes and attributes.

Research Questions: This paper will specifically aim to answer the following research questions:

- What classifies a homestay owner attributes?
- What are the attributes that are actually required to form a proper homestay?
- What are the attributes that are actually required to run a proper homestay?
- What are the attributes of the owners that are required to become proper homestay owners?

Objectives: This paper will specifically aim to answer the following objectives:

- To find out the primary themes and attributes surrounding owners' homestay perspective.
- To explore whether there any sub themes, which are co related to the primary themes and attributes.
- To investigate if the themes and attributes are recurring in nature.
- To determine whether the attributes are crucial for the proper functioning of a homestay.

Methodology: This section proposes the methodology used to address the research questions and examines its importance as a tool for understanding attributes from homestay owner perspectives in Assam, an area where there is little existing empirical work. Research methodology provides the basic framework of collection and analysis of data. The methodology of data collection and analysis is exploratory in nature and a multi method research approach was followed. Data collection was done through questionnaire. The interview was conducted online and through telephonic conversations and upon directly visiting the homestays. Convenience sampling was conducted and 50 homestay owners from 17 districts of Assam were considered for the study. Descriptive analysis methods like frequencies, percentage, mean, standard deviation is used for the data analysis design.

Findings: Based on the quantitative analysis, two interesting findings were gleaned. First, even though homestay travelers were generally more stringent than other family travelers were, they occasionally emerged as being meticulous. The homestay owners were from diverse areas and had diverse backgrounds, so their reviews were somewhat mixed in nature.

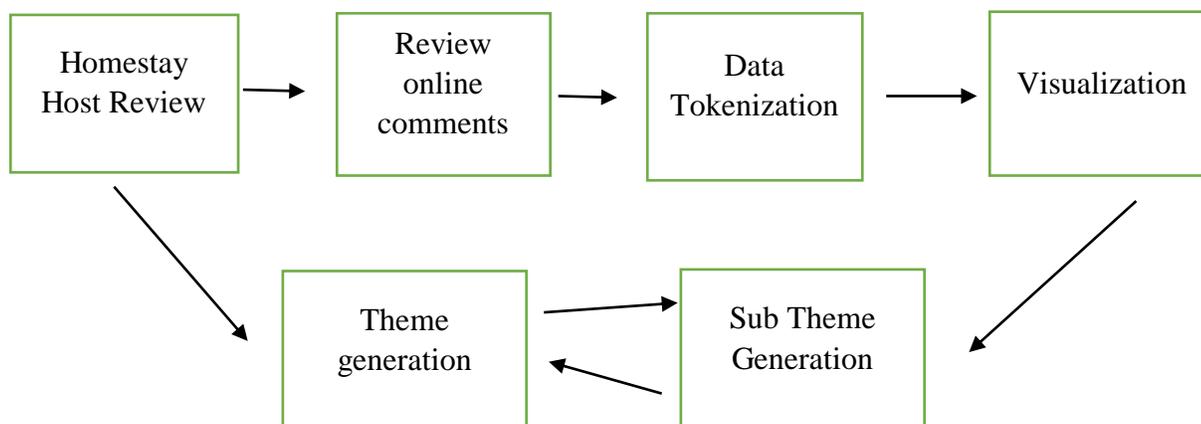
Profile Table of Homestay Host:

Location of Homestay	Number of Homestay Hosts considered for the study
Barpeta	2
Bongaigaon	2
Dibrugarh	4
Digboi	1
Golaghat	2
Guwahati	7
Haflong	2
Jorhat	5
Karbi Anglong	2
Kaziranga	5
Majuli	5
Morigaon	2
Sivsagar	2
Silchar	1
Tezpur	3
Tinsukia	3
West Karbi Anglong	2

Source of the diagram: Compiled from Survey of Literature

The study revealed the following themes through the reviews of homestay hosts; promotion, food, guest related, communication, training, utilization of property, host related and tourism. There were various underlying subthemes generated, while the study was conducted.

Diagram 001: Framework for Analysis



Source of the diagram: Compiled from Survey of Literature

The sub themes were **promotion**-promotional government scheme, homestay implementation awareness, marketing of homestay, advertising campaign, strategic planning. The theme of **food** had underlying sub themes - authentic cuisine options, local food availability, cultural exchange through recipe sharing between host and guests, common kitchen skill sharing. **Guest related**-Guest norms and principles, faith and beliefs, food habits, needs and requirements.

Communication was related to cultural exchange and participation of ethnic behavior. **Training** had underlying themes like host expertise development and better implementation of homestay in diverse areas. **Utilization of property** had a sub theme of types of property that can be constructed on used land, i.e. modern construction or traditional construction. **Host related** theme had implication on all the major themes as well as sub themes as because the host needed to be familiar with every aspect of homestay attributes. **Tourism** as a theme had an entirety of implication on homestay implementation. Tourism benefitted as a whole from the surfacing of homestays. Thus, it can be seen that the host attributes were very crucial in generating themes and sub themes, which were ultimately dependent on each other. The themes highlighted had generated the following proportions;

Table 002

Themes	Sub theme	Proportion percentage of 50 host reviews
Promotion	Government scheme, Homestay implementation awareness, Strategic planning, marketing and advertising of Homestay	40%
Food	Authentic cuisine, cultural exchange, recipe sharing, local food options	4%
Guest Related	Faith, values, principles, norms, habits	4%
Communication	Cultural exchange and ethnic behavior pattern	8%
Training	Host expertise development, internet use, online booking, feedback handling	6%
Utilization of Property	Modern or traditional structure, wooden set up, rural set up	12%
Host Related	Every theme and sub theme is interrelated to host	12%
Tourism	Overall implementation, benefits to the national tourism	14%

Suggestions and Scope of future studies:

: This study was primarily exploratory in nature wherein by analyzing homestay owner reviews in the study area many new themes and directional sub themes have emerged. This paper investigated ways in which hosts could review on the attributes and their perspective on homestay business and their future references for probable hosts and government at large. However, as it is evident from the data proportion study exercise, there are certain areas which homestay hosts need to pay attention to reduce negative feedback from visitors. Specifically, the areas involving cleanliness & hygiene, staff behavior, service quality and value for money as evident from emerging themes and sub themes. These factors are inter related and need to be laid emphasis on by the prospective future homestay host in future. The current hosts gave ample amount of good suggestions to prospective homestay hosts and made it clear to lay emphasis on all themes and sub themes.

They were of the opinion that the government could do a lot for homestay implementation in both rural and urban areas where tourist footfall is highest, which will directly help the tourism of the country to flourish.

Limitations of Study: The study had its pros and cons. The data generation process was quite lengthy as because not all homestay owners were fluent in internet use or in the English language. The lack of knowledge of technology played a huge role in the difficult data collection. Nonetheless, most of the host were quite helpful and tried their best to provide as much information required. The biggest limitation here has to be technological illiteracy, which if dealt properly can be fulfilled.

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