

Enhancing the Visitor Experience: Identifying Factors Influencing Tourist Satisfaction at Varendra Research Museum

Sheikh Shamima Sultana¹ Md. Mahfuj Alam Noyon² Syeda Farzana Yasmin³

Abstract: This study investigates tourist satisfaction at Varendra Research Museum (VRM) in Bangladesh, a destination with significant archaeological value. Recognizing tourism's potential for Bangladesh's economy, the research explores factors influencing tourist satisfaction at VRM. Employing a quantitative approach, data was collected through surveys with tourists visiting the museum. The research identified limitations at VRM that affect tourist satisfaction, including a lack of new attractions, outdated web presence, and inadequate tourist services. Based on the findings, recommendations are proposed to enhance VRM's appeal, such as developing new attractions, improving the museum's website, and ensuring tourist safety and security. The study also highlights the need for collaboration between the public and private sectors to improve VRM's infrastructure and service quality. By addressing these factors, VRM can enhance tourist satisfaction and contribute to the growth of Bangladesh's tourism industry.

Keyword: Tourist Satisfaction, Museums, Varendra Research Museum, Bangladesh, Cultural Tourism

Date of Submission: 13-09-2024

Date of acceptance: 27-09-2024

I. Introduction:

Bangladesh, known for its rich cultural and historical assets, is gaining recognition as an emerging tourist hotspot. The tourism industry plays a crucial role in driving the country's economy by contributing to GDP and job creation (Rahman et al., 2019; Roy & Roy, 2015). Museums, including the Varendra Research Museum (VRM), serve as key attractions for tourists interested in exploring the nation's heritage. The success of these institutions, however, largely depends on ensuring visitor satisfaction, which is essential for encouraging repeat visits and enhancing the tourism experience (Pramudito, 2020; Oktarisa et al., 2021).

Despite VRM's archaeological importance, it faces numerous challenges that impact its ability to attract and satisfy tourists. Factors such as service quality, visitor engagement, and the overall museum experience significantly influence tourist satisfaction (Forgas-Coll et al., 2017; ZhenShan et al., 2019). Studies suggest that both cognitive and emotional elements are key to shaping visitors' perceptions and satisfaction (Forgas-Coll et al., 2017). For example, the emotional connection formed with the exhibits can greatly affect visitors' experiences and their likelihood of returning (ZhenShan et al., 2019; Brida et al., 2013). Additionally, the physical environment, including cleanliness and accessibility, plays an important role in enhancing tourist satisfaction (Sitiari et al., 2019).

This study adopts a quantitative approach, integrating survey data from VRM visitors to provide a detailed understanding of the factors influencing tourist satisfaction. The research seeks to identify the main elements affecting satisfaction, the obstacles hindering visitor experiences, and potential improvements to enhance the museum's offerings (Pramudito, 2020; Oktarisa et al., 2021; Damayanti et al., 2020).

Addressing these issues is critical within the larger framework of Bangladesh's growing tourism sector. The potential of tourism to generate revenue and contribute to national development has been extensively highlighted (Hossain & Wadood, 2020; Nipa et al., 2015). Museums like VRM act as important points of interest for tourists looking to engage with Bangladesh's cultural and historical heritage. However, realizing this potential requires overcoming the barriers to visitor satisfaction at VRM (Tuli, 2014). This research seeks to offer insights that can assist VRM's management in developing strategies to elevate the museum as a top tourist destination in Bangladesh. By improving visitor satisfaction, VRM could play a significant role in boosting the

¹ Associate Professor in the Department of Marketing at the University of Rajshahi. Email: sssmita29@ru.ac.bd

² Undergraduate (BBA) student of the Department of Marketing at the University of Rajshahi. Email: mahfuj.alam3200@gmail.com

³ Undergraduate (BBA) student of the Department of Marketing at the University of Rajshahi. Email: syedafarzanayasmin@gmail.com

tourism industry, contributing to the country's overall economic growth (Hossain & Wadood, 2020; Nipa et al., 2015).

II. Literature Review:

Cultural tourism, particularly through museums, is a crucial means of promoting a nation's cultural heritage and identity. Museums serve a key function in preserving and displaying cultural artifacts, which allows for a deeper understanding of a country's history. The connection between cultural tourism and the management of cultural heritage is significant, with museums serving as central points for visitors seeking meaningful interactions with local culture (Jankova et al., 2023; Chan et al., 2014). This dynamic is especially evident in Bangladesh, where institutions like the Varendra Research Museum (VRM) play a vital role in highlighting the nation's rich cultural and historical assets, thus boosting the potential for cultural tourism (Saleem & Umar, 2022).

In Bangladesh, the growth of cultural tourism relies on the ability of museums to meet modern visitor expectations. Museums like the VRM have the potential to attract both domestic and international tourists by showcasing the country's historical narratives. However, they face challenges in terms of modernization and infrastructure, which are critical to improving tourist satisfaction (SUN, 2023; Easson & Leask, 2019). Failure to incorporate contemporary technologies and interactive displays may alienate visitors who seek more engaging and immersive experiences (Ivanov, 2023). Integrating technology not only modernizes the visitor experience but also aligns with the trend of personalized content delivery, which has been shown to enhance visitor satisfaction significantly (Ivanov, 2023; Ivanov, 2023).

Tourist satisfaction is a key measure of the success of cultural tourism destinations, including museums. Elements such as service quality, exhibit relevance, and the overall environment greatly influence visitors' experiences (Chan et al., 2014; King et al., 2022). Research shows that increasing visitor engagement through interactive and educational experiences can lead to greater satisfaction (Kim & Lee, 2022). For example, social media platforms like Instagram allow visitors to share and reflect on their museum experiences, strengthening their connection to the cultural narratives displayed (Rhee et al., 2021). Moreover, the professionalism and hospitality of museum staff, along with well-maintained facilities, are crucial factors contributing to a positive visitor experience (Chan et al., 2014; Easson & Leask, 2019).

The relationship between service quality and destination image is another critical factor influencing tourist satisfaction. A museum's image can significantly shape tourists' perceptions and affect their likelihood of returning (Chan et al., 2014; Easson & Leask, 2019). For VRM, improving service quality through an enhanced online presence and upgraded on-site facilities could strengthen its reputation as a top cultural destination. This is especially pertinent in Bangladesh, where the tourism industry is still developing and grapples with issues related to infrastructure and marketing strategies (Saleem & Umar, 2022). Public-private partnerships may offer a viable solution to these challenges, allowing museums to enhance facilities and promote cultural tourism more effectively (Saleem & Umar, 2022).

In conclusion, developing cultural tourism in Bangladesh, particularly through museums like the VRM, presents both challenges and opportunities. By embracing modernization, improving service quality, and leveraging technology, museums can significantly boost visitor satisfaction and engagement. This, in turn, will not only promote cultural heritage but also contribute to the broader goals of sustainable tourism development in the region.

III. Research Methodology:

This research employed quantitative approach to comprehensively investigate tourist satisfaction at Varendra Research Museum (VRM) in Bangladesh. In this approach data collected through surveys, providing a well-rounded understanding of tourist experiences.

Data Collection Methods

- **Surveys:** A self-administered questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data from tourists visiting VRM. The questionnaire included a mix of closed-ended questions (e.g., Likert scale) to gauge satisfaction with various aspects of the museum and open-ended questions to allow tourists to elaborate on their experiences. The target population for the survey was tourists who had recently visited VRM. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure participants had firsthand experience with the museum.

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Data:** Data collected through the survey was analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS). Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations) were used to summarize responses to closed-ended questions.

Data Quality and Ethical Considerations

The research prioritized data quality and ethical considerations throughout the process. The questionnaire was pilot tested to ensure clarity and ease of understanding. During collection of responses, the researcher maintained a neutral and non-judgmental stance to encourage honest responses. All data was anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

IV. Data Analysis & Findings:

The results of the collected data, using statistical tools through computer program SPSS will be presented in a manner that outfits the purpose of the study. It is started earlier that this study will attempt to find out the tourists satisfaction towards Varendra Research Museum as a tourist destination. The detail analysis of demographic factors and influential factors are presented below-

Demographic Factors: The analysis of demographic factors reveals that among the 70 respondents, the majority are aged between 21-30 years (75.7%), with smaller proportions in other age groups. There is a slightly higher number of male respondents (55.7%) compared to females (44.3%). In terms of education, most respondents are undergraduates (61.4%), with fewer having less formal education or being graduates. Geographically, the majority come from Rajshahi (60%), followed by Dhaka and other regions. Occupation-wise, a significant portion of respondents are students (74.3%), with fewer in business, government, and private service roles. Most visitors come to VRM for the first time (45.7%), and the majority visit with friends (64.3%).

Motivational Factors: Respondents generally agree that visiting VRM fulfills personal interests and provides psychological benefits. A majority feel that VRM meets their spiritual needs (67.6% agree or strongly agree), helps overcome stress (70% agree or strongly agree), and satisfies their inner desires (71.4% agree or strongly agree). The museum is also seen as a place to learn about archaeology (87.1% agree or strongly agree) and refresh their minds (75.4% agree or strongly agree). The excitement factor of the museum is noted by 72.9% of respondents, and there is a consensus on the presence of significant archaeological elements (84.3% agree or strongly agree) and valuable statues, sculptures, and monuments (82.9% agree or strongly agree).

Service Factors: In terms of service, respondents show a generally positive view of the facilities at VRM. While 62.9% find the information desk helpful and 51.5% rate the quality of services as favorable, there are mixed feelings about the availability of tourist guides (35.7% agree or strongly agree) and the staff's behavior (52.8% agree or strongly agree). Amenity services received neutral to slightly positive feedback (44.3% agree or strongly agree).

Learning and Educational Content: Respondents express a generally favorable opinion about the learning and educational resources at VRM. Most agree that there is an adequate collection of books and research papers (58.6% agree or strongly agree) and educational objects (67.1% agree or strongly agree). Documentary collections are seen as sufficient by 57.1% of respondents. There is also a positive view on the availability of brochures (55.7% agree or strongly agree). The digital archive, which could enhance learning experiences, is integrated into this factor, indicating a potential area for improvement as current responses do not specifically address this.

Aesthetic Factors: Regarding the aesthetic aspects of VRM, respondents appreciate the exterior (77.1% agree or strongly agree) and interior design (81.4% agree or strongly agree). The surroundings and garden are also viewed positively, with 75.7% finding the environment excellent and 84.3% appreciating the garden.

Cultural Values: Respondents generally value the cultural insights provided by VRM. A significant majority find that the museum offers valuable information about ancient lifestyles (71.5% agree or strongly agree), customs (75.7% agree or strongly agree), human beliefs (61.4% agree or strongly agree), and cultural scripts (67.2% agree or strongly agree). There is moderate agreement on the museum's ability to convey tribal culture (51.4% agree or strongly agree) and religious sculptures (78.6% agree or strongly agree).

Recommendations to enhance VRM's appeal:

To boost the appeal of the Varendra Research Museum (VRM) as a tourist destination, a comprehensive strategy is required, focusing on enhancing attractions, improving visitor services, and securing robust government support. The following recommendations integrate insights from various scholarly sources to outline an effective approach:

Enhance Attractions and Facilities

Develop New Attractions: Introducing interactive exhibits and multimedia presentations can greatly increase visitor engagement. Research underscores the importance of unique cultural experiences in attracting a diverse audience to museums (Chan et al., 2014; Guo et al., 2021). Immersive digital tourism, employing multisensory elements, has been found to enhance visitor satisfaction and engagement (Guo et al., 2021). The addition of themed tours that spotlight the museum's archaeological collections will cater to educational interests, aligning with findings that highlight the significance of educational experiences in museums (Chan et al., 2014).

Upgrade Amenities: Modern tourists have high expectations for facility quality. It is crucial to upgrade restrooms, enhance signage, and ensure accessibility. Research shows a strong link between visitor satisfaction and the quality of amenities (Huo, 2024; Burke et al., 2010). Maintaining these facilities to high standards will not only meet but exceed visitor expectations, encouraging repeat visits (Huo, 2024).

Improve Online Presence

Develop a Modern Website: A contemporary, user-friendly website is essential for drawing potential tourists. The site should provide detailed information on exhibits, visiting hours, ticket prices, and upcoming events. Incorporating virtual tours and educational resources can engage online visitors, as emphasized by research on the importance of digital presence for enhancing visitor experiences (Guo et al., 2021). Adding augmented reality (AR) technology could offer innovative ways for visitors to interact with exhibits, enhancing the museum's appeal (Khalil et al., 2023).

Government and Institutional Support

Incorporate in Development Plans: The government should prioritize VRM in regional tourism development plans. Investing in infrastructure and promotional activities can significantly increase the museum's visibility (Florido-Benítez, 2023; Jiménez et al., 2023). Additionally, granting the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) greater autonomy in decision-making can facilitate quicker adaptations to tourism trends and visitor needs (Florido-Benítez, 2023).

Enhance Visitor Services

Increase Tourist Guides: Providing knowledgeable guides can significantly enhance the visitor experience. Effective communication about the museum's history and exhibits is crucial for visitor satisfaction (Vu et al., 2017; Loureiro & Sarmiento, 2018). Implementing strong safety and security measures will also build visitor trust and counteract any negative perceptions (Vu et al., 2017).

Promote Cultural and Educational Value

Multilingual Information: Offering information in both Bengali and English will cater to a wider audience, improving the cultural experience for both local and international visitors (Ranković, 2023). Supporting local handicrafts and organizing cultural shows can further enrich the visitor experience and promote local heritage, attracting more tourists (Ranković, 2023).

Participate in Tourism Fairs: Engaging in local and international tourism fairs can enhance VRM's visibility and attract potential visitors. This approach aligns with the need for museums to participate in broader tourism marketing strategies to boost their appeal (Kinanti et al., 2020).

Improve Accommodation and Infrastructure

Upgrade Accommodation Facilities: Collaborating with local hotels and guesthouses to improve accommodation quality will ensure a comfortable stay for tourists, which is essential for a positive overall experience (Jiménez et al., 2023; Kinanti et al., 2020).

Preserve Historical Structures: Maintaining the museum's historical structures is essential for preserving its cultural significance and attracting visitors interested in heritage tourism. Research highlights the importance of preserving historical sites to enhance tourism appeal (Ranković, 2023).

By implementing these recommendations, the Varendra Research Museum can significantly improve its attractiveness as a tourist destination, thereby benefiting the local economy and preserving cultural heritage.

V. Conclusion:

The Varendra Research Museum (VRM) possesses considerable potential as a prominent tourist destination in Bangladesh. Although it currently faces challenges such as outdated facilities and a limited online presence, targeted strategic improvements could significantly enhance tourist satisfaction. This research, the first to assess tourist satisfaction at VRM, highlighted key areas for improvement, including the introduction of new attractions, upgraded amenities, and enhanced safety measures. By leveraging modern technology, improving infrastructure, and fostering public-private partnerships, VRM can strengthen its appeal and assist authorities in refining its destination image and service quality. Addressing these factors will not only boost visitor satisfaction but also establish VRM as a leading cultural tourism hub, supporting heritage conservation and contributing to economic growth.

Reference:

- [1]. Brida, J. G., Disegna, M., & Scuderi, R. (2013). The behaviour of repeat visitors to museums: Review and empirical findings. *Quality & Quantity*, 48(6), 2817-2840. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-013-9927-0>
- [2]. Burke, P., Burton, C., Huybers, T., Islam, T., Louviere, J., & Wise, C. (2010). The scale-adjusted latent class model: application to museum visitation. *Tourism Analysis*, 15(2), 147-165. <https://doi.org/10.3727/108354210x12724863327605>
- [3]. Chan, W., Zhang, C., Hon, A., & Mak, B. (2014). New business drivers of Hong Kong cultural museums: The tourism stakeholder perspective. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 20(6), 619-634. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2014.924542>
- [4]. Damayanti, V., Ekasari, A., & Syaodih, E. (2020). The determinants of cultural tourism attractions based on tourist satisfaction in the Sundapolis area, Bandung city. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200225.117>

- [5]. Easson, H., & Leask, A. (2019). After-hours events at the National Museum of Scotland: A product for attracting, engaging and retaining new museum audiences? *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23(11), 1343-1356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2019.1625875>
- [6]. Florido-Benítez, L. (2023). Air connectivity and proximity of large airports as an added value for museums. *Museum Worlds*, 11(1), 136-154. <https://doi.org/10.3167/armw.2023.110112>
- [7]. Forgas-Coll, S., Palau-Saumell, R., Matute, J., & Tárrega, S. (2017). How do service quality, experiences and enduring involvement influence tourists' behavior? An empirical study in the Picasso and Miró Museums in Barcelona. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 19(2), 246-256. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2107>
- [8]. Guo, K., Fan, A., Lehto, X., & Day, J. (2021). Immersive digital tourism: the role of multisensory cues in digital museum experiences. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 47(6), 1017-1039. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10963480211030319>
- [9]. Hossain, B., & Wadood, S. N. (2020). Potential unexplored? Tourism and economic growth of Bangladesh. <https://doi.org/10.26650/jot.2020.6.1.0031>
- [10]. Huo, H. (2024). Measuring the relationship between museum attributes and visitors: an application of topic model on museum online reviews. *Plos One*, 19(7), e0304901. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0304901>
- [11]. Ivanov, R. (2023). Exhibitexplorer: Enabling personalized content delivery in museums using contextual geofencing and artificial intelligence. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202308.1925.v1>
- [12]. Ivanov, R. (2023). Tangible and personalized smart museum application. *Digital Presentation and Preservation of Cultural and Scientific Heritage*, 13, 97-106. <https://doi.org/10.55630/dipp.2023.13.9>
- [13]. Jankova, L., Auzina, A., & Zvirbule, A. (2023). Regional smart cultural tourism destinations in a region of Latvia. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 15(5), 507-516. <https://doi.org/10.1108/whatt-06-2023-0082>
- [14]. Jiménez, C., Gutiérrez-Coronil, S., Márquez-Ballesteros, M., & Moreno, A. (2023). Relating spatial quality of public transportation and the most visited museums: revisiting sustainable mobility of waterfronts and historic centers in international cruise destinations. *Sustainability*, 15(3), 2066. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15032066>
- [15]. Khalil, S., Kallmuenzer, A., & Kraus, S. (2023). Visiting museums via augmented reality: an experience fast-tracking the digital transformation of the tourism industry. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 27(6), 2084-2100. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ejim-09-2022-0479>
- [16]. Kim, J., & Lee, M. (2022). Evaluating visitor engagement through Instagram: A case study of One with Eternity: Yayoi Kusama in the Hirshhorn Collection. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 59(1), 729-731. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.705>
- [17]. King, E., Smith, M., Wilson, P., Stott, J., & Williams, M. (2022). Creating meaningful museums: A model for museum exhibition user experience. *Visitor Studies*, 26(1), 59-81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10645578.2022.2129944>
- [18]. Kinanti, L., Irawan, M., & Puspitasari, N. (2020). Strategies model of jember historical tourism marketing. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management*, 8(12), 2058-2068. <https://doi.org/10.18535/ijstrm/v8i12.em06>
- [19]. Loureiro, S. and Sarmento, E. (2018). Engaging visitors in cultural and recreational experience at museums. *Anatolia*, 29(4), 581-592. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2018.1484378>
- [20]. Nipa, N. J., Sultana, J., & Rahman, M. H. (2015). Prospect of private-public partnership in tourism of Bangladesh. *Journal of Investment and Management*, 4(3), 73-83. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.jim.20150403.11>
- [21]. Oktarisa, T. L., Prihatiningtias, A. L., Prabawa, T. S., & Susilowati, L. (2021). Visitors' motivation and perception on Sangiran Early Man Museum, Krikilan Cluster: Motivasi dan persepsi pengunjung terhadap Museum Manusia Purba Sangiran Klaster Krikilan. *Berkala Arkeologi*, 41(1), 109-128. <https://doi.org/10.30883/jba.v41i1.570>
- [22]. Pramudito, O. (2020, February). Do attractions give tourists satisfaction? In 4th International Conference on Management, Economics and Business (ICMEB 2019) (pp. 53-57). Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.200205.011>
- [23]. Rahman, M., Islam, M. S., Amin, M. A., Sultana, R., & Talukder, M. I. (2019). Effective factors of service marketing mix on tourist satisfaction: A case study. *Asian Social Science*, 15(7), 1. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v15n7p1>
- [24]. Ranković, K. (2023). Ethno museums - witnesses of the past, tourist resources for the future., 112-117. <https://doi.org/10.15308/sitcon-2023-112-117>
- [25]. Rhee, B., Pianzola, F., & Choi, K. (2021). Analyzing the museum experience through the lens of Instagram posts. *Curator the Museum Journal*, 64(3), 529-547. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12414>
- [26]. Roy, S. C., & Roy, M. (2015). Tourism in Bangladesh: Present status and future prospects. *International Journal of Management Science and Business Administration*, 1(8), 53-61. <https://doi.org/10.18775/ijmsba.1849-5664-5419.2014.18.1006>
- [27]. Saleem, S., & Umar, R. (2022). A netnography study on memorable cultural tourism experiences: Insights from Asian cultural heritage site tourists. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 29(2), 280-303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2022.2143990>
- [28]. Sitiari, N. W., Pandit, I. G. S., Laksmi, A. R. S., Budiarta, I. W., & Sudini, L. P. (2019, January). The influence of environment on tourist satisfaction seeing from management, linguistics and social cultural aspects. In *Proceedings of International Conference of Social Science, ICOSS 2018, Denpasar, Indonesia*. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.21-9-2018.2281130>
- [29]. Sun, R. (2023). Neglect of translation in museums: A case study of the Ulster Museum. *Translogos Translation Studies Journal*, 6(2), 67-84. <https://doi.org/10.29228/translogos.60>
- [30]. Tuli, F. A. (2014). The problems of managing tourism business in Bangladesh: Causes and remedial measures. *Global Disclosure of Economics and Business*, 3(2), 167-174. <https://doi.org/10.18034/gdeb.v3i2.161>
- [31]. Vu, H., Luo, J., Ye, B., Li, G., & Law, R. (2017). Evaluating museum visitor experiences based on user-generated travel photos. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 35(4), 493-506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2017.1363684>
- [32]. ZhenShan, X., Zhang, Z., Zhang, C., Xu, M., & Nan, D. (2019). Exploring the role of emotion in the relationship between museum image and tourists' behavioral intention: The case of three museums in Xi'an. *Sustainability*, 11(3), 559. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11030559>