

Evaluation of Barriers to Gilgit Baltistan's Travel & Tourism Industry: Pakistani Youth's Perception

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Abstract: Thousands of local and foreign tourists visit Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) which has huge tourist potential due to its unique beauty, but for being countryside area and new province, this region is facing different type of challenges and barriers towards its travel & tourism development. The current study intends to identify and evaluate multiple barriers to the development of GB's travel & tourism industry. Primary data was collected from Pakistani youth. The opinion of both men and women were sought. Later, the Grey Rational Analysis (GRA) model was used to analyse data and rank the barriers. The results showed that, absence of tourist information centres, limited and expensive flights and inability to regulate tourism & lack of effective tourism policy are key barriers hindering the development of GB. The results are important for GB's cultural & tourism department and for policy makers. Also, the results are important for the tour operators and the general public who want to visit GB.

Keywords: Gilgit Baltistan; Pakistan; travel and tourism; barriers; grey relational analysis

1. Introduction

Tourism is a social, cultural, and monetary factor that offers many benefits, including small businesses, economic benefits for attracting visitors from different places, and providing jobs for people working in the transport and hotel industry (Angela & Angelina, 2021). Further, tourism can lead to better the relation between countries or businesses by cultural exchange and improve the value of currency, for tourist it provides happiness, refreshment, knowledge, etc (Laksito & Yudiarta, 2021). Pakistan has potential in the tourism industry, having its variety of cultures, highest and snowy mountain ranges, beautiful lakes, rivers, cold and hot deserts and has especially Gilgit Baltistan (GB) which can satisfy the needs of domestic and overseas tourist (Arshad *et al.*, 2018). Gilgit Baltistan has its own beauty and rank as concerning national and international level, however its tourism industry not so developed yet because of some challenges and difficulties on the way of tourism and hospitality growth which are mainly highlighted in this study.

Even though GB has huge tourism potential, the tourist still faces different types of problems like lack of communication services, absence of tourist information centres, unavailability of relaxing benches, and lack of resting areas on scenic points (Nation, 2020). In the extreme north of Pakistan, the beautiful Skardu valley is located which path to some the highest mountain in the world including K2, K3 and Gasherbrum. These towering mountains attract lots of climbers,

visitors from different countries (Bukhari, 2019) if we talk from tourism perspective in Pakistan, Gilgit Baltistan is one of the most attractive parts of the country. But there are not many facilities, the hospitality of the people is amazing (Qureshi, 2013). Hussain (2021a) concluded that the beauty and serenity of this region being collapsed due to unregulated, unplanned and irresponsible tourism policy, which also the decrease flow of decent and nature loving tourists in Gilgit Baltistan. This study predicted that Gilgit-Baltistan is losing its advantage in the exchange of tourism and is becoming a centre of illegal and unfair business activities like other border areas of the country (Hussain, 2021a).

In some recent studies about tourism industry in GB Pakistan, it is seen that some criteria such as geographical, historical reviews and cultural traits of this region has been discussed (Hussain *et al.*, 2017). Most of the previous researches presented the potential for tourism, sustainable development and a list of leading challenges to the way of GB's travel & tourism growth by sharing their self-traveling experience and collecting local's opinions mainly including transportation problems, lack of hoteling, natural risk, lack of connectivity between valleys, lack of tourism planning, lack of medical facilities (Nation, 2020; Hussain, 2021a; Qureshi, 2013). Saqib *et al.* (2019) explored the impact of tourism on GB, through interviews and personal observation of local residents and tourists.

Many studies identified the challenges that the GB's tourism industry is facing. Some studies (Nabi *et al.*, 2019; Hussain, 2021a; Khan, 2021) highlighted natural risks and challenges towards tourism whereas others (Baig, 2017; Qureshi, 2013; Bukhari, 2019; Jabri, 2021; Khursid, 2003) highlighted the inability and lack of functional policy from the government side. Issues concerning social media marketing, safety and security issues have also been studied (Khan, 2021; Arshad *et al.*, 2018). It is obvious from the literature that there are many risks and challenges that the tourism industry of Pakistan, in general, and GB, in particular, is facing, however rarely efforts have been made to identify all important factors and issues followed by their scientific evaluation. Considering this gap in the literature, the current study identified the key challenges currently being faced by the Pakistani tourism industry from the online literature and then evaluates them against the GB tourism sector using the Grey Relational Analysis (GRA) method in light of the opinions collected from the Pakistani youth.

The rest of the study is organized as follows. The second section is on literature review. Here the important risks and challenges being faced by GB's tourism sector are identified. The third section is on research methodology where data collection strategy and data analysis technique (Grey Relational Analysis) are reported. The fourth section presents the results and their discussion while the last section presents conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature review

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) is Pakistan's fifth province, located in the north of Pakistan. Gilgit Baltistan is famous for its own cultural tourism and graceful views. Tourists visit Gilgit Baltistan to explore the beautiful plains (Astora Valley), the highest mountains (K2), and high-altitude plains (Deosai Plain). In 2019, according to statistics posted by PTDC-Pakistani Tourism Development Company, this area was visited by 1.72 million tourists, in fact, which is 3 times the number of tourists visited last year, and in 2021 the number of regional and foreign tourists is equal to 700,000 people. Tourists contributed up to 300 million rupees to the regional economy, and tourism accounts for 2.8% of the joint state GDP (Tabarak, 2019).

In 2021's summer season close to 700,000 local and foreign tourists and travellers visited GB (BR, 2021). The flow of foreign tourists decreased during the last years while the domestic tourist increased compared to previous years. The declining number of overseas tourists was seen due to the terrorism events, the poor security issue that damaged the tourism industry. Such uncertain situations in Pakistan have prevented the flow of overseas tourists towards northern-areas especially GB. The highest number of domestic visitors record in 2015 which shows a great change in people's perceptions about security. The promotion of domestic tourism was due to the new publishing reports, sharing scenic pictures on social media and print media.as statistical report by

Pakistan Association of Tourism, before the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US in September 2001, more than 20,000 foreign tourists used to visit Gilgit-Baltistan each year. The number of visitors decreased more than fivefold in 2002 following the 9/11 terrorist attack event in USA (Saqib *et al.*, 2019).

The tourism and hospitality industry in GB is growing day by day because of the new well security plan and tourists from different places want to visit this place of Pakistan. Pakistan is also a safe sound country in the world. Lots of local and foreign tourists want to explore the beauties of the different places of Pakistan. The amiable residents, heavenly scenery and charming waterfalls make this province a favourite destination for tourists from all over the world, the simplicity and harmony of the province are the enjoyment of the heart and soul. Hussain (2017) composed a list of top 7 key tourist places in GB in accordance to the tourist preferences. These are Hunza Valley, Skardu Valley, Nagar Valley, Khaplu valley, Shigar Valley, Gupis Valley, and Astore Valley. The map of GB is shown in Figure 1.

3. Research methodology

3.1 The research instrument

Based on the nineteen factors extracted from the literature (Table 1), a questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire had two parts; the first part aimed to collect the demographic information of the respondents and the second part contained key questions. The questions were like this: "I believe _____ is/are key barriers to the growth of Gilgit Baltistan's Travel & Tourism industry." Data was collected on 5-point Likert scale.

3.2 Data collection

In this study, Pakistani citizens and GB's residents were selected to evaluate the top-ranking risk and challenges towards travel and tourism in GB. Data was collected through an online questionnaire on 5-point Likert scale where 5 implies strongly agree and 1 implied strongly disagree. 36 respondents participated in the survey, however only 31 filled the questionnaire properly and thus the sample size was thirty-one. 21 of them were male and 10 were female. Most of the respondents were young people of Pakistan and GB with bachelor degree and work experience of

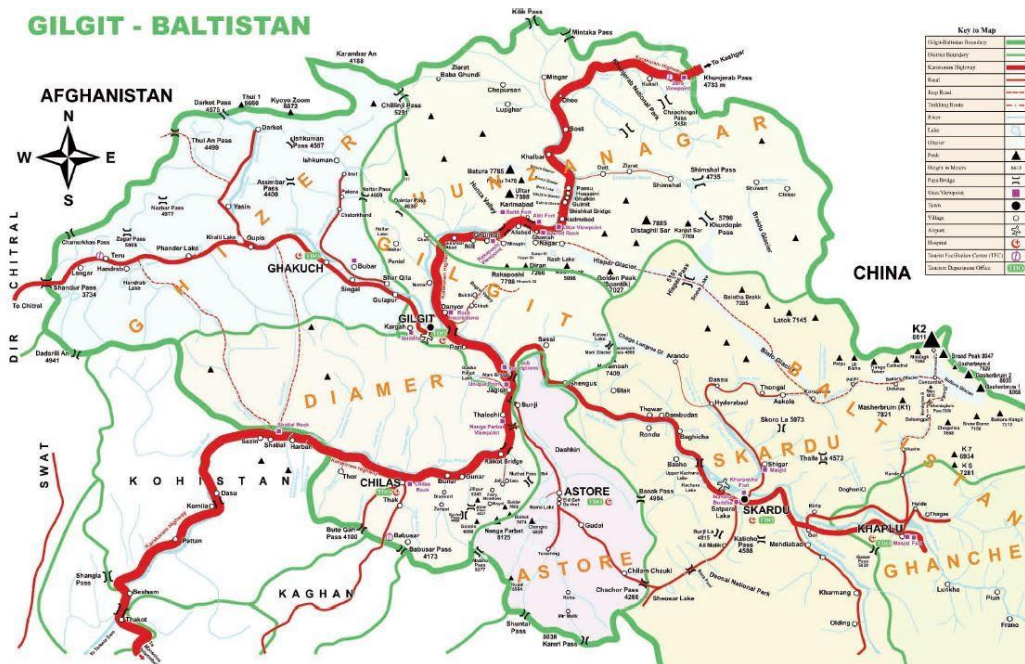


Figure 1. Map of Gilgit-Baltistan (Source: AP, 2015)

Table 1. Key challenges currently being faced by Pakistani tourism sector

Code	Factors	Literature
F1	Absence of tourist information centres	Sheikh (2020); Arshad et al., (2018)
F2	Harassment and misbehaviour with tourists	Iqbal (2020); Shahid (2019)
F3	Inability to regulate tourism & lack of effective tourism policy	Hussain (2021a); Hussain (2021b); Arshad et al., (2018)
F4	Lack of lactation rooms & child care facilities	Soomro (2015)
F5	Lack of hotels	Baig (2017); Qureshi (2013)
F6	Lack of variety in food	Hussain (2021b)
F7	Lack of sports & entertainment facilities	Baig (2017) ; Qureshi (2013)
F8	Land sliding	Nabi et al., (2019); Dawn (2021)
F9	Limited & expensive flights	Sheikh (2020); Jabri (2021)
F10	Overpricing or overcharging for tourists	Iqbal (2020); PK (2022)
F11	Poor communication infrastructure (Wi-Fi/internet)	APP (2018); Abbas (2021)
F12	Poor transportation infrastructure	Sheikh (2020); Hussain et al. (2017); Qureshi (2013)
F13	Increasing water & land pollution	Javaid (2018); Khan (2021)
F14	Poor governance & weak rule of law	Hussain (2021a); Jabri (2021)
F15	Shortage of electricity	Hussain (2021a)
F16	Shortage of clean drinking water	Hussain (2021a); Hussain (2021b)
F17	Safety & security concerns	Bukhari (2019); Jabri (2021); Khursid (2003)
F18	Unavailability of public toilets	Sheikh (2020)
F19	Weak tourism marketing	Khan (2021); Arshad et al. (2018); Ullah et al. (2021); Haq et al. (2008)

less than one year. Data was analysed using Deng's Grey Relational Analysis (GRA) model at MS Excel. Demographic features of respondents are given in Table 2.

3.3 Grey Relational Analysis model

Grey System Theory was proposed by Deng Julong in the 1980s (Deng, 1982). Grey System Theory classifies all systems of the world into three groups; black, white and grey. Black and white systems are the systems whose information is unknown and know respectively while grey is the system whose information is partially known (Javed & Cudjoe, 2021). Such systems can be found in every field. That's why the theory has seen applications in various fields e.g., aviation industry (Delcea *et al.*, 2021), energy sector (Wu *et al.*, 2019; Xie *et al.*, 2021), construction sector (Mahmoudi *et al.*, 2021a), healthcare sector (Delcea & Bradea, 2017; Javed & Liu, 2018), supply chain management (Mahmoudi *et al.*, 2021b), tourism sector (Javed *et al.*, 2020), among others. Grey Relational Analysis is an important part of Grey System Theory and is primarily used for ranking of factors. It can quantify the correlation between multiple independent and dependent variables in the studied field. For the comparison process it shows some degree of similarity to the referencing model and determine the best one. The GRA model is defined by its Grey Relational Grade, which is given by (Mahmoudi *et al.*, 2020):

$$\gamma(x_0x_i) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{k=1}^n \gamma(x_0(k), x_i(k)) \tag{1}$$

where,

$$\gamma(x_0(k), x_i(k)) = \frac{\min_k \min_i |x_0(k) - x_i(k)| + \xi \max_k \max_i |x_0(k) - x_i(k)|}{|x_0(k) - x_i(k)| + \xi \max_k \max_i |x_0(k) - x_i(k)|} \tag{2}$$

Table 2. The demographic profile of the respondents

Variable	Category	No.	%
Gender	Male	21	68
	Female	10	32
Education	Diploma	1	3
	Bachelor	20	65
	Master	5	16
	PhD	5	16
Experience	<1 year	18	58
	1 ~ 3 year	6	19
	4 ~ 6 year	2	6
	>6 year	5	16
Age	Less than 25	21	68
	25 ~ 30	3	10
	30 ~ 35	6	19
	35 ~ 40	1	3

Here $\gamma(x_0x_i)$ shows the degree of influence of the sequence x_i on reference sequence x_0 . The reference sequence can collect useful information about the variation of data points from other similar sequences. In the current study, $\xi = 0.5$. Analysing Grey Relational Grades and associated ranks allow us to understand which factors are more or less important than others.

4. Results and discussion

In the current section, the key challenges currently being faced by GB will be evaluated in light of the opinions of Pakistani youth. To the best of our knowledge, it's the first time Deng's GRA model has been used for the evaluation and ranking of this factors. The analyses were performed on MS Excel and the results are shown in Table 3 for both males and females.

As can be seen in the table, the factors are different in values for both male & female, that's we can see they all have different potential. According to GRA model, the absence of Tourist Information Centres (F1) gets the highest relative weight and got first rank in both among both male and female.it followed by Limited & Expensive Flights (F9) among male respondents, whether Overpricing or Overcharging for Tourists (F10) from female. The Poor Transportation Infrastructure (F12) among male respondents with most critical expectation, while the Inability to Regulate Tourism & Lack of Functional Tourism Policy (F3) from female got 3rd rank. Lack of Variety in Foods (F6), Lack of Sports & Entertainment Facilities (F7), Increasing Water & Land Pollution (F13), Poor Governance & Weak Rule of Law (F14), Shortage of Clean Drinking Water (F16), Safety & Security Concerns(F17) was ranked 18th, 10th, 16th, 11th, 14th, 17th respectively these factors got same rank among both male and female group respectively. Overall, the results are realistic and convincing. Details can be seen from Figures 2 and 3 as well.

As in the previous literature presenting most of the challenges and barriers towards GB's tourism industry, which means these mentioned barriers in our study have certainly negative impacts on its tourism industry. These facts also seem to relate to our findings in which our respondents including local residents and domestic tourists has agreed and support to top ranked factors as they are really most important for attracting more tourist and other factors got least rank as the government and civil society took notice on them and some are in process to completion.

5. Conclusion

This project has shown the perception of GB's residents about Identification and Ranking of Barriers to Gilgit Baltistan's Travel & Tourism Industry. Apart from local people, different

Table 3. Grey relational grades and ranking of the woes of Gilgit-Baltistan's tourism sector

	Male		Female	
	GRG	Rank	GRG	Rank
F1	0.844	1	0.850	1
F2	0.395	19	0.707	8
F3	0.689	7	0.773	3
F4	0.554	13	0.667	12
F5	0.532	15	0.757	4
F6	0.465	18	0.570	18
F7	0.616	10	0.697	10
F8	0.676	8	0.733	5
F9	0.825	2	0.723	7
F10	0.594	12	0.817	2
F11	0.757	4	0.617	15
F12	0.806	3	0.707	8
F13	0.521	16	0.607	16
F14	0.616	11	0.683	11
F15	0.729	6	0.733	5
F16	0.544	14	0.623	14
F17	0.478	17	0.573	17
F18	0.625	9	0.547	19
F19	0.729	5	0.647	13

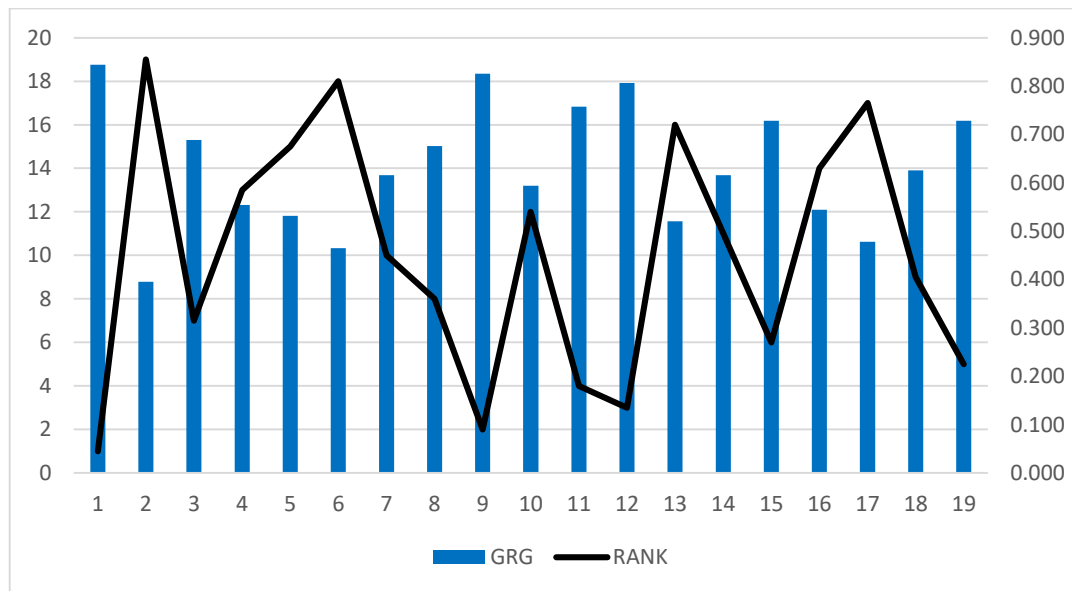


Figure 2. Grey relational evaluation of the factors (among male respondents)

respondents from all over the Pakistan were included in the questionnaire survey. Most of the respondents rated the basic and famous key factors impacting the growth of GB's travel and tourism industry. More over by this study we can concluded the mix behaviour and perception of local and domestic tourists in ranking the of top key barriers towards growth of GB's travel and tourism industry using the Grey Relational Analysis (GRA) method, a user-friendly multi-attribute

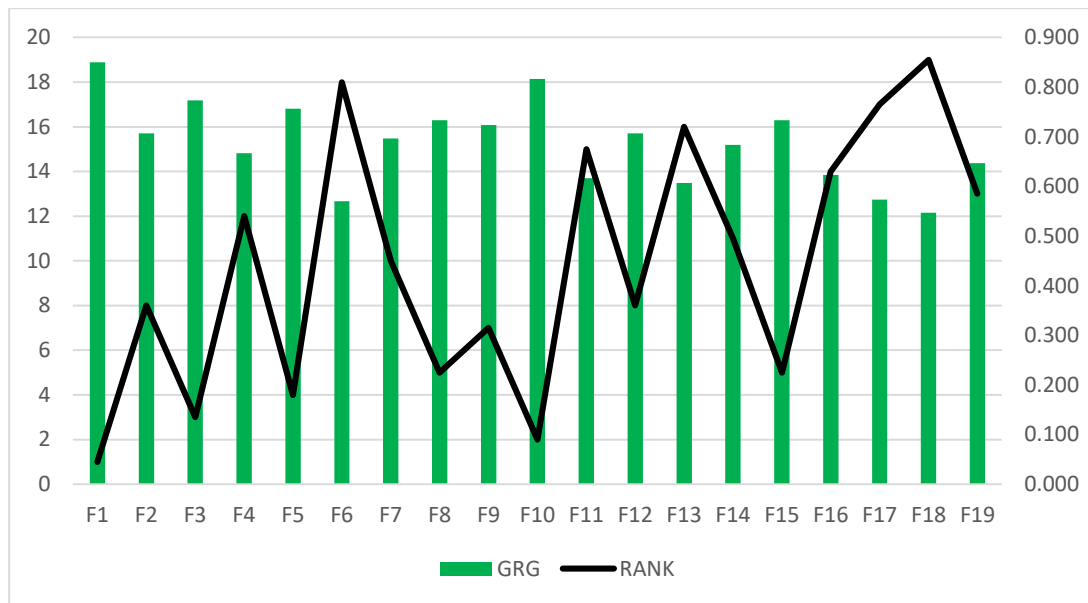


Figure 3. Grey relational evaluation of the factors (among female respondents)

decision-making technique, that helped in identifying most possible top expected ranked key factors or barriers for GB's tourism. These analyses discovered that there are many beautiful hotspot and potential tourist places for local and oversea tourists in GB, but because of lack of facilities and factors or criteria under discuss in this study are the most famous reason keeping tourist away from GB. By this study we can concluded that to improve the travel & tourism in GB is important to build tourist information centres. The tourism marketing strategies and communication (Wi-Fi/internet) system need to be updated to accommodate the awareness of this region to world tourist market. The study also emphasizes the need to increase efficiency of government regulated functional tourism policy, improving the hospitality industry, concerning safety, security and transportation system and GB provincial government and policy makers should improvise tourism policy by providing most needed facilities which meet the requirement of Gilgit Baltistan. On the basis of respondents opinion we concluded that the 19 factors based on most reasonable criteria has negative impact on the tourism industry.

The current study has certain limitations, on which future scholars may work. For instance, most of the respondents were young, thusn mature and expereined people can be considered in the future. Sample size can also be increased. Local people can be optimistic, thus in the future opinions of actual tourists, especially foreigners, should be considered before generalizing the findings of the current study.

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