

Abstract

This dissertation presents a forward-looking investigation into how virtual reality (VR) experiences shape the travel intentions of Bottom-of-the-Pyramid (BOP) consumers. BOP refers to individuals whose annual income typically falls below ₹6,00,000 INR annually. Although BOP consumers are often stereotyped as being unable to afford expensive products or leisure travel, recent studies show that they are increasingly inclined toward conspicuous consumption. Despite financial and social constraints, they aspire to travel.

While most prior studies on VR in tourism have focused on higher-income groups, the BOP segment, which represents nearly 37.8% of the global population, has been largely overlooked in scholarly research. This research addresses several interconnected dimensions of BOP consumers' travel intention. First, it examines the factors that shape travel intentions after a VR experience. Second, it examines the multifaceted effects of satisfaction derived from VR exposure and their intention to travel. Third, it examines how various leisure constraints interact with positive VR experiences in influencing travel intentions. Finally, it examines the role of VR in shaping consumer behavioral intentions toward low-cost and affordable rural tourism destinations, with a particular focus on how immersive VR content enhances the perceived value of such destinations. The thesis undertakes these four objectives using both qualitative and multi-study approaches. The findings identify perceived financial risk, employment risk and family dominance as key factors shaping cognitive constraints. The results indicate that these constraints overshadow the benefits of VR, ultimately influencing intentions to visit a destination. Additionally, satisfaction arising from the VR experience reveals mixed feelings effect, which further influence the intention to visit. The conclusions of this dissertation offer several academic, managerial and policy implications, enabling stakeholders and government agencies to design customized, segment-specific strategies for effectively engaging the BOP travelers.

Keywords: Leisure constraint theory, Virtual reality, Bottom of the pyramid consumer, Rural Tourism, Yield shift theory of satisfaction