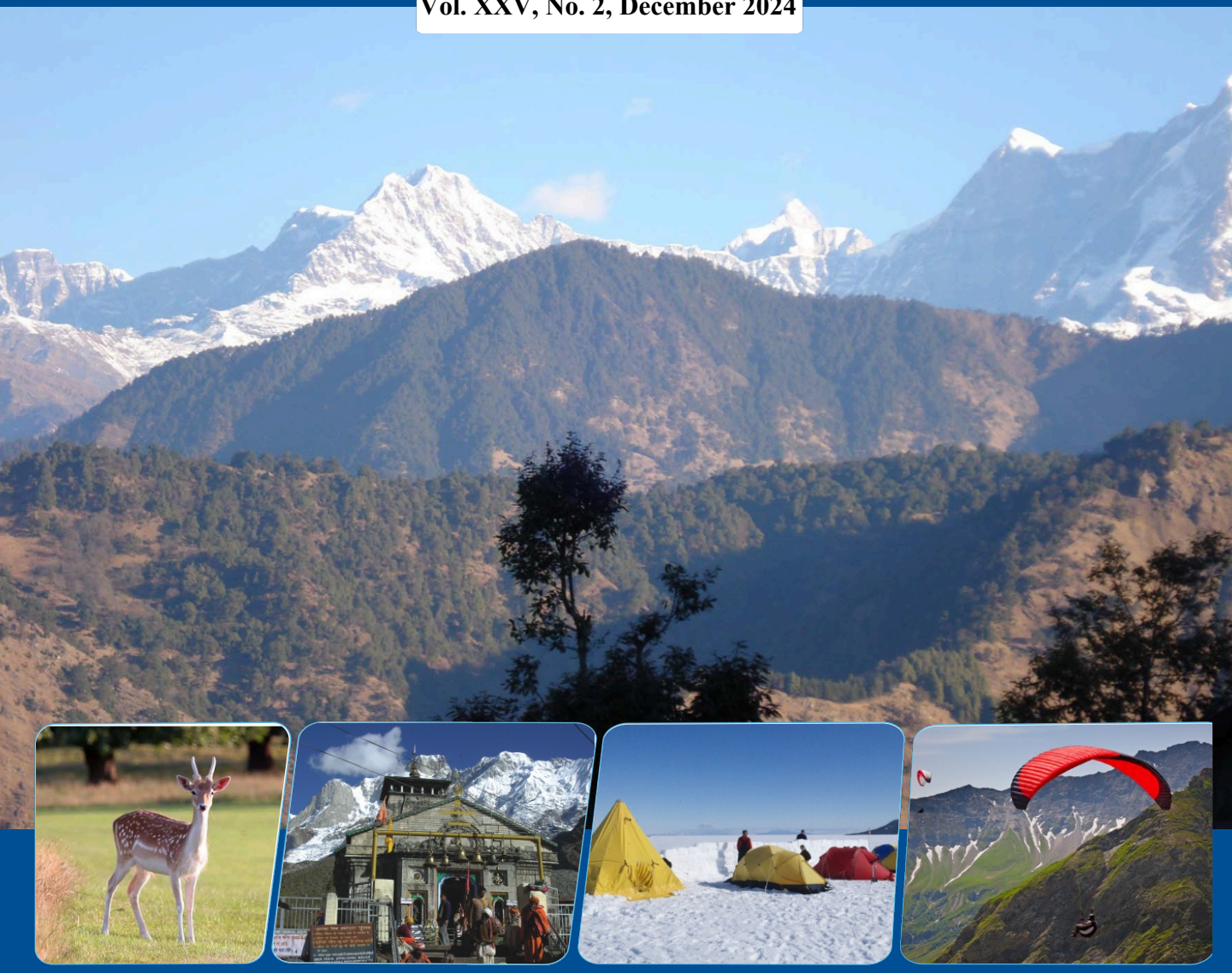
ISSN: 0972-7310

Journal of Tourism

An International Research Journal on Travel and Tourism

Vol. XXV, No. 2, December 2024



Centre for Mountain Tourism and Hospitality Studies (CMTHS)
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Journal of Tourism
Vol. XXV, No. 2, December 2024 ISSN No. 0972-7310

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Frequency and Subscriptions: Journal of Tourism is published biannual.

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JOURNAL OF TOURISM

(An International Research Journal on Travel and Tourism)

Vol. XXV, No. 2

DECEMBER 2024

ISSN No. 0972-7310

Centre for Mountain Tourism and Hospitality Studies (CMTHS)

Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University

(A Central University)

Srinagar (Garhwal) - 246174, Uttarakhand, India

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From the Desk of Editors

Dear Readers,

It gives us immense pleasure to present the **Journal of Tourism**, **December 2024 issue**. The **Journal of Tourism (JOT, ISSN No. 0972-7310)** is an international journal in the area of travel and tourism, published by the **Centre for Mountain Tourism & Hospitality Studies (CMTHS), School of Management, Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University (HNBGU)**, Uttarakhand, India. The journal is **bi-annual**, **peer reviewed** and publishes quality and innovative research spanning the broader dimensions of the tourism and hospitality sector.

The contemporary tourism landscape is witnessing profound transformations driven by technological innovation, sustainable development, changing traveller expectations, and increasing emphasis on inclusive and community-oriented growth. As destinations and tourism enterprises adapt to these emerging realities, research plays a vital role in generating evidence-based insights that inform policy, strengthen industry practices, and contribute to sustainable tourism development. This issue brings together empirical and review-based studies addressing service quality, destination marketing, sustainable rural tourism, gender empowerment, homestay development, tourism economics, and entrepreneurship, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of tourism research.

The journal received valuable contributions from academicians and researchers representing diverse institutions and research interests. Following a rigorous double-blind peer review process, the editorial board selected the following papers for publication in this issue.

The first paper, **"Evaluating Service Quality in Semi-High-Speed Trains: Evidence from the Vande Bharat Express,"** examines passengers' perceptions of service quality in India's flagship semi-high-speed rail service, providing valuable insights into customer satisfaction and service improvement in railway tourism and transport.

The second paper, **"Analyzing the Influence of Destination Image and Tourist Satisfaction on Tourist Loyalty: A Study of Indian Business Travelers Attending Exhibitions in Germany,"** explores how destination image and visitor satisfaction shape loyalty among Indian business travellers, offering important implications for destination marketing and business tourism.

The third paper, **"Sustainable Rural Tourism Development: An Examination of its Impact on Tourist Satisfaction and Loyalty,"** investigates the relationship between sustainable rural tourism practices, visitor satisfaction, and destination loyalty, emphasizing the significance of sustainability in enhancing long-term destination competitiveness.

The fourth paper, **"Gender Participation and Women's Empowerment through Tourism in Hill Villages of Uttarakhand: A Socio-Economic and Perceptual Study with Case Narratives,"** presents an in-depth analysis of women's participation in tourism, highlighting its contribution to socio-economic empowerment and community development in the Himalayan region.

The fifth paper, **"Socio-Economic Impacts of Homestay Tourism in Garhwal Himalaya of Uttarakhand, India,"** evaluates the role of homestay tourism in improving livelihoods, generating employment, and promoting sustainable rural development in mountain communities.

The sixth paper, **"Trends and Patterns of Tourism Sector, Economy and Employment in Sikkim,"** provides a comprehensive assessment of the evolving relationship between tourism growth, economic development, and employment generation, offering insights into tourism's contribution to regional development.

The seventh and final paper, **"Rural Entrepreneurship Training: A Critical Systematic Review of Concepts and Outcomes,"** presents a systematic review of rural entrepreneurship training literature, synthesizing existing knowledge while identifying future research directions and policy implications for entrepreneurship development in rural contexts.

We sincerely thank all the authors for their valuable scholarly contributions and express our deep appreciation to the reviewers for their constructive comments and dedicated efforts in maintaining the academic quality of the journal. We also acknowledge the continued guidance and support of the editorial advisory board, whose expertise contributes significantly to the journal's growth and academic excellence.

We hope this issue provides meaningful insights for researchers, educators, policymakers, and practitioners, while inspiring further scholarly inquiry into the dynamic and evolving field of tourism and hospitality. We look forward to your continued support and contributions in future issues of the Journal of Tourism.

Editor-in-Chief
Prof. R.K. Dhodi

Guest Editors (s)
Prof. Sandeep Kulshreshtha
Prof. Saurabh Kumar Dixit

JOURNAL OF TOURISM

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Evaluating Service Quality in Semi-High-Speed Trains: Evidence from the Vande Bharat Express

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KEYWORDS

Passenger Satisfaction, Food Service Quality, Staff Behavior, Cleanliness Standards, Vande Bharat Train, Kerala.

ABSTRACT

This study examines how food service quality, staff behavior, and cleanliness standards affect passenger satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train in Kerala. While service quality has become an increasingly important area of focus in rail transport, there is a lack of research specifically exploring its effects on customer satisfaction in the context of India's modern semi-high-speed trains. This study aims to bridge this gap by employing a mixed-methods approach to gather data from 390 passengers, offering a comprehensive analysis of the key factors that influence the travel experience. The results show that food quality, including taste, presentation, and variety, significantly affects passenger satisfaction. Positive interactions with service staff; characterized by courtesy and attentiveness, greatly enhance the travel experience. Cleanliness and hygiene are also shown to directly impact passengers' perceptions of safety and comfort. This study makes a unique contribution through its detailed analysis of these factors, offering actionable insights for railway authorities and service providers. By recommending enhancements in meal variety, staff training, and hygiene protocols, this research not only seeks to improve the service quality of the Vande Bharat Train but also contributes to the larger conversation about sustainable development in public transport. The findings align with India's goals of achieving safe, accessible, and sustainable transportation by 2030, underscoring the study's potential impact on policy and practice.

INTRODUCTION

As the world's most populous country, India is experiencing an increasing demand for travel options that are both efficient and affordable. Historically, Indian Railways has been seen as one of the most comfortable and economical ways to travel (Sanyal et al., 2018) and has made significant advancements in its services to better meet the needs of its passengers. Among these advancements, the Vande Bharat Express stands out as a flagship initiative, marking a significant step forward in semi-high-speed rail travel. This train is notable for its indigenous design and modern features, such as automatic doors, onboard Wi-Fi, and ergonomic seating, which collectively offer a contemporary and comfortable travel experience (Indian Railways, 2023; Sharma, 2019). However, ensuring high service quality, especially in areas like food, staff interactions, and cleanliness, remains a major challenge in maintaining passenger satisfaction and loyalty. Passengers have reported inconsistencies in service delivery, which can damage the train's reputation and affect ridership (Dandotiya et al., 2020; Kumari & Hussain, 2022). Addressing these challenges is essential for sustaining the success of this innovative rail service and enhancing the overall travel experience.

This research examines how the quality of food service, staff behavior, and cleanliness standards influence passenger satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train in Kerala. Although existing models like SERVQUAL have laid the groundwork for understanding service quality, there is a need to adapt these models to the specific context of semi-high-speed rail services, which present unique challenges and opportunities. Emerging theories addressing digital service delivery and sustainability can provide fresh insights into enhancing passenger satisfaction and service quality. This research aims to address these gaps by exploring how these frameworks can be expanded and integrated to improve service delivery on the Vande Bharat Train.

Recent studies emphasize the critical importance of service quality in enhancing customer satisfaction and commitment across different transportation modes (Zhong & Moon, 2020; Hallak et al., 2018). The SERVQUAL model, which centers on dimensions like tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1985), is widely used in transportation research to assess service quality (Geetika & Nandan, 2010). Despite its broad application, there is limited research on these dimensions in the context of semi-high-speed trains like the Vande Bharat, particularly regarding food service quality and passenger satisfaction in India (Devi Prasad & Raja Shekhar, 2010).

The quality of service on the Vande Bharat Train is crucial not only for passenger satisfaction but also for its broader implications, such as regional economic growth and sustainable transportation development. Improving service quality can increase ridership, contributing to the financial viability of rail networks and boosting regional tourism and economic development (Chua et al., 2015; Filimonau & Krivcova, 2017). Moreover, enhancing service quality aligns with India's broader sustainable development goals by encouraging a shift towards more sustainable modes of transportation, reducing carbon emissions, and improving connectivity between major urban centers and rural areas (Samsa, 2023; Kumar, 2016).

Despite the Vande Bharat Express's promising features, passengers often report issues with the consistency of food quality, staff behavior, and hygiene standards (Dandotiya et al., 2020; Mohd Zahari et al., 2011). Addressing these concerns is crucial for meeting passenger expectations and maintaining the train's status as a leading mode of transport in India. This study seeks to address the research gap by exploring the critical aspects of food service quality, staff behavior, and cleanliness standards on the Vande Bharat Train in Kerala. The research objectives are to analyze how these factors impact passenger satisfaction and provide actionable recommendations to improve the overall travel experience. By meeting these objectives, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of literature on service quality in rail travel and provide practical insights for railway authorities and service providers aiming to improve passenger satisfaction and operational excellence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in Rail Travel:

Service quality is a critical determinant of customer satisfaction and commitment in the transportation industry, particularly within the railway sector (Zhong & Moon, 2020). Numerous studies underscore the significance of service quality in boosting customer satisfaction (Geetika & Nandan, 2010). A commonly utilized framework for evaluating service quality is the SERVQUAL model, introduced by Parasuraman et al. (1985), which emphasizes dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These dimensions are essential for assessing and enhancing food service quality on trains like the Vande Bharat.

The RAILQUAL model, derived from SERVQUAL, has been adapted to assess service quality in railways (Devi Prasad & Raja Shekhar, 2010). It emphasizes reliability, tangibles, and assurance, but has been criticized for not fully addressing responsiveness and empathy, which are important for passenger satisfaction. This suggests a need to adapt these models to the specific context of semi-high-speed trains in India, where passenger expectations may vary due to cultural and regional differences.

Friman & Fellesson (2009) examined how passengers evaluate the quality of public transportation based on factors such as comfort, cleanliness, reliability, frequency, fares, and travel time. However, few studies specifically focus on food preferences, a crucial aspect of the Vande Bharat experience (Dandotiya et al., 2020). Hallak et al. (2018) noted that while service quality is linked to passenger satisfaction, recent studies have seldom incorporated alternative models to address emerging challenges (Gopal Vasanthi et al., 2023).

Rail Food Service Experience and Passengers' Expectations:

The quality of food service significantly influences the overall travel experience (Chua et al., 2015). Onboard dining experiences directly impact passenger satisfaction and their readiness to recommend the service to others (Han et al., 2019). Passengers evaluate food quality based on attributes such as color, presentation, taste, and overall quality (Mohd Zahari et al., 2011). Pricing sensitivity further complicates passenger satisfaction with food services, as perceived value for money is crucial (Petrick, 2005).

Agarwal (2008) emphasizes the importance of understanding passenger preferences and expectations regarding onboard food service. Demographics, cultural influences, and dietary needs play key roles in shaping customer satisfaction. Additionally, the quality of service, product tangibility, and pricing greatly affect passengers' travel preferences (Shen & Yahya, 2021). Offering diverse food options that cater to different cultural preferences can significantly enhance customer satisfaction (Filimonau & Krivcova, 2017). However, service delivery failures can negatively affect perceptions, highlighting the need for efficient and reliable food service operations (Chung & Hoffman, 1998).

Food Safety and Passenger Expectations:

Food safety and hygiene are essential components of passenger satisfaction. Service providers must comply with stringent food safety regulations to ensure that food is appealing, tasty, healthy, and fresh (Mulier et al., 2021). The confined spaces and limited facilities in rail travel present challenges in maintaining high hygiene standards (Kumar, 2016). Proper food handling, service delivery, and dining area cleanliness are vital to preventing foodborne illnesses and ensuring passenger well-being (Sax et al., 2007).

Implementing stringent hygiene practices can improve perceptions of food service quality. Effective cleaning and sanitation processes contribute to total quality management and enhance food safety systems (Baş et al., 2007). Recent research advocates for the integration of HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) systems to ensure the standards of food safety and compliance (Taylor & Taylor, 2004).

Staff Interaction and Customer Perception

Customer service interactions are crucial in shaping passenger perceptions. Staff behavior and professionalism greatly influence passenger satisfaction in the railway industry (Geetika & Nandan, 2010). Courteous and attentive staff are positively correlated with higher passenger satisfaction (Froehle, 2006; Liu & Jang, 2009; Shahzadi et al., 2018). Training staff to manage incidents diplomatically can prevent issues related to food and beverage services on the Vande Bharat Train from escalating (Orpen, 1994).

A customer-centric approach is essential for improving the overall travel experience and building loyalty (Tan & Chang, 2010). Addressing passengers' special needs and expectations is critical for maintaining high satisfaction levels (Chang & Chen, 2012). The Service-Dominant Logic framework, introduced by Vargo & Lusch (2004) emphasizes the co-creation of value through customer-staff interactions, which is increasingly relevant in enhancing customer satisfaction.

Theoretical Frameworks in Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction:

A robust theoretical foundation is necessary for understanding service quality and customer satisfaction in rail travel. The SERVQUAL model and its adaptation, the RAILQUAL model, offer valuable insights into evaluating service quality. However, the applicability of these models to semi-high-speed trains needs further exploration to address the unique challenges in this context.

Recent advancements in service quality models have included technology-driven aspects of service delivery. For example, the e-SERVQUAL model considers online elements of service quality, which is pertinent given the digital enhancements on trains like Vande Bharat (Gummerus et al., 2004). These models can provide deeper insights into passenger expectations in modern rail services.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Service Quality:

Incorporating insights from marketing, psychology, and operations management can provide a comprehensive understanding of service quality. Marketing theories, such as the Service-Dominant Logic, emphasize co-creating value and the importance of a customer-centric approach (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Psychological theories, including the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), help explain how passengers form satisfaction judgments. Operations management frameworks offer strategies for optimizing service processes, such as lean management principles to enhance service consistency (Hines et al., 2004).

Recent studies advocate for adopting a Total Quality Management (TQM) approach in railway services, integrating quality control measures with customer feedback to drive continuous

improvement (Oakland, 2014). Additionally, the Balanced Scorecard approach (Kaplan & Norton, 1992) can be applied to align operational strategies with passenger satisfaction goals, ensuring comprehensive service quality management.

Identifying Research Gaps:

Although there is extensive literature on service quality and customer satisfaction, several significant research gaps persist that this study intends to address.

Few studies have explored the unique challenges of maintaining service quality in semi-high-speed trains like the Vande Bharat, particularly in emerging markets such as India. Existing models often overlook the impact of cultural and regional factors on passenger expectations and satisfaction, a gap this study seeks to fill. The role of digital enhancements and technology-driven service models in shaping passenger experiences remains under explored, especially in the context of rail travel. Although interest in sustainable transportation is growing, few studies have integrated sustainability into the evaluation of service quality and its influence on passenger satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design, using a structured questionnaire to collect data from passengers travelling on the Vande Bharat Train in Kerala, India. Kerala was chosen due to its status as the region with the highest traffic in the country, boasting a travel occupancy rate of 177.45%. This high occupancy rate underscores the significance of service quality on such a heavily utilized route and provides a valuable context for assessing passenger satisfaction.

Initially, a total of 410 passengers were surveyed. After data cleaning and validation, 390 valid responses were included in the analysis, resulting in a 95% response rate. This sample size is statistically significant and provides a solid foundation for generalizing the findings. The sampling strategy was designed to include passengers from diverse demographic backgrounds to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting satisfaction.

The questionnaire was structured into two parts. The first part focused on demographic information, which includes age, gender, and source of income, and the second portion was concerned with food and beverage service and passenger satisfaction. The questionnaire was developed based on a thorough literature review to ensure the inclusion of relevant and valid constructs. The design of the questionnaire was informed by the SERVQUAL and RAILQUAL models to ensure comprehensive coverage of service quality dimensions. Academic experts reviewed the questionnaire to confirm content validity, ensuring that the questions accurately represent the constructs being measured.

A pilot study involving 40 participants was conducted to assess the clarity and relevance of the survey items. Feedback from this pilot study resulted in refinements to question wording and format, ensuring that the final questionnaire was easily understood by participants.

The survey was administered in both English and Malayalam to accommodate language preferences and enhance response accuracy. Participants were made aware of the study's objectives and gave informed consent before taking part adhering to ethical research practices. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 29.0.1, applying various statistical techniques to examine the relationships between service quality dimensions and passenger satisfaction:

Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the constructs, with scores indicating high reliability for food quality ($\alpha = .799$), personnel service delivery ($\alpha = .890$), and food safety, cleanliness, and hygiene ($\alpha = .849$).

Descriptive Statistics: Mean scores were calculated to describe demographic data and assess overall satisfaction levels.

Regression Analysis: Multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the impact of independent variables (food quality, service standards, food safety, hygiene, and price) on the dependent variable (passenger satisfaction). This analysis helps identify the most significant predictors of satisfaction.

One-Way ANOVA: A one-way ANOVA was performed to evaluate differences in satisfaction levels among various demographic groups, offering insights into how different passenger segments perceive service quality.

Chi-Square Test: Chi-square tests were utilized to explore the relationships between categorical variables, such as demographic factors and satisfaction ratings, with a particular focus on staff behavior and cleanliness standards.

Development of Hypothesis:

The research seeks to explore the relationship between different service quality factors and passenger satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train in Kerala. The study focuses on three primary dimensions of service quality: food service quality, service staff behavior and interactions, and cleanliness and hygiene standards. To guide this investigation, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant positive relationship between food service quality and customer satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train in Kerala.

Objective Alignment: This hypothesis supports the objective of assessing how different aspects of food service, such as taste, presentation, price, and freshness, affect passenger satisfaction. The research aims to determine whether enhancements in these areas can improve the overall customer experience.

Hypothesis (H2): Service staff behavior and interactions significantly influence customer satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train in Kerala.

Objective Alignment: This hypothesis aligns with the objective of evaluating how service staff behavior affects passenger satisfaction. The study investigates factors such as timeliness, quality of service delivery, responsiveness to special needs, and overall staff performance.

Hypothesis (H3): Cleanliness and hygiene standards have a significant effect on customer satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train in Kerala.

Objective Alignment: This hypothesis aligns with the objective of assessing the impact of cleanliness and hygiene on passenger satisfaction. It emphasizes aspects such as the cleanliness of dining areas, utensils, and food handling practices, which are vital for ensuring passenger well-being and satisfaction.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

In the initial phase of data collection for the Vande Bharat Train study, a sample comprising 390 passengers was surveyed, encompassing a broad spectrum of demographics. Gender distribution showed 56% male and 44% female respondents, indicating a relatively balanced representation. Age demographics revealed that 48% of passengers belonged to the above-45 age group, with 30% falling within the 35-45 age bracket, 18% in the 25-35 range, and 4% below 25 years old, depicting a diverse age distribution. Additionally, respondents were categorized based on the frequency of train travel, with 35% traveling rarely, 50% occasionally and 15% frequently. Occupation-wise, passengers hailed from varied backgrounds: 25% were self-employed, 30% held government jobs, 15% were daily wage earners, 20% were business owners, and 5% were farmers, with the remaining 5% categorized into miscellaneous occupations. This amalgamation of demographics underscores the heterogeneous nature of passengers traveling on the Vande Bharat Train, highlighting a diverse mix of gender, age, frequency of train travel, and occupational backgrounds.

Regression Analysis of Food Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction:

Table 1: Estimation of Standard Deviation – Model Summary of Customer Satisfaction and Food Service Quality

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.578[a]	.334	.328	.619

a. Predictors: (Constant), presentation, taste of food, price of food, Freshness of food

The multiple correlation coefficient (R) measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the independent variables (presentation, taste of food, price of food, freshness of food) and the dependent variable (customer satisfaction).

An R value of 0.578 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables.

Table 2: Variation Analysis – ANOVA of Customer Satisfaction and Food Service Quality

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	74.133	4	18.533	48.376	.000[b]
	Residual	147.497	385	.383		
	Total	221.631	389			

a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), presentation, taste of food, price of food, Freshness of food

The ANOVA table shows that the regression model as a whole is statistically significant in explaining the variance in the dependent variable (customer satisfaction) (F=48.376; df=4, 385; p=0.000). The predictor variables (presentation, taste of food, price of food, freshness of food) collectively contribute to explaining the variability in food variety ratings among the passengers.

Table 3: Regression Coefficients of Customer Satisfaction and Food Service Quality						
Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.617	.241		2.555	.011
	taste of food	.222	.067	.196	3.315	.001
	Freshness of food	.145	.086	.108	1.686	.093
	price of food	.197	.074	.153	2.647	.008
	presentation	.232	.037	.287	6.203	.000
a. Dependent Variable: customer satisfaction						

Based on the coefficients obtained in the provided regression analysis, the regression equation formed to predict customer satisfaction is:

Customer Satisfaction = 0.617 + 0.222 Taste of Food + 0.145 Freshness of Food + 0.197 Price of Food + 0.232 Presentation. From the coefficients provided, it can be observed that three predictor variables are significant at the 0.05 level (Taste of Food, Price of Food, and Presentation).

The coefficient for Taste of Food shows that a one-unit increase in the perceived taste of food corresponds to a 0.222-unit increase in customer satisfaction. The t-value for Taste of Food (3.315) is highly significant ($p = 0.001$), indicating a statistically significant relationship between taste and customer satisfaction. This suggests that enhancing the taste of food offerings is likely to boost customer satisfaction.

Similarly, the coefficient for Price of Food indicates that a one-unit increase in the perceived price of food results in a 0.197-unit increase in customer satisfaction. The t-value associated with Price of Food (2.647) is significant ($p = 0.008$), suggesting a statistically significant relationship between price and customer satisfaction. This implies that customers are likely to experience greater satisfaction if they perceive the food as offering good value for the price.

The coefficient for Presentation shows that a one-unit increase in the perceived presentation of food leads to a 0.232-unit increase in customer satisfaction. The t-value associated with Presentation (6.203) is highly significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the relationship between food presentation and customer satisfaction is statistically significant. This suggests that improving the visual presentation of food can positively impact customer satisfaction levels.

These findings indicate that the taste of food, price of food, and presentation are significant predictors of customer satisfaction. Enhancing these elements of food service is likely to result in higher levels of customer satisfaction. Therefore, the hypothesis "There is no significant relationship between food service quality and customer satisfaction" is not supported by the data.

One Way ANOVA for Customer Satisfaction and Service Staff behaviour and interactions

Table 4: One Way ANOVA (Customer Satisfaction and Service Staff behaviour and interactions						
ANOVA						
Name of the Factors		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Food Delivery on time	Between Groups	20.960	3	6.987	13.439	.000
	Within Groups	200.671	386	.520		
	Total	221.631	389			
Quality of Service delivery	Between Groups	23.809	3	7.936	15.486	.000
	Within Groups	197.822	386	.512		
	Total	221.631	389			
Responsiveness of special needs	Between Groups	20.620	3	6.873	13.199	.000
	Within Groups	201.011	386	.521		
	Total	221.631	389			
Over all service of service staff	Between Groups	20.665	3	6.888	13.230	.000
	Within Groups	200.966	386	.521		
	Total	221.631	389			

The table presents the results of One-Way ANOVA tests examining the relationship between customer satisfaction and various aspects of service staff behavior and interactions, including Food Delivery on Time, Quality of Service Delivery, Responsiveness to Special Needs, and Overall Service of Service Staff. The ANOVA results clearly demonstrate that each of these aspects significantly affects customer satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train.

The significant p-values ($p < 0.001$) indicate statistically significant differences in customer satisfaction ratings across different levels of each aspect of service staff behavior. This suggests that service staff behavior and interactions are key factors in shaping passengers' perceptions of satisfaction. Therefore, the null hypothesis for all aspects of service staff behavior is rejected, indicating that service staff behavior and interactions have a significant influence on customer satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train.

The mean represents the average score for each aspect of cleanliness. The mean cleanliness score for the dining area is 3.92, for utensils is 3.88, and for food handling is 3.81. A higher mean indicates

a higher average perception of cleanliness in that particular aspect.

Chi-square Test for Cleanliness and hygiene standards

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for the Cleanliness and hygiene standards					
Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Cleanliness of dining area	390	3.92	.542	2	5
Cleanliness of utensils	390	3.88	.505	2	5
Food handling	390	3.81	.587	1	5

Table 6: Chi- square test for the Cleanliness and hygiene standards			
Test Statistics			
	Cleanliness of dining area	Cleanliness of utensils	Food handling
Chi-Square	539.497[a]	563.292[a]	666.128[b]
df	3	3	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 97.5.			
b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 78.0.			

The Chi-square test results reveal statistically significant associations between each aspect of cleanliness (cleanliness of the dining area, utensils, and food handling) and customer satisfaction. The p-values for all three tests are below 0.05, providing strong evidence against the null hypothesis of no association.

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between cleanliness factors and customer satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train.

DISCUSSIONS

The regression analysis results demonstrate that food service quality significantly impacts customer satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train. The moderate positive correlation coefficient indicates that factors such as food presentation, taste, price, and freshness collectively influence passengers' dining experiences. This finding aligns with existing literature in the hospitality industry, which emphasizes the importance of these factors in driving customer satisfaction. The key predictors identified; taste of food, price, and presentation, reinforce previous research, highlighting their crucial role in shaping positive passenger perceptions.

Service Staff Behavior and Interactions

The One-Way ANOVA tests demonstrate that service staff behavior and interactions are crucial in determining passenger satisfaction. Factors like timely food delivery, service quality, responsiveness to special requests, and overall staff performance significantly affect customer satisfaction ratings. These findings align with earlier research, emphasizing that positive interactions with service staff can greatly enhance the overall customer experience and satisfaction levels.

Cleanliness and Hygiene Standards

The significant associations identified through Chi-square tests further highlight the importance of maintaining high cleanliness and hygiene standards on the Vande Bharat Train. As noted in previous studies, the results show that passengers' perceptions of cleanliness directly affect their satisfaction and overall travel experience. Upholding high standards of cleanliness not only enhances comfort but also fosters a sense of safety and well-being among passengers.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Contributions

This study enhances the theoretical understanding of service quality by illustrating how established models like SERVQUAL and RAILQUAL can be applied to semi-high-speed rail contexts. It emphasizes the necessity for adapting these models to account for regional nuances and the interaction between sensory, economic, and relational factors that influence passenger satisfaction.

Practical Contributions

The findings offer valuable insights for railway authorities and service providers:

- **Service Enhancement:** Implementing targeted improvements in food quality, service staff training, and cleanliness standards can directly affect passenger satisfaction, providing a strategic pathway for achieving operational excellence.
- **Policy Development:** The insights from this study can aid in shaping policy decisions, guiding investments in infrastructure, service quality, and staff development to promote sustainable growth and enhance passenger satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to improve customer satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train:

1. Railway authorities should establish regular monitoring systems to evaluate food service quality, service staff behavior, and cleanliness standards onboard the train. Feedback mechanisms, such as passenger surveys or suggestion boxes, should be employed to collect input from passengers and identify areas that require improvement.
2. Training programs should be developed to improve the skills and competencies of onboard staff, focusing on areas such as customer service, food handling, and cleanliness protocols. These programs should emphasize fostering positive interactions with passengers and consistently maintaining high service standards throughout the journey.
3. Railway authorities should collaborate with food vendors to diversify menu offerings and ensure the availability of high-quality, nutritious meals onboard the train. Regular quality checks and adherence are essential.
4. Investments should be made in upgrading onboard facilities, including dining areas, utensils, and food handling equipment, to ensure cleanliness and hygiene standards are met. Accessibility features should also be incorporated to accommodate passengers with special needs.
5. Transparent communication channels should be established to keep passengers informed about any changes or disruptions to onboard services, ensuring they are well-informed and can plan accordingly. Timely updates regarding food availability, service delays, or facility maintenance can help manage passenger expectations and mitigate dissatisfaction.
6. Railway authorities should actively engage with passengers to solicit feedback, address concerns, and incorporate passenger preferences into service improvements. Regular communication channels, such as social media platforms or dedicated customer service hotlines.
7. Collaboration with local communities, food vendors, and hospitality partners can enhance the overall passenger experience on the Vande Bharat Train. Partnerships with local suppliers can promote the use of fresh, regional ingredients and support sustainable food sourcing practices.

BROADER CONTEXT AND IMPLICATIONS

Global Comparison

The Vande Bharat Train marks a significant advancement in Indian rail travel by offering semi-high-speed services that enhance passenger experiences through modern amenities and efficient operations. To understand the Vande Bharat Train's place in the global rail industry, it is essential to compare its service quality and passenger satisfaction with similar semi-high-speed trains worldwide, such as Japan's Shinkansen, China's Fuxing trains, and Europe's TGV and ICE services.

Japan's Shinkansen is celebrated for its punctuality, safety, and exceptional service quality, setting a global standard for high-speed rail systems. Its emphasis on customer service, innovative technology, and seamless integration with urban transportation networks leads to high passenger satisfaction and loyalty (Kurosaki, 2018). Similarly, China's Fuxing trains boast advanced features, including high-speed connectivity and spacious interiors, prioritizing efficiency and passenger comfort (Liu et al., 2020).

European trains like France's TGV and Germany's ICE focus on environmental sustainability and regional connectivity, aligning with broader objectives of reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable transportation (Smith & Jones, 2019). These systems offer valuable insights into balancing technological innovation with customer-centric service delivery.

In comparison, the Vande Bharat Train incorporates many of these global best practices, such as advanced technology, ergonomic design, and a focus on passenger amenities. However, there are opportunities for enhancement in areas such as maintaining consistency in service delivery, integrating with regional transport networks, and utilizing technology to improve passenger engagement.

This comparison highlights the potential of the Vande Bharat Train to serve as a model for other emerging markets aiming to improve their rail systems and emphasizes the need for continuous improvement to meet international standards.

Long-term Impacts

Enhancing service quality on the Vande Bharat Train has significant long-term implications for regional economic development, sustainability, and public transportation policies in India. High-quality rail services can drive economic growth by improving regional connectivity, facilitating tourism, and attracting investment in

infrastructure development (Chaudhary et al., 2021).

Improved service quality leads to increased ridership, which supports the financial sustainability of the rail network and reduces reliance on less sustainable modes of transportation, such as road and air travel. This shift aligns with India's broader sustainable development goals, focusing on reducing carbon emissions and promoting energy-efficient transportation solutions (Rao & Kumar, 2023).

Enhanced rail services can influence public transportation policies by emphasizing the need for integrated, multi-modal transport systems that prioritize accessibility, affordability, and environmental sustainability. Policymakers can leverage the success of the Vande Bharat Train to advocate for investments in similar projects across the country, driving innovation and setting new standards for service excellence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study highlights the crucial impact of food service quality, service staff behavior, and cleanliness standards on customer satisfaction aboard the Vande Bharat Train in Kerala. The findings emphasize the need for ongoing efforts to improve these aspects of onboard services to ensure a positive passenger experience. By prioritizing improvements in food service quality, service staff training, and cleanliness protocols, railway authorities can elevate passenger satisfaction levels and bolster the reputation of the Vande Bharat Train as a premier travel option.

It is important to acknowledge several limitations of this study. Firstly, the research was conducted within a specific context, the Vande Bharat Train in Kerala; which limits the generalizability of the findings to other train services or regions. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from passengers, which may be influenced by biases such as social desirability or recall bias. Future research could benefit from incorporating a broader range of methodologies, such as observational studies or qualitative interviews, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing passenger satisfaction. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the factors affecting customer satisfaction on the Vande Bharat Train and lays a solid foundation for future research in this area.

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CMTHS

JOURNAL OF TOURISM
Vol. XXV, Issue 2 (December 2024), 12-23

Analyzing the Influence of Destination Image and Tourist Satisfaction on Tourist Loyalty: A Study of Indian Business Travelers Attending Exhibitions in Germany

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KEYWORDS

Destination image, Satisfaction, Indian Business tourist, Tourist loyalty

ABSTRACT

International exhibitions emerge as a valuable platform to enhance destination image and competitive edge. This study aims to investigate the impact of both cognitive and affective perceptions on destination image and their effects on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Collaborating with industry associations and chambers, the study employed a convenience sampling method to gather responses from Indian business tourists who visited various international exhibitions in prominent business hubs in Germany. For the current study, a total of 210 respondents were surveyed for data. The structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach was followed in checking the relationship between the latent variables and hypotheses testing. The results indicated a direct correlation between cognitive and affective images, affirming the development of the destination image. Both cognitive and affective images positively influenced satisfaction, consequently predicting tourist loyalty. Furthermore, the link between destination image and loyalty demonstrated that the affective image directly influenced tourist loyalty. While the cognitive image did not directly relate to tourist loyalty, the authors observed its indirect influence through affective image and satisfaction. The study findings contribute to a deeper comprehension of the decision-making process behind Indian business tourists' destination preferences and loyalty. Additionally, it offers valuable insights for the German Government, the German Tourism Organizations, and tourism operators.

INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism industry stands as a significant and promising driver of global economic development. It accounted for 7.6% of the worldwide GDP, marking a 22% increase from 2021 and trailing just 23% below the 2019 levels (WTTC, 2022). In 2021, this sector generated 22 million new jobs, reflecting a 7.9% rise and a decrease of merely 11.4% from 2019. Despite an 81.9% surge in international visitor spending in 2022, it remains 40.4% lower than the figures recorded in 2019 (WTTC, 2022). In India, the tourism sector made a direct contribution of INR 15,687.9 billion (equivalent to $199.6 billion), experiencing an annual change of +89.2%, and contributing to an economic change of +6.8% (WTTC, 2022). As per the Bureau of Immigration's 2022 report from the Government of India, the count of outbound Indian tourists stands at 8,551,315, reflecting a 17.23% increase from the previous year. Notably, the number of Indian outbound tourists was 1.94 million in 1991, climbing to 8.55 million in 2021, demonstrating a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.90%. Predominantly, the major categories for outbound tourists encompassed the Indian Diaspora

(43.9%) and Leisure, Holiday and recreation (32.8%), followed by tourists engaged in Business and professional pursuits (17.3%), Educational endeavors (5.2%), and Other Purposes (0.8%) (Bureau of Immigration, Government of India's report 2022).

The Federal Republic of Germany (hereafter referred to as Germany), getting benefits continuously from the growing Indian outbound business tourism. India has been the major market for German tourism for the past few years. According to the report of the Bureau of Immigration, Govt. of India, in 2022 almost 119635 Indian outbound tourists visited Germany and among these tourists, 17% are going for business purposes.

Although Germany boasts unique attractions and experiences, and there has been a noticeable surge in tourist numbers from India to Germany, there remains a dearth of research investigating the perspectives of Indian business tourists regarding Germany as a business destination. Studies such as Ko and Yu's (2012) exploration of Chinese tourists' views on medical tourism, Kim et al.'s (2015) comparison of attitudes among Taiwanese and Chinese tourists, and Lee et al.'s (2011)investigation into tour quality's impact on tourist loyalty exist.

In a comprehensive review, Kwiatkowski and Jensen (2019) identified 40 previous studies investigating the relationship between events and destination image. Their analysis revealed those events wield substantial influence over a host destination's image by bolstering awareness, and familiarity, and altering existing stereotypes while fostering credible links and legitimacy. Moreover, they emphasized the pivotal role of the event experience quality, encompassing diverse event programs and service delivery processes (Lee et al., 2018; Jin, Lee, & Lee, 2015; Zhang et al., 2011), as an antecedent to shaping the destination's image. Further studies indicate that hosting events often trigger enhancements in a host destination's infrastructure, augmenting its appeal, overall image, and competitive edge (Lai, 2018; Page & Getz, 2016).

The particular correlations among the image of the destination, satisfaction of tourists, and their loyalty, specifically among Indian business travelers in Germany remain inadequately addressed. Understanding a traveler's viewpoint of a destination not only impacts their travel choices but also plays a vital role in determining their loyalty (Gartner & Tasci, 2007; Lysonski & Woodside, 1989). Consequently, marketers promoting German destinations might have a strong interest in understanding how the destination's image influences the perceptions and behaviors of Indian tourists visiting Germany.

Hence, this study aimed to construct a framework elucidating the interplay among destination image, business tourist satisfaction, and business tourist loyalty. It particularly examined the dual facets of destination image like cognitive and affective and scrutinized how these aspects shape tourist satisfaction and loyalty. By exploring these dimensions, the study aimed to offer crucial insights for destination marketers, enabling the development of strategic positioning plans beneficial for the German tourism industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Destination Image: The perception of a destination, known as a destination image, stands as a critical determinant influencing tourists' decisions before, during, and after their travels (Martín & Beerli 2004; Gartner & Tasci, 2007). The definition of destination image primarily revolves around a person's comprehensive perception of a place (McCleary & Baloglu, 1999). More contemporary perspectives view destination image as "an amalgamation of beliefs and impressions formed through the processing of information from diverse sources, shaping a mental representation of a destination's attributes, benefits, and distinct influence" (Zhang et al., 2014). This definition acknowledges the multifaceted nature of destination image, encompassing affective and cognitive components, and highlights the process of its formation through the interplay between these elements.

The perception of a destination holds immense sway over a traveller's decision-making process when choosing where to go (Stylidis & Iordanova, 2019; Kelly et al., 2018). This preference arises because many travelers rely heavily on their perceptions of a place rather than solely on factual data when making travel choices (Kim & Jeong, 2019; Lehto et al., 2010). Consequently, it becomes crucial to actively manage, evaluate, and enhance a destination's image to attract and retain visitors (Mules et al.,

2003; Kwiatkowski & Jensen, 2019). To achieve this, destination marketers must craft strategic approaches, potentially incorporating events, to continually uplift a destination's image. Events have taken on a pivotal role as shapers of a host destination's image in contemporary times (Jensen & Kwiatkowski, 2019). However, this relationship hinges partly on the magnitude and renown of an event, with more esteemed and widely recognized events wielding a greater influence on the host destination's image (Deng et al., 2015).

Traditionally, studies have mainly concentrated on the cognitive aspect when considering a destination's image. However, recent research has emphasized the importance of jointly examining both affective and cognitive aspects to comprehensively evaluate destination image, suggesting that the presence of both aspects might properly elucidate this construct (Yoon & Kim, 2003; del Bosqueand & San Martín, 2008).The cognitive component pertains to an individual's perceptions or understanding of a tourist destination's characteristics or features (Baloglu, 2000; Ryan & Pike, 2004). In contrast, the affective dimension involves an individual's emotional response or feelings toward the tourist place (Brinberg & Baloglu, 1997)

Researchers widely agree that the cognitive component serves as a precursor to affective evaluation (McCleary & Baloglu, 1999; Gartner, 1994; Baloglu, 2000). More recent studies have confirmed the association between affective and cognitive images using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Andereck & Vogt, 2003, Lin et al., 2007).

Cognitive destination image pertains to an individual's understanding and subsequent perception regarding the qualities and features of a tourist place (Go & Govers, 2005; Chiu et al., 2016). The cognitive aspect of the image is shaped by visitors' assessments of the environmental setting, the characteristics of resources, and tourist attractions within the destination. These encompass natural and social aspects, service standards, transportation systems, local cuisine, and amenities essential for sustaining the destination and catering to visitors' fundamental requirements (Mavondo et al., 2017; Qu & Tavitiyaman, 2013).

The affective image element pertains to a person's emotions, perceptions, opinions, and emotional reactions regarding a tourist place (Stylidis et al., 2017; Wang & Shani, 2011). Describing a destination's affective image might involve terms like stimulating, enjoyable, thrilling, and calming (Jahari & Chew, 2014; Stylidis et al., 2017; Ananzeh & Chiu, 2012).

Elements constituting the cognitive image, as identified by Stylos et al. (2016), incorporate the natural surroundings, well-developed infrastructure, political steadiness, enticing tourist offerings, and destination circumstances encompassing pleasant accommodations, personal safety, security, and cost-effectiveness. Previous research indicates that affective image is significantly influenced by cognitive image. Consequently, as per Li et al. (2010) the cognitive image acts as a precursor to the affective image component. Therefore, the first hypothesis was formulated.

H1. The affective image is significantly influenced by the cognitive image

Tourist Satisfaction: Satisfaction stands as one of the extensively explored variables within tourism literature. It represents the evaluation a tourist makes after they visit a destination (Ryan, 1995). Academics offer varying definitions of satisfaction, generally concurring that it is a multifaceted concept encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychological and physiological elements (Suhartanto, 2018). While satisfaction is closely related to service quality, it differs in essence. Satisfaction pertains to a customer's examination of a service concerning their expectations, whereas quality of service represents the consumer's judgment of a company's overall quality (Jolliffe & Dodds, 2016). Tourist satisfaction combines pre-travel and post-travel expectations and experiences, culminating in fulfillment if the journey aligns with their anticipations (Chen & Chen, 2010). Research in creative tourism illustrates that contented tourists exhibit positive inclinations toward the attraction (Ali et al., 2016). Moreover, the literature consistently highlights satisfaction as pivotal in fostering tourist loyalty and concurs that tourist satisfaction predominantly hinges on their experiences at the tourism destination (Nowacki, 2009; Chen & Chen, 2010; Ali et al., 2016).

Prior studies have emphasized the pivotal role of a destination's image in shaping tourists' satisfaction (Gartner & Tasci, 2007; Prayag, 2009). Generally, these findings have consistently suggested that the perception of a destination significantly influences satisfaction (Phou &

Chen, 2013; Prayag & Ryan, 2012). However, many current research studies concentrated on the effect of the cognitive dimension of the destination image on satisfaction. Yet, it has largely overlooked the broader influence of the destination image, considering both affective and cognitive dimensions, on satisfaction of tourist. To investigate and distinguish the individual impacts of cognitive and affective images on tourist satisfaction, these study further hypotheses are:

H2: The tourist satisfaction is significantly impacted by the cognitive image.

H3: The tourist satisfaction is significantly affected by the affective image.

Tourist Loyalty: Tourist loyalty is characterized as a profound commitment to continuously repurchase or revisit a favored service or product in the future (Oliver, 1999). For tourist place marketers, tourist loyalty holds major importance, given that retaining existing tourists is more advantageous and less costly than attracting new ones (Loureiro & González, 2008). Research on loyalty typically employs two primary approaches: attitudinal and behavioral. In behavioral approach conceptualizes loyalty as consistent consumer actions, where an individual is deemed loyal if they repeatedly purchase a service or product within a specified timeframe. Within tourism, behavioral loyalty is commonly assessed through metrics like the numbers of visits to a particular tourist place. Although this method offers insights into how an attraction performs relative to others, it has faced criticism for lacking a strong theoretical foundation and providing a limited perspective on the intricate and fluid behaviours of tourists (Suhartanto, 2018). Additionally, scholars (Chi et al., 2014) argue that this method of evaluating loyalty often conflates substantial instances of false loyalty, unable to distinguish genuinely loyal tourists from those visiting due to cost or convenience considerations alone. Consequently, relying solely on behavioral loyalty measures proves insufficient in explaining tourists' loyalty to a creative tourism place.

The second way to study the loyalty is to involve an attitudinal perspective, specifically conative loyalty (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018). Loyalty intention signifies a consumer's strong inclination to consistently purchase a service or product (Cong, 2016). Loyalty encompasses not only the intention to purchase but also behaviors such as intending to repurchase and recommend, even in price hike (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). This aligns along with the Tripartite Theory of Attitude, positing attitude as comprising cognitive, affective, and conative elements, where behavioral intention falls within the conative component (Ajzen, 2005). Consequently, this approach posits that loyalty can be imagined based on revisits in future and the intention to advocate and support the attraction.

Tourists tend to prolong their stays at a tourism place compared to first-time visitors, actively associated in spreading positive word-of-mouth information, and participate more extensively in consumption activities (Zhang et al., 2014; Li et al., 2010). Furthermore, these recurring visitors contribute to reducing marketing expenses in contrast to the expenses incurred in attracting the visitors who visits first-time (Lewis & Shoemaker, 1999).

As mentioned earlier, destination image stands out as a significant predictor impacting various behavioral aspects of tourists (Gartner & Tasci, 2007). Scholars have indicated those tourists' loyalty-related behaviors, such as their intention of to revisit the same place and their inclination to recommend that place to others (Cai et al., 2003; Li et al., 2010). Nonetheless, as previously discussed, mostly studies have considered the influence of either the affective or cognitive destination image without adopting an integrative viewpoint. So, the authors aimed to identify the diverse effects of destination image loyalty of the tourist, resulting in the creation of the further hypotheses:

H4: The tourist loyalty is significantly influenced by the cognitive image.

H5: The tourist loyalty is significantly influenced by the affective image.

According to Oliver (1999), satisfaction experienced during a visit to a tourist place is a very significant factor in the development of loyalty in tourism. Moreover, various studies have indicated an important and positive correlation between tourist loyalty and satisfaction (Qu & Chi, 2008; Ryan & Prayag, 2012; Tsai & Chen, 2007). Consequently, this study has formulated the sixth hypothesis:

H6. Tourist loyalty is significantly influenced by the tourist satisfaction

Table 1 Demographic Profile		
Characteristics	**Frequency**	**(%)**
Gender		
Male	189	90
Female	21	10
Age Years		
18-25	21	10
26-35	42	20
36-45	88	41.90
46-55	41	19.52
56 and above	18	8.58
Occupation		
Business owner/Partner	141	67.14
Private Employee	43	20.47
Govt Employees	06	2.85
Freelancer	12	5.71
Other	08	3.80
Industry Category		
Manufacturing	98	46.66
Textile & Garments	14	6.66
Pharmaceutical	13	6.19
Auto Components	25	11.90
Printing & Packaging	18	8.57
Medical devices	21	10
Agriculture &Allied	16	7.61
Others	5	2.38
Company Location		
Punjab	91	43.33
Haryana	28	13.33
Delhi	53	25.23
Chandigarh	38	18.09
Average Annual Income		
Up to 5 Lakh	26	12.38
5 to 7.5 Lakh	37	17.61
7.5 to 10 Lakh	75	35.71
More than 10 Lakh	72	34.28
Past Experience		
First-time visit	117	55.72
Repeated visit	93	44.28
Length of stay(Days)		
4-6	147	70
6-10	41	19.53
10-above	22	10.47

METHOD

Data collection and procedure

Data collection was done using the convenience sampling method, utilizing both online and offline surveys facilitated by a range of industrial chambers, associations, and clubs. These surveys targeted Indian business tourists attending industrial exhibitions across several German cities such as Hannover, Dusseldorf, Stuttgart, and Cologne. The survey's primary objective was to gather opinions from business tourists. Data were collected over a six-month period, spanning from April 1 to October 1, 2023. In total, 270 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 230 responses. After filtering out invalid submissions, 210 completed questionnaires remained for subsequent analysis. The profile of respondents is outlined in Table I. Among the respondents, the majority were male (n 189, 90 per cent) and aged between 36-45 years. Additionally, a significant portion of participants (n 117, 55.7 per cent) were visiting Germany for the first time. Moreover, most respondents were business owners or partners, staying in Germany for 4 to 5 days (n 147, 70 per cent).

Measures

The research tools utilized in this study were selected based on extensive literature reviews. The destination image scale used in this study encompassing two aspects. One aspect where there are seven items in the cognitive image (Ryan & Prayag, 2012). In second aspect we used four items in affective image (Ryan & Pike, 2004). These were derived from earlier studies that specifically investigated these dimensions (Del Bosque & San Martin, 2008). Considering their proven reliability and validity through various studies, the choice to utilize these scales in this research was considered appropriate.

In addition, the scales for tourist satisfaction and loyalty, we used three-three items for both according to Lee et al. (2011). We assessed all the items based on a five-point Likert scale, ranges from 5(strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).These particular scales were chosen based on their documented validity and reliability in previous research. Furthermore, certain items within the scales were slightly changed to better suit the context of Indian business tourists visiting Germany for international exhibitions.

Initially, we have done the pilot study after meeting with 50 Indian business travelers with the help of respective industrial association, chambers, and clubs. As a result, only slight modifications were incorporated into the final questionnaire.

Data analysis

In this study, the SPSS 23.0 statistical package was employed to analyze the sample structure, while AMOS 23.0 facilitated the use of SEM (structural equation modeling). The SEM analysis software utilized maximum likelihood estimation. The data analysis was conducted in two stages, following the methodology outlined in Gerbing's and Anderson's (1988) study. At first, confirmatory factor analysis was used to evaluate the validity and reliability of both

observed and latent variables, aiming to estimate the apparent levels of these variables. Afterward, the study utilized SEM analysis to evaluate the hypotheses outlined in the conceptual model. The assessment of path strengths and the significance levels of latent variables in this study were conducted using standard factor loading and the t-value of the path coefficient in the structural model analysis.

RESULTS

Measurement Reliability and Validity

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) demonstrated compliance with Bentler and Hu's (1999) criteria, revealing a model fit that meets acceptable standards: $\chi2$ (126) = 315.278, CFI = 0.956, TLI = 0.946, and RMSEA = 0.069. Subsequently, an evaluation of the reliability and validity of the scale was conducted. All Cronbach's alpha values surpassed 0.80, exceeding the recommended threshold (0.70) as recommended by Nunnally (1978). Furthermore, according to Larcker and Fornell (1981), the values of CR range from 0.880 to 0.915, surpassing the criterion of 0.70.

By examining factor loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE) confirmation of convergent validity was achieved. All indicators within the constructs displayed factor loadings above 0.50, surpassing the suggested threshold, while the AVE values also exceeded the recommended level of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010).

Moreover, the assessment of discriminant validity revealed that the AVE values surpassed both the average shared squared variance (ASV) and maximum shared squared variance (MSV). Additionally as outlined in Table II and III, the squared AVEs surpassed the correlation estimates in the model.

Table 1.

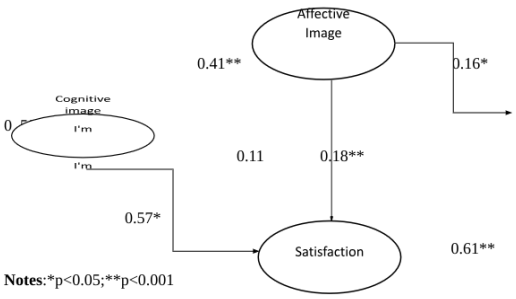
Items	Std factor loadings	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted	Maximum shared squared variance	Average shared squared variance
Cognitive Image (a=0.872)		0.880	0.510	0.455	0.330
Historical and cultural landmarks	0.730				
Diversity in culture	0.690				
Range and excellence of hotel options	0.650				
Overall service standards at the exhibition	0.780				
Ease of access to the exhibition	0.715				
Reputation of the exhibition	0.770				
Uniqueness and charm of the location	0.650				
Affective Image(a=0.903)		0.910	0.720	0.215	0.200
Sleepy – arousing	0.735				
Unpleasant - pleasant	0.780				
Gloomy - exciting	0.940				
Distressing - relaxing	0.920				
Satisfaction (a=0.901)		0.905	0.760	0.580	0.410
I am happy and satisfied with the exhibition	0.855				
I had a great time at the exhibition	0.855				
I am optimistic about joining the exhibition again in the future	0.910				
Tourist loyalty (a=0.898)		0.915	0.780	0.580	0.370
I intend to share positive experiences from the exhibition with others.	0.950				
I plan to recommend the exhibition to other people.	0.935				
I aim to return to Germany and participate in the exhibition again in the future	0.755				

Hypothesis Testing

The depicted results in Figure 1 supported Hypotheses 1 by revealing a statistically significant relationship between cognitive and affective image (β = 0.41, t = 6.34. Likewise, support for Hypothesis 2 was evidenced by the significant link observed between satisfaction and cognitive image (β = 0.57, t = 8.21). Moreover, in line with Hypothesis 3, the pathway from affective image towards satisfaction exhibited statistical significance (β = 0.18, t = 3.42).

The lack of significance in the association between cognitive image and tourist loyalty (β = 0.11, t = 1.78) led to the rejection of Hypotheses 4. Supporting Hypothese5, a significant relationship was found between affective image and tourist loyalty (β = 0.16, t = 2.65).Finally, confirming Hypothese6, there was significance observed in the pathway to tourist loyalty from satisfaction (β = 0.61, t = 2.74).

Figure 01 Conceptual model with path coefficients



Examining the mediating effect

Mediating effects analysis was done by examining the pathways within the conceptual model. Recent research suggests that although the traditional three-step approach advocated by Kenny and Baron (1986) provides valuable insights into studying mediating effects, it may not be obligatory to strictly adhere to these three steps. Alternatively, Zhao et al. and Iacobucci et al. (2010) suggest a more pragmatic approach to establish mediation. Rucker et al. (2011) propose

that the identification of a statistically significant indirect effect enables the inference of a substantial mediation effect.

Table III: Results for Average Variance Extracted and squared correlations are provided

	Cognitive Image	*Affective image*	*Satisfaction*	*Tourist loyalty*
Cognitive image	0.714			
Affective image	0.426	0.849		
Satisfaction	0.671	0.447	0.872	
Tourist loyalty	0.583	0.459	0.757	0.883

Notes: The square root of Average Variance Extracted is represented by elements in italics along the diagonal, whereas correlations squared are denoted by values below the diagonal.

Figure 1 illustrates the interrelationship of destination image (cognitive image & affective image), tourist satisfaction, and loyalty, while Table IV provides a detailed breakdown of these relationships. An empirically significant indirect pathway was identified. It indicates a statistically significant relationship with the help of affective image to satisfaction from cognitive image with a standardized estimate of 0.09 ($p < 0.001$). Furthermore, with a standardized estimate 0.59($p < 0.001$) there is a notable direct relationship among satisfaction and cognitive image.

According to Zhao et al. (2010), there is a proposed partial mediating effect, referred to as complementary mediation, wherein affective image plays important role in the connection among cognitive image and satisfaction.

Additionally, satisfaction plays a role of mediator between tourist loyalty and affective image. According to table IV, A substantial indirect pathway to tourist loyalty from affective image with the help of satisfaction was noted, with a standardized estimate of 0.12 ($p < 0.001$).With a standardized estimate of 0.13 and significance level of $p < 0.001$, there is a noteworthy direct path to tourist loyalty from affective image. The association between tourist loyalty and affective image, as suggested by these results, involves a partial mediating effect-referred to as complementary mediation-of satisfaction (Zhao et al., 2010)

Table IV-Presents an examination of effects, encompassing both direct and indirect impacts.

Independent variables	Dependent Variables	Indirect effect	Direct effect	Overall effect
Cognitive Image	Affective Image	-	0.41**	0.41
Cognitive Image	Satisfaction	0.10**	0.57**	0.67
Cognitive Image	Tourist loyalty	0.51**	0.11	0.62
Affective Image	Satisfaction	-	0.18**	0.18
Affective Image	Tourist loyalty	0.11**	0.16**	0.27
Satisfaction	Tourist loyalty	-	0.61**	0.61

*Notes: Cognitive Image, Affective image, Satisfaction, Tourist loyalty; **p < 0.001*

Illustrating the role of mediator between affective image and satisfaction in association with and tourist loyalty and cognitive image, Figure 1 is accompanied by additional details in Table IV.
The findings unveiled a significant indirect effect of cognitive image on tourist loyalty with the help of satisfaction and affective image, with a significance level of $p < 0.001$ and a standardized estimate of 0.50. Nevertheless, the direct route between tourist loyalty and cognitive image was deemed insignificant, with a standardized estimate of 0.11 and a p-value of 0.12. These results suggest a complete mediating effect, referred to as direct-only mediation, wherein affective image and satisfaction play a crucial role in the relationship between tourist loyalty and cognitive image, as proposed by Zhao et al. (2010).

DISCUSSION

As Indian Business travelers have become a dominant force in the German inbound market, the German tourism industry must delve deeper into the determinants of Indian outbound business tourists' choices regarding destinations and their perceptions while visiting Germany for attending exhibitions. This study aimed to explore the influence of destination image on the satisfaction and loyalty of Indian business tourists within German. While previous research has examined the effects of destination image on tourist behaviors, our study uniquely incorporated both the affective and cognitive aspects of destination image. We sought to understand how these dimensions independently impact the satisfaction as well as loyalty of

business travelers from India in the Germany. Our framework sought to uncover the interconnections among the destination image (both affective and cognitive), tourist loyalty and tourist satisfaction. The results of this study yield several important observations.

Our findings highlighted, firstly, a sequential relationship in line with previous quantitative and qualitative studies (Andereck and Vogt, 2003), where cognitive image preceded affective image. Perceptions of tangible functional elements like cultural attractions and accommodations and intangible psychological aspects like welcoming nature of the people constitute the cognitive aspect of destination image. Establishing a destination image involves a multifaceted process integrating these two distinct components; the affective aspect encapsulates the emotions elicited by a tourism place like pleasure, excitement etc.. This discovery implies a multifaceted process. The generation of a person's emotional response toward a destination (affective image) is influenced by their beliefs about that destination (cognitive image), as indicated by our findings. While our study uncovers the formation process of a destination image, it's essential to note that the connection between affective and cognitive images is regarded as causal rather than solely temporal.

Secondly, our research findings highlighted the significant role of both cognitive and affective images as crucial precursors to tourist satisfaction. Notably, these outcomes align with numerous prior studies (Prayag, 2009; Ryan and Prayag, 2012; Gartner and Tasci, 2007), indicating that an enhancement in visitors' perceptions of a place correlates with an elevation in their satisfaction levels. Our results highlight the diverse impact of the destination image, involving both affective and cognitive dimensions. Additionally the results demonstrate there is a partial impact on the linkage between tourist satisfaction and cognitive image by affective image. This underscores the significant role played in determining the levels of satisfaction by the affective image. While elements of cognitive images like infrastructure, accessibility, and service quality are essential for meeting the needs of business tourists, the emotional bond and feelings that tourists associate with the destination must not be underestimated.
As tourist develop positive emotional experiences with a destination, their likelihood of experiencing satisfaction increases. Therefore, understanding and nurturing tourists' emotional attachment to a destination alongside addressing practical aspects are pivotal in enhancing overall tourist satisfaction.

Thirdly, the affective and cognitive dimension of images plays a significant role in shaping tourist loyalty. Our observations did not reveal any significant relationship between tourist loyalty and cognitive image, whereas the affective image exhibited a positive influence on tourist loyalty. Moreover, previous studies have primarily focused on investigating the impact of either affective or cognitive image on tourist loyalty (Bigné et al., 2001; Tsai & Chen, 2007). By incorporating both affective and cognitive dimensions, this study stands out and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of their individual roles in determining tourist loyalty. These outcomes emphasize the importance of emotional perceptions and satisfaction levels held by Indian business visitors towards Germany as a destination.

Particularly, the way Indian business tourists evaluate Germany in terms of accessibility of place, quality of service and infrastructure can evoke their emotional perceptions and satisfaction levels. This underscores the importance of nurturing positive emotional experiences and satisfaction with destination features to foster and sustain tourist loyalty among Indian business visitors.

Lastly, this study underscored the significant influence on tourist loyalty by a tourist satisfaction, a finding that aligns with prior literature (Tsai and Chen, 2007; Qu & Chi, 2008; Ryan and Prayag, 2012). Underscoring the substantial impact of satisfaction on tourists' behaviors associated with loyalty, the emphasized significance includes actions such as revisiting the same destination and participating in positive word-of-mouth for recommendations of the tourism place. This study's empirical evidence further strengthens the direct and positive relationship between tourist loyalty and satisfaction.

Hence, as levels of satisfaction rise, there is a corresponding increase in the inclination to return to the destination and to recommend it, all of which are fundamental factors contributing to fostering loyalty among tourists.

IMPLICATIONS

Given the escalating number of Indian outbound business tourists and their substantial expenditure during travel, comprehending Indian business tourists' destination preferences and loyalty holds immense significance for the German Tourism Organization, Government and tour operators. This study presents valuable insights into Indian business tourists' experiences in Germany and offers pertinent implications for the German tourism industry. The study's outcomes will offer contributions both in theory and practical application. Theoretically, it serves as a valuable tool to understand the behavior of business tourists in Germany. Moreover, from a practical standpoint, these findings will aid policymakers and practitioners in the business tourism sector by assisting them in formulating effective strategies and making informed decisions for the future.

Firstly, our findings emphasize that the concept of destination image is multifaceted, influenced by distinct cognitive and affective components. This highlights the need for German destination managers to address both facets in shaping the destination image. For instance, enhancing the cognitive aspect could lead to an improvement in tourists' affective perceptions. To achieve this, the German tourism industry could focus on creating a more welcoming environment for Indian business tourists. Implementing measures like English-language signage and employing English and Hindi-speaking guides at exhibition grounds could significantly enhance the comfort and experience of Indian business tourists during their exhibition visits. Such improvements may positively impact future travel behaviours, including increased revisits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Secondly, recognizing the pivotal role of satisfaction in fostering loyalty, the German tourism industry must prioritize understanding and meeting the preferences of Indian business tourists. Implementing regular satisfaction surveys at key touch points such as airports or popular exhibition grounds specifically tailored for international tourists could be beneficial. Meeting their expectations and ensuring satisfaction increases the likelihood of revisits and advocacy for Germany as a preferred business tourism place.

Finally, tourism destination marketers ought to employ various strategies to showcase the strengths of Germany as a business tourist destination. Utilizing mass media platforms such as movies filmed at renowned business tourist locations can prove to be an effective method to promote Germany as a prominent destination for business tourism. Such media exposure not only showcases the destination's allure but also contributes to cultivating a favorable image among potential Indian business tourists. By leveraging these promotional opportunities, the German business tourism industry can effectively communicate the unique appeal of the destination and attract more business visitors.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study offers valuable insights into the determinants of Indian outbound business tourists' loyalty in Germany, several limitations merit consideration. Firstly, our research employed a convenience sampling method exclusively targeting Indian outbound business tourists. Future studies could incorporate a more diverse profile of Indian business tourists, considering regional differences, as highlighted by Kim et al. (2015). Additionally, our research concentrated solely on exploring the connections among cognitive and affective image along with loyalty and tourists satisfaction. To gain a more comprehensive insight into business tourist loyalty, future studies could incorporate different variables like perceived value, place attachment etc. Thirdly, our proposed model suggests sequential and directional impact between the variables. The use of a cross-sectional design in this study, however, limits the examination of long-term loyalty among Indian business tourists.

Future studies employing longitudinal or experimental designs could provide deeper insights into the sustained loyalty of outbound business tourists over time. Lastly, given the widespread popularity of the German Wave, future research could explore the influence of German exhibitions and trade fairs in shaping Germany's image as a business tourist destination. Addressing these limitations through more diverse sampling, the inclusion of additional variables and longitudinal research designs could further enrich our understanding of Indian business tourists' behavior and preferences in Germany.

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JOURNAL OF TOURISM
ISSN: 0972-7310. Vol. XXV, Issue 2 (December 2024), 24-31

Sustainable Rural Tourism Development: An Examination of its Impact on Tourist Satisfaction and Loyalty

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KEYWORDS

Rural Tourism, Destination, Loyalty, Sustainability

ABSTRACT

Rural tourism is gradually gaining momentum in Uttarakhand, attracting significant attention from tourists over the past few years. As the demand for rural tourism continues to rise, entrepreneurs involved in this sector, whether directly or indirectly, are actively working to upgrade their destinations. They are exploring new sources and tourism offerings to draw in a larger number of visitors. The promotion of rural tourism development in these areas is essential to achieve economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability. This research endeavors to comprehend the means by which sustainable rural tourism development can be realized by enhancing tourism satisfaction, thereby fostering tourist loyalty to the destination. The study investigates the influence of destination image, destination quality, and value on the overall satisfaction and loyalty of tourists. The Garhwal Region of Uttarakhand serves as the focal point of the study, with 225 questionnaires distributed among rural tourists, and 195 questionnaires deemed suitable for analysis. A model was formulated and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to evaluate the model. The results indicate that rural tourism in Uttarakhand holds significant potential to enrich the experience of novelty-seeking tourists and cultivate loyalty through repeated visits and extended stays. The study also suggests that entrepreneur indulged in rural tourism businesses must make efforts to encourage repeat visits by offering authentic rural experiences involving the local community and preserving the natural and cultural heritage. However, the study also brings to light several challenges in the state's tourism sector, such as the carrying capacity of mountains, issues related to solid waste management, inefficiencies in tourist guidance, a lack of awareness among local communities, and inadequate connectivity to unexplored yet potentially promising remote areas.

INTRODUCTION

According to the UN's World tourism Organization (UNWTO), Rural Tourism is "a kind of tourism endeavor wherein the overall visitor experience is centered around a variety of offerings usually associated with nature-based events agricultural fields, rural regions lifestyles and culture, angling, and sightseeing." Rural tourist attractions are carried out in other than urban (rural) locations that exhibit a variety of characteristics: i) Lower density of residents, ii) Agricultural and forestry activities characterize the terrain and land usage, and iii) Conventional social systems and lifestyle." Tourism in rural areas is becoming among the increasingly in-demand sectors in the tourist industry. Tourists are increasingly seeking relaxed and nature-surrounded destinations for leisure. A soothing atmosphere is possible only if natural environmental elements are retained and kept so that tourists might enjoy them. (Chin and Lo, 2017).

Rural tourism has gained the attention of both academics and tourist officials because of its potential as a means of growth for rural communities and present industry developments. This marketplace demonstrates an increasing fascination in rural regions as a recreational activities place which provides possibilities for outdoor enjoyment, exposure to nature and culture, socialisation in a world of isolation that serves as an ideal break away from excruciating crowds, hazardous substances, vibrancy, and hectic lifestyle and seems totally distinct via other areas of the global community, giving vibrant remembering for bringing to their homeland. (Kastenholz et al., 2012). Tourism in rural areas can provide a likelihood for economies to broaden or enhance the prestige of their locations, as well as for economies with similar images to India can diversifying their own investment portfolios of weakening mega tourist attractions (Loureiro, 2010). In the past few decades, the extensive growth of rural tourism has proven to be an intriguing issue, with tourist activities in all aspects providing a substantial source of revenue. Following the coronavirus outbreak, the need for confined places has grown, resulting in a surge in demand for rural tourism destinations where guests may enjoy isolation and serenity while working.

Uttarakhand tourism centres on the state's natural beauty. The state is widely recognized as Devbhoomi, meaning "Land of God." It is rich in devotional sites, which account for a large portion of Uttarakhand's tourist industry. The state is renowned to a large percentage of Hindu temples preserved in its rural areas. Uttarakhand, as an iconic rural travel vacation, offers numerous distinct sights, including the mystical splendour of nature's beauty, a variety of beloved artistic heritage, and plentiful ecological assets, every one of which serves an important role in developing an unforgettable memory for visitors and motivating them to return. Tourism is an important engine of growth in Uttarakhand.The state has been popular for decades, but it is growing into an increasingly recognisable and important location

The evolving behaviour of travellers in discovering new areas and becoming progressively information-driven has highlighted the importance of excellent service in the rural tourism industry. Natural and man-made aspects of the natural landscape tend to be one of the most important elements influencing service quality at the destination. Natural resources and cultural appeal play an essential role in creating a distinctive tourism offering to attract travellers. The natural world concept as an important aspect of rural tourism development has a positive impact on the rivalry of rural tourist destinations. The capacity of a tourist location to meet the demands of its consumers via fantastic experiences and superior amenities tends to increase customer delight, resulting in more favourable development of a rural tourism destination (Chin and Lo, 2017). Tourism plays a vital part in Uttarakhand's economy, and rural tourism is emerging as a cure for the sustainable development of rural regions, hence it is critical to determine visitors' perceived value of rural tourism destinations in Uttarakhand. After the epidemic, travellers are looking for stress-relieving and rejuvenating activities in nature, which rural tourism destinations in Uttarakhand provide (Rosalina, Dupre, and Wang, 2021).The popular notion of workation is benefiting rural tourist destinations. Following the Corona breakout, numerous firms have embraced the work-from-home model. The concept behind workation is to get away from the routine of the home office and travel to the hills or rural regions for a refreshing attitude in a calm and beautiful setting. Rural tourism in Uttarakhand provides an excellent opportunity to see the profound link between man and the environment while also experiencing the warm embrace of the region's inhabitants.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Loyalty

"Loyalty can be defined and assessed by both attitudinal and behavioral measures. The attitudinal measure refers to a specific desire to continue a relationship with a service provider while the behavioral perspective refers to the concept of repeat patronage"(Chen and Chen, 2010). Loyalty towards a destination is the willingness of the tourist to return and to recommend to others (McKercher and Guillet, 2011). Rural tourism must adapt to the current competitive situation which is dominated by developed marketing strategies and actions. So, in order to guarantee long-lasting success and increase the sustainability of the destination, it is most important to keep the loyal customers. (Loureiro, 2010). Tourists are usually inspired by the opportunity to avoid stress and their keenness to explore new places and adventure. Tourism experience for competitive and durable destination

development can be an important factor (Kastenholz et al., 2012). It is important for the rural tourism destination to ensure excellent services for more promising income generation and attracting not only the new tourists but also convincing to visit again and convey positive attitude towards the destination (Chin and Lo, 2017). Word of mouth is considered as a strong variable which influences the tourist behavior for the visit, which creates a link between satisfaction and loyalty (Sanz et al., 2021). The degree of loyalty towards a tourism destination is considered by the intention of tourist to visit to the destination again and his willingness to endorse it to others (Chen and Chen, 2010).

As rural tourism is facing more challenges of an increasingly competitive advantage, the entrepreneurs indulge in rural tourism region are more interested in developing sustainability to loyal visitors and guaranteeing the long-term success of its tourist destination (Lourio, 2010). Lopez-Sanz et al. (2021) throws light on the variables that influence the tourist behavior, motivation, destination image and satisfaction obtained by the tourists. The study revealed that motivation plays an important role in decision making of tourist regarding his visit to a specific tourist destination. The study also revealed that tourists with satisfactory travel will positively affect loyalty to the destination and will impact on better business outcomes for the tourist establishment in the region. Osman and Sentosa (2013), states that customer satisfaction has significant and positive partial mediating effect on service quality and customer loyalty relationship. The study revealed that the relationship of service quality, satisfaction and customer loyalty leads to profitability of rural tourism businesses.The study also suggests that the loyalty of rural tourists can be strengthened and enhanced by increasing the level of customer satisfaction among rural tourism tourists. McKercher and Guillet (2011), sought to examine whether individual tourists are destination loyal or whether markets can be considered as loyal. The findings of the study states that though there is low tourist repeat visitation intention, but overall the market is stable. The study also reveals the crucial role of word of mouth recommendations. Though the tourist themselves may not visit again but their recommendations to others can help in the inflow of more tourists to the destination. The intention of low-term repetition can act as a barometer of destination health and potentially word- mouth effects.

Destination Image

Destination image is the overall insight of an individual for any place or destination that is created by knowledge, ideas, imagination or experience that the destination has built in them. It is one of key contributor for the successful development of any tourism destination and also plays a critical role in selecting tourist destination. The destination image acts as a crucial component for the success of any tourist destination as recognizable image will likely influence the choice of the tourist for leisure and recreational activities (Sanz et al., 2021). According to Sanz et al. (2021), for tourism to act as a contributor for the development of the destination area, it is important to maintain and protect the quality of the environment, as the attracting beauty of nature makes rural tourism activities possible. The study suggests that destination image and tourist attraction should be prompted wisely so that it can be translated into a large inflow of tourists that can generates economic income and assures social and economic welfare. The capacity of rural tourism must be reflected in the conservation of natural resources that must be maintained for years to achieve long-term sustainability for social development. Sun, Chi and Xu (2013), in their study has revealed that domestic tourist destination is influenced by destination familiarity, destination image, perceived value, and tourist satisfaction. The study also states that positive destination image and value perceptions tend to lead to favorable outcomes, such as intention to recommend and revisit intentions.

H1: Destination image has a positive effect on overall satisfaction.

H2: Destination image has a positive effect on loyalty

Destination Quality

Chin and Lo (2017), highlights that in rural tourism destination a better quality of service can be experienced by visitors only if the number of tourists is limited at a time. The degree of relaxation for the tourists can be determined by the availability of tourism activities such as cultural events, recreational activities, etc. The main attractions for the tourists are the environmental factors and the hospitality and support that the local communities serve that adds up the additional advantage to attract tourists. The support of local communities for

tourism activities will leads to a better service quality and satisfaction to the tourists. Rajaratnam et al. (2015) has examined the direct effect of perceived destination quality on tourists' behavioural intentions and the indirect effect through satisfaction in the context of rural tourism destinations. The results showed that perceived destination quality is notably influenced by satisfaction which in turn significantly influenced by behavioural intentions. Furthermore, perceived destination quality significantly and directly influences behavioural intentions. The study also suggests that managers and service providers involved in rural tourism should strive hard to maintain a desired level of quality as expected by the tourists, as this can subsequently contribute to a positive image of these destinations and will lead to more profitability. According to Bajs (2013), tourist destinations individually or together can combine a wealth of products and services offered in a particular place and introduce this product to the global market. For tourist attraction and marketing features such as attractions, accessibility, tourist services, ancillary services and activities of a destination should be added. Loureiro and Kastenholz (2010), examine that rural tourism as a developmental tool of rural areas has ability to integrate varied activities and resources present in the destination are increasingly demanded by the tourist market. The study revealed that quality of the destination leads to satisfaction for the tourists which further leads to loyalty of the tourists for that destination.

H3. Destination's quality has a positive effect on overall satisfaction.

H4. Destination's quality has a positive effect on loyalty.

Destination Value

H5. Destination's value has a positive effect on overall satisfaction.

H6. Destination's value has a positive effect on loyalty.

Satisfaction

Tourism satisfaction refers to the fulfillment of expectations of a tourist from tourism destination. It can also be referred as the difference between before-travel expectations and after-travel experiences. When a tourist is satisfied, he will stay longer and will come back and will also promote the destination. However, when the visit results in feelings of resentment, the tourist is dissatisfied (Chen and Chen, 2010). Attribute satisfaction refers to the experience that a tourist gets from different range of attributes during his visit to the destination such as hotel, restaurants, accommodation, shops, local culture and traditions and festivals and fairs (Cerro et al., 2016).

Tourist satisfaction and loyalty are crucial factors for cultivating a destination's competitive advantage which results in financial stability and employment generation for local communities (Cerro et al., 2016). This leads to sustainable rural tourism in the destination. Chen and Chen (2010), examine the relationship between quality experiences, perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. The study reveals that there is a direct effect of the quality of experience on perceived value and satisfaction. Assaker, Vinzi and Connor (2010), in their study state that satisfaction has a significant, positive, and direct impact on immediate revisit intention. The study suggests that unless the satisfaction is consistent the tourist satisfaction may not be significant for the business growth in long run. As satisfaction directly affects visitors' intention to return, the business owners can measure and improve satisfaction at least in the short term.

H7. Attribute satisfaction has a positive effect on overall satisfaction.

H8. Attribute satisfaction has a positive effect on loyalty.

H9. Overall satisfaction has a positive effect on loyalty.

Destination's quality has a positive effect on loyalty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, which is a popular rural destination for both local and international tourists. A scale was selected based on a literature review to assess the variables of the model. The scale was used to evaluate the destination image, quality, value, attribute satisfaction, overall satisfaction, and loyalty, which were developed based on Cerro et al. (2016) and other well-known previous studies. Expert opinions were also sought to confirm the created items. The research tool used was a questionnaire consisting of close-ended questions to indicate the effect of image, quality, value, and satisfaction on loyalty. A quantitative methodology based on a survey method was used to collect data. The questionnaires were distributed among tourists visiting rural tourism

destinations. All questions were measured using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high). Out of 225 questionnaires distributed, only 195 were found suitable for the present study. The fieldwork was conducted in the months of October and November. After collecting the data, descriptive analysis was done using IBM SPSS software, and the data was analyzed using Structural Modeling Equation (SEM).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The study utilized a statistical technique called Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the research hypotheses. The technique involved two main models: the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model was employed to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs, while the structural model was used to evaluate the relationship between the constructs using the path model.

To validate the internal consistency among the variables, the study used two measures: Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). The results showed that both the measures were above the recommended value of 0.70, indicating that the constructs were reliable and consistent. The study also assessed the convergent validity of the constructs using the average variance extracted (AVE) method. The AVE values were found to be acceptable, as they exceeded the threshold limit of 0.50. This indicated that the constructs were convergent and measured the same underlying construct. Overall, these findings suggest that the study has strong internal validity and provides reliable results as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity of Constructs:

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Quality	0.875	0.886	0.914	0.727
Value	0.866	0.871	0.909	0.713
Image	0.870	0.876	0.906	0.658
Overall Satisfaction	0.911	0.915	0.931	0.693
Attribute Satisfaction	0.886	0.889	0.921	0.746
Loyalty	0.907	0.909	0.931	0.728

The table displayed below presents the measures of discriminant validity between the different constructs, as evaluated according to the Fornell & Larcker (1981) criterion. This criterion suggests that the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct should be higher than the correlation between that construct and other constructs. Based on the results, it can be concluded that the measures of discriminant validity satisfy the Fornell & Larcker criterion. (Table 2)

Table 2: Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Larcker Criterion)

	Attribute Satisfaction	Image	Loyalty	Overall Satisfaction	Quality	Value
Attribute Satisfaction	*0.863*					
Image	0.253	*0.811*				
Loyalty	0.505	0.226	*0.853*			
Overall Satisfaction	0.494	0.263	0.479	*0.832*		
Quality	0.337	0.261	0.437	0.339	*0.853*	
Value	0.486	0.299	0.283	0.390	0.285	*0.844*

The measurement model's results were deemed satisfactory, and as a result, the structural model was evaluated to determine the connection between the constructs. The R2 value was utilized to measure the extent of variation in the dependent variable caused by the independent variable. According to Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle (2018), the higher the R2 value, the better the independent variables explain the dependent variable. Table 4 displays the R2 values for the endogenous variables, all of which are greater than 0.1, indicating that the model's explanatory power is established (refer to Table 3).

Table 3: Values of R2

	R Square
Overall Satisfaction	0.306
Loyalty	0.381

Results of Hypotheses Testing:

The study analyzed several constructs and their interrelationships using beta (β) and t-values. Out of the nine hypotheses tested, seven were supported. The study found that the destination image has a significant positive impact on both loyalty and overall satisfaction. Similarly, the quality of the destination also has a significant positive impact on loyalty and overall satisfaction. However, the study found that the destination's value did not have a significant impact on loyalty and overall satisfaction. Attribute satisfaction was found to have a positive effect on overall satisfaction and loyalty. Lastly, the study found a significant positive relationship between overall satisfaction and loyalty to the tourism destination. A detailed summary of the results of the hypotheses is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Hypothesis Results	β	SD	t-values	p-values	H1
H1: Image -> Overall Satisfaction	0.089	0.074	4.205	0.000	**Supported**
H2: Image -> Loyalty	0.028	0.070	3.400	0.000	**Supported**
H3: Quality -> Overall Satisfaction	0.157	0.083	3.255	0.000	**Supported**
H4: Quality -> Loyalty	0.253	0.070	3.642	0.000	**Supported**
H5: Value -> Overall Satisfaction	0.151	0.061	0.480	0.613	**Not- Supported**
H6: Value -> Loyalty	-0.050	0.062	0.796	0.427	**Not- Supported**
H7: Attribute Satisfaction -> Overall Satisfaction	0.345	0.083	4.154	0.000	**Supported**
H8: Attribute Satisfaction -> Loyalty	0.314	0.098	3.194	0.001	**Supported**
H9: Overall Satisfaction -> Loyalty	0.251	0.087	2.891	0.004	**Supported**

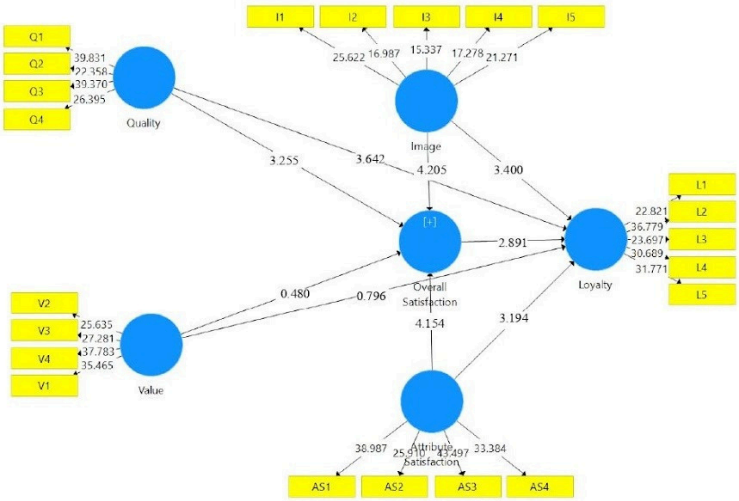

Figure 1: Structural Model:

CONCLUSION

The present research findings have highlighted the key factors that significantly influence tourists' overall satisfaction with their destination. According to the study, destination image, quality, and value are the three critical factors that play a vital role in attracting and retaining tourists. A positive destination image that showcases the natural beauty, cultural heritage, and environmental conservation of the location is crucial in captivating tourists. The provision of high-quality tourism services, including infrastructure, accommodation, transportation, and recreational activities, also contributes significantly to enhancing tourists' satisfaction levels. In addition, destination value, which denotes the perceived benefits and costs associated with the destination, significantly impacts tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. It is imperative to establish a strong link between tourism satisfaction and tourist loyalty, emphasizing the importance of sustainable rural tourism development. By ensuring high levels of satisfaction among tourists, destination management organizations and local communities can foster loyalty, leading to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. This, in turn, plays a vital role in the sustainable growth and development of rural tourism destinations.

To achieve sustainable rural tourism, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive approach that takes into account environmental, socio-cultural, and economic factors. Encouraging responsible tourism practices, promoting the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage, and engaging local communities in tourism planning and development are key components. In addition, incorporating sustainable practices in tourism operations, such as eco-friendly accommodations, waste management systems, and community-based initiatives, can enhance the overall experience for tourists and contribute to their satisfaction and loyalty. According to a recent study, there has been a significant increase in the duration of stay for tourists in rural tourism destinations after the COVID-19 pandemic. The length of stay has increased from 2-3 days to 30-45 days due to the isolation, authenticity, and peace that such destinations provide. The study also revealed that many of the tourists were repeat visitors, with most of them being weekend tourists who would visit the destination only during weekends. However, the tourists who stayed for 30 to 45 days were from various parts of the country, such as Kerala, West Bengal, Mumbai, Delhi NCR, Gujarat, and so on. On the other hand, the weekend tourists were mostly from Noida, Gurgaon, Delhi NCR, and nearby areas.

Businesses involved in rural tourism need to prioritize exceptional service delivery to meet the expectations of tourists. Exceptional service includes being kind, courteous, prompt, helpful, professional, and having knowledgeable frontline staff. The rural tourism industry in Uttarakhand is still in its early stage, hence professionals in this field need to focus on addressing technical issues, implementing effective marketing strategies, and improving their offerings' commercialization. These steps will help to improve tourist loyalty towards the destination and facilitate the growth

of sustainable rural tourism. The government needs to strike a balance between tourism development and preserving the natural and cultural heritage of Uttarakhand to achieve sustainable development. Uttarakhand has unique natural and cultural resources that require preservation and protection. This can be achieved by maintaining a welcoming environment for tourists, providing a wide range of tourist products and activities, and adhering to international standards. These initiatives will create a peaceful and pleasurable atmosphere for visitors and contribute to the long-term viability of rural tourism businesses. To keep the destination attractive and cultivate a positive image, destination managers should engage in promotional activities and events that cater to local preferences and showcase new attractions and features in the area (Assaker, Vinzi, and Connor, 2010; Sun, Chi, and Xu, 2013).

To enhance the rural tourism experience, rural tourism practitioners must go beyond the traditional approach of merely providing accommodations and regional cuisine. They should also involve tourists in rural community activities and cultural events, as well as curate more engaging and enticing recreational activities that showcase the unique features of the region. This will result in the creation of complex and attractive rural tourism products, expanding the overall rural experience for visitors (Loureiro and Kastenholz, 2010).

The research findings also bring to light several challenges in the tourism sector of the state. These include concerns related to the carrying capacity of mountainous regions, ineffective solid waste management practices, ineffective tourist guides, limited awareness among local communities, and insufficient connectivity to remote areas with untapped tourism potential. To address these issues, the government should establish policies for efficient waste management and implement visitor limits during specific periods to prevent overcrowding and degradation of natural resources. Furthermore, the government should organize awareness campaigns and training programs in potential rural tourism destinations to enhance the understanding and capabilities of local communities. This will not only benefit the tourism sector but also contribute to the overall development of rural areas.

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CMTHS

JOURNAL OF TOURISM
ISSN: 0972-7310. Vol. XXV, Issue 2 (December 2024), 32-45

Gender Participation and Women's Empowerment through Tourism in Hill Villages of Uttarakhand: A Socio-Economic and Perceptual Study with Case Narratives

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KEYWORDS

Women empowerment, gender participation, tourism development, Uttarakhand, rural economy, sustainable tourism, socio-economic change

ABSTRACT

Tourism has emerged as one of the major forces of socio-economic transformation in the hill areas of Uttarakhand and has affected livelihoods, gender roles, and community development. This paper analyzes gender involvement and the empowerment of women in the chosen villages in the Rudraprayag district through tourism. A mixed-method design was employed in gathering data on 385 respondents in key tourism locations together with field based case accounts. The results indicate that women are active in homestays, food services, handicraft, digital content development, and community enterprises, which increases household income, enhances mobility, and improves confidence and participation in decision-making. Case studies indicate the educational advantages of the generations, group entrepreneurship and the increasing influence of digital platforms. Nevertheless, such issues as a lack of access to capital, skills, seasonal working, safety issues, and environmental factors are still important. The paper concludes that tourism is a multidimensional empowerment process within the hill villages, which contributes to the economic and social inclusion in the villages as well as creating ecological and structural dilemmas. Policies that are gender sensitive and sustainable must be in place so that tourism development results in equitable growth in the long run.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the most important units of the global service economy, which generates jobs, develops a region, and helps to bring different cultures together. In addition to the economic aspects, tourism is becoming a social process that redefines livelihoods and community forms, as well as gender relations, especially in the rural and geographically vulnerable areas (UNWTO, 2019). Tourism has often become a feasible alternative source of income and diversification in the mountain economies where productive agricultural activities are often constrained and there are high migration pressures. Its indirect impacts are the accommodation, food services, transport, handicrafts, and informal enterprises, thus incorporating the local populations into larger markets (WTTC, 2022). The state of Uttarakhand located in the Indian Himalayas offers a good backdrop to the analysis of these dynamics. The state is known as Dev Bhoomi (Land of the Gods) because it is visited by millions of both national and foreign tourists each year thanks to pilgrimage routes, hiking trails, biodiversity and scenic beauty. Tourism in the area is not merely a seasonal form of the economic activity as it is a structural element in the local economy affecting labor distribution, the development of infrastructure and socio-cultural relations (Government of Uttarakhand, Human

Development Report, 2019). Rapid tourism growth generates significant challenges, including environmental degradation, resource overuse, and unequal distribution of tourism benefits, particularly in ecologically fragile mountain regions (Nepal, 2007). In this context, gender becomes an important analytical dimension, as tourism both reflects and reshapes existing divisions of labour and social power within rural communities.

The involvement of women in tourism has therefore attracted increased academic interest because of its ability to increase economic autonomy, free movement and authority to make decisions. The barriers to tourism activities like homestays, food services, handicrafts, guiding, and digital promotion are relatively low and therefore allow the rural women to engage in income-generating activities within or around their communities. Nevertheless, tourism has not been found to empower people automatically and similarly; it is mediated by accessibility to capital, training programs, institutional support, security situation, and existing socio-cultural norms. In its turn, the empowerment of women in tourism should be viewed in a multidimensional perspective including economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects. Important contexts on the dynamics of analysis are provided in the hill villages of the Rudraprayag district. The destination is found along the major pilgrimage and trekking trails, where there has been a growing number of tourists during the last 20 years.

Even though tourism has brought in new economic (living) avenues, its effects on gender participation and empowerment are disproportionate and situation-specific. This study aims to examine the extent of gender participation in tourism and assess its impact on multidimensional women's empowerment in selected hill villages of Uttarakhand. The study adopts a mixed-method approach, including survey analysis and field-based case narratives. Women's empowerment in this study is conceptualized across four dimensions: economic, social, decision-making, and environmental. The study can be used to contribute to the existing discourse on gender equity, sustainable tourism, and community resilience in mountain areas by placing the experiences of women in the scope of a wider socio-economic and environmental framework of rural tourism.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tourism-gender scholarship is beginning to pay more attention to the interaction of economic involvement and social change at large, especially in rural and ecologically sensitive areas.

Women's Economic Empowerment through Tourism: The tourism development has acquired a good share of academic interest as a means through which women can be empowered economically, especially in the rural and community-based tourism settings. Homestays, handicrafts, guiding services, and hospitality enterprises are tourism-based sectors which in most cases have low entry barriers and therefore rural women are able to engage in income earning activities without sacrificing their domestic duties. Empirical studies and evidence on the macro level indicate that tourism development creates positive effects on the indicators of gender equality. Based on the statistical analysis of 24 European countries, Nassani et al. (2019) demonstrate that the development of tourism along with the financial one positively influences the number of women employed and engaged in non-agricultural wage labor and increases their access to education. Tourism entrepreneurship at the community level is a great opportunity to women economically independent and participating in collective activities. As an example, Pazhoor and John (2024) identify the Kudumbashree women self-help network in Kerala, where tourism-related businesses like homestays, handicraft shows, and cultural festivals create jobs and build on the community based entrepreneurship.

The researchers in other regions also demonstrate that tourism entrepreneurship increases the autonomy of women and diversification of livelihood. The women involved in rural tourism ventures are likely to have more bargaining power in terms of working conditions and revenue generation as they bargain on the conventional gender roles (Moller, 2012). Equally, culturally based tourism business can enable women to use indigenous knowledge, craft, and cooking habits to earn money and enhance social position in the society (Makandwa, Klerk, and Saayman, 2021). Handicrafts, the production of souvenirs, and small hospitality businesses are the ways in which rural tourism can provide people with self-employment and financial independence (Vukovic et al., 2023). The involvement in tourism may have more far reaching impacts in terms of empowerment other than the economic one.

Research on the theme of community-based tourism in Fiji reveals that women are found to have psychological confidence in engaging in tourism enterprises, social recognition, and increased involvement in community decisions (Movono & Dahles, 2017). The same pattern has been noted in India where rural tourism has been determined as a powerful indicator in the empowerment of women based on entrepreneurial skills building and socio-economic mobility (Seal et al., 2024). One of the most important sources of economic activity of women in the rural setting is homestay tourism. A study conducted at Darjeeling revealed that homestays run by women offer sustainability in terms of income and also increasing the bargaining power of women both at household and community level (Kannegieser, 2015). Similarly, researchers in Uttarakhand show that women have been employed in homestay businesses and this has led to sustainable tourism and cultural conservation (Chakraborty, 2019). Another benefit of homestay services is that women can both fulfill domestic tasks and earn income, which enhances their financial self-reliance and status as considered members of society (Yaja et al., 2023). Studies conducted in other regions of India point towards how nature-based tourism improves the livelihood of women. The women of Meghalaya are actively involved in the hospitality services, handicrafts and managing the environment in tourism related activities which help them to have better socio-economic status despite the lingering occupational classes (De, 2013). On the whole, the literature continues to show that tourism presents a great potential in economic empowerment of women even though the results depend on the access to financial resources, exposure to training, and conducive institutional conditions.

Social and Cultural Transformation: Other than economic performance, tourism affects social interactions, culture and gender life experiences in the societies. By engaging in activities related to tourism, women tend to be more visible in the society and become more involved in the decision making of their family. Research on tourism workforce indicates that the involvement of women can both upset conventional gender-based ideologies and create conflicts in the family. As Duffy et al. (2015) show, the position of women in the Dominican Republic in the tourism sector enhances economic autonomy and social exchanges, but traditional gender roles still remain frequent. In line with this, Boonabaana (2014) reveals that women employed in the tourism sector in Uganda have a high level of impact on the welfare of the household and slowly redefine the household decision-making processes. Nevertheless, tourism does not necessarily destroy already existing social hierarchies. Nimble (2019) points out the ongoing socio-cultural limitation such as gender inequality and mobility that restrict women in political processes in the community-based tourism governance systems. A study conducted in Thailand confirms that tourism businesses have the potential to alter the role of gender in that women are able to bargain mobility and decision-making power at home and in society, even though these changes may be slow (Promburom, 2022). Research on the dynamics of households finds that women involvement in tourism businesses augments female involvement in financial decision-making (Lunardi, De Souza, and Perurena, 2015). Critical gender scholars suggest that in this case, tourism can establish a space in which women are renegotiating their social place and challenging the rules of patriarchy, though the effects of empowerment will depend on wider institutional and cultural frameworks (Cole, 2018). Tourism has created empowering opportunities to women in India to bargain with traditional gender roles, but structural challenges remain in place to keep women entirely empowered (Singhania, Swain, and George, 2021). Homestay tourism is another piece of evidence that shows the potential of tourism to alter gender perceptions. Female homestay owners tend to earn more social status and power in families and society (Kannegieser, 2015). Similarly, involvement in non-traditional tourism activities like trekking and mountaineering has helped women to break gender stereotypes and create more platforms of leadership (Caparros, 2018). Altogether, the impact of tourism on social and cultural change is in the increase of the mobility, visibility, and agency of women, but these changes are slow and situation-specific.

Structural Constraints and Persistent Barriers: In spite of the empowerment that can be seen in tourism, there are many structural constraints that are still evident in gendered experiences in tourism economies. The studies have shown that women often have limited access to tourism opportunities because of socio-cultural norms, labour market and institutional inequalities. As Tucker and Boonabaana (2012) show, tourism development is usually in interaction with the available gender

norms that limit the mobility of women, their access to jobs, and the power to make decisions. This makes women often be left behind in the lower status tourist jobs. Equally, Costa et al. (2017) point out that gender segregation in the tourism workplace has been an unrelenting problem with women usually being hired in low-paying service capacities, and managerial opportunities being predominantly occupied by men. The seasonal and informal character of the tourism employment adds to the unstable working conditions, low wages, and weak job security. The recent scholarship criticizes the mainstream discourse of tourism-led empowerment. According to Pecot et al. (2024), development discourse tends to give the stories of individual success and ignores the existence of structural inequalities that influence the participation of women in tourism. Lack of access to financial funds, training and market networks often limits the possibility of women entrepreneurs growing or maintaining tourism businesses. Such results underscore the importance of gender-sensitive development schemes which cater to structural inequalities in tourism economies.

Women and Tourism in Himalayan Context: The research based on Himalayan region bring out the critical role of women in the maintenance of mountain livelihoods and tourism. Females in Himalayan societies tend to engage in farming, management of natural resources and services related to tourism activities that help them to survive as a household and community (Sherpa, 2007). A number of studies have emphasized the significance of the institutional support and training programs to increase the role of women in tourism. Alvarado and Jackson (2012) records how the training programs on trekking guides in Nepal are questioning the stereotypes of male gender in the male dominated adventure tourism industry. Likewise, homestay programs in Nepal based in the community have been reported to give women the chance to be entrepreneurs and involved in the management of tourism (Acharya and Halpenny, 2013). Other previous studies in the Indian Himalayas report socio-cultural and institutional obstacles that influence the involvement of women in tourism. Despite the fact that women play a major role in provision of tourism services e.g. hotel services, and handicrafts, they are mostly involved in lowly positions in the tourism workforce. Meanwhile, the ecotourism programs proved to be an opportunity to enhance the livelihoods of women and the involvement of the community in the areas surrounding the mountains (Ogra & Badola, 2015). It has been observed that skill development programs are the major empowerment mechanism to women in Himalayan tourism economies. Marginalized women have been empowered in hospitality training programs in Nepal to gain entrepreneurial skills and engage in more tourism-related businesses (Deagon, Ham, and Hillman, 2021). The community-based projects in Uttarakhand also indicate how tourism can help women in terms of economic empowerment as well as other social problems like gender inequality and domestic violence (Tiwari, 2023). Other studies in Himachal Pradesh show that tourism businesses enhance the income-generating capacity of women, their self-esteem, and bargaining power at the household level (Rinaldi and Salerno, 2020). Nevertheless, the access to tourism benefits in mountain communities still manifests unequal power relations associated with gender, caste, and class (Nimble, 2023). The studies conducted in Uttarakhand reveal that the role of women in tourism governance is insignificant because of the social model of patriarchy and the absence of education opportunities (Kala & Bagri, 2018). The women entrepreneurship opportunities have however emerged due to the government policies and the community-based tourism initiatives. Uttarakhand has had homestay schemes that have promoted women to engage in tourism businesses and self-employment (Uniyal and Kumar, 2023); and community tourism committees that have enhanced women in tourism governance and decision-making (Virgo et al., 2017). Generally, the literature covering tourism in Himalayan region brings out the opportunities and the challenges involved with tourism-based development. The avenues in the economic involvement and social interactions of women created by tourism are rather significant, yet the level of empowerment results remains defined by these structural barriers.

Research gaps and focus of the current study: Despite the available studies that prove the effect of tourism in rural development and the economic involvement of women, most studies concentrate on the economic effects and pay minimum attention to the overall social, cultural and environmental aspects of the empowerment process. Additionally, the integrated empirical researches that combine quantitative analysis with the qualitative field-based findings are lacking to depict the multidimensionality of tourism-driven

empowerment. Within the context of Uttarakhand, gender involvement in tourism has been under investigation with fair degree of limited studies on the same even as the region increasingly relies on pilgrimage and nature tourism. Not many studies have combined socio-economic profiling, perception-based indicators, and field-based narratives to comprehend the effects of tourism on women in regard to their mobility, power to make decisions, environmental consciousness, and social position in a particular village setting. In order to fill such gaps, this research paper will use a mixed-methodology approach to a survey-based quantitative analysis, approach that will be supplemented with qualitative case descriptions. In this way, the research will add to the general body of literature on gender, tourism and sustainable rural development in mountain areas with location-specific empirical evidence.

METHODOLOGY

This paper has utilized a descriptive research design to test the gender participation and the outcome of women empowerment in tourism based activities in the rural Himalayan communities. The strategy allowed examining both quantifiable socio-economic trends and contextual social processes related to the development of tourism. The study took place in Rudraprayag District within the Garhwal division in Uttarakhand which has pilgrimage routes, trekking tours and nature-based tourism. The district can be considered an archetype of a mountain economy in which the livelihoods of locals depend directly on tourism and other related services. The probability and non-probability sampling methods were combined to make sure that tourism stakeholders were represented well. Multi stage sampling was used on the blocks and major tourist destinations whereas purposive sampling was employed to select respondents with direct or indirect involvement in the tourism activities. The Slovin formula was calculated with a population of 50,719 and margin of error of 5 percent giving the final sample of 385 respondents. To measure spatial differences in tourism participation, these respondents were proportionately spread in four major tourism attractions in India, which include; Kedarnath, Sari, Tungnath and Triyuginarayan. Primary and secondary sources were used to collect the data. The primary data collection methods include the structured interview schedules, the field observations, and selected case narratives, whereas the secondary data collection methods comprised the government reports, academic literature, tourism statistics, and the policy documents. Data collected were determined and evaluated through the percentage analysis, gender comparative tables, perception basis indicators and combined Gender-Tourism Participation Index (GTPI) in order to assess the participation and empowerment trends. To add more insights to the statistical results, qualitative case stories were used to have a more in-depth background about the experiences of tourism participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Gendered Patterns of Tourism Participation

The results that are provided in table 1 demonstrate a significant difference between genders in various aspects of tourism participation and empowerment. There was a minor difference of direct involvement in tourism and length of stay among women where women were found to be more involved in tourism as well as longer periods and as a result, tourism has become a comparatively stable means of livelihood. The importance of tourism to the financial independence of women is displayed by economic indicators since a higher percentage of the female respondents cited tourism as their major source of income and said they contribute more to the finances of the household. Higher bank account ownership rates of women indicate that there is gradual victory of financial independence and accessibility of formal economical systems. In addition to economic factors, tourism involvement has affected a number of social empowerment indicators. The women mentioned higher enhances in mobility, confidence, and communication with tourists than male respondents as an indicator of having been exposed more to external social networks and avenues of communication.

It is important to mention that the disparity in household decision making power implies significant move towards increased female agency in families. The increased direct tourist contact among women increases their social visibility and communication which are very important aspects of empowerment in a rural tourism economy. Altogether, the data demonstrate that tourism does not only increase the economic role of women, but also the wider enhancement in aspects of social confidence, mobility, and perceived quality of life, which facilitates tourism, one of the factors of key gender empowerment in the study region.

Table 1: Integrated Gender–Tourism Participation & Empowerment Matrix					
Dimension	**Indicator**	**Men (%)**	**Women (%)**	**Gap (W–M)**	**Interpretation**
Participation	Direct tourism involvement	89.85	92.00	+2.15	Women slightly higher direct participation
	Years involved (6–10 yrs)	66.27	72.00	+5.73	Women show stable long-term engagement
Economic Empowerment	Tourism as main income	78.00	94.00	+16.00	Women depend more on tourism livelihood
	Household financial contribution	78.50	94.00	+15.50	Women stronger contributors
	Bank account ownership	Moderate	High	—	Financial autonomy improving
Social Empowerment	Mobility increase	81.00	92.00	+11.00	Tourism enhances women's movement freedom
	Decision-making power	52.00	74.00	+22.00	Strong intra-household empowerment shift
	Confidence/self-expression	84.00	95.00	+11.00	Tourism boosts personal agency
Interaction	Direct tourist interaction	76.00	100.00	+24.00	Women gain communication exposure
Perceived Quality of Life	Very Positive	56.41	62.00	+5.59	Women perceive stronger well-being gains

2. Multi-Dimensional Empowerment through Tourism Participation

These observations are further supported by the Gender-Tourism Participation Index (GTPI) as in Table 2 which depicts the multidimensional aspect of the participation of women in tourism. Weights were assigned based on relative importance derived from literature and field observations. Women score higher in all the important elements of participation such as economic contribution, social empowerment, environment awareness and safety and mobility. The greatest disparities are observed in the power of the decisions and indicators of safety and mobility, which implies that tourism participation plays an important role in fostering the agency and confidence of women in their family and community settings. Generally, the overall composite GTPI score records that the empowerment index of women (0.91) is much higher than that of men (0.80), which depicts tourism as a transformative process, which appears to contribute to empowers women and makes them more active, empowered economically, and more visible in the community.

Table 2: Gender–Tourism Participation Index (GTPI) Expanded Analytical Table				
Component	**Indicator Weight**	**Men Score**	**Women Score**	**Difference**
Participation Intensity	0.20	0.89	0.92	+0.03
Economic Contribution	0.25	0.78	0.94	+0.16
Social Empowerment	0.20	0.81	0.92	+0.11
Decision-Making Power	0.15	0.52	0.74	+0.22
Environmental Awareness	0.10	0.88	0.94	+0.06
Safety & Mobility	0.10	0.58	0.80	+0.22
Overall GTPI	**1.00**	**0.80**	**0.91**	**+0.11**

3. Tourism and Women's Economic Agency

Gendered variations in the use of tourism generated income are further demonstrated by the economic behavior patterns which are indicated in Table 3. Women tended to spend the income on basic household items like daily expenditure, education of children, and health services, which means that they are more oriented toward family welfare and the development of the human capital in the long run. Contrarily, male respondents were slightly more inclined towards personal savings and re-investment in business activities. There is evidence of moderate to high rates of loan repayment by women and these may indicate that they depend on microfinance systems to counsel tourism related businesses. Nonetheless, the two genders significantly underreported the production of assets including land or housing investments, which is indicative of more widespread structural limits in rural mountain economies. All in all, these results can point out the importance of tourism in increasing the financial involvement of women and also illustrate the importance of income distribution patterns among women in promoting the welfare of the household and community development.

The statistical data on the contribution by women and their participation in livelihood are further demonstrated using case accounts in the field. Madmaheshwar Homestay enterprise, Gaundar village, is one of them and shows that the involvement of long-term tourism can transform into a multi-generational economic change.

Madmaheshwar Homestay, Gaundar Village: Individual Entrepreneurship, Family Transformation, and Ripple Empowerment

The example of Madmaheshwar Homestay, Gaundar village, demonstrates that the multi-layered empowerment can be achieved due to the long-term engagement of women in tourism. About 20 years ago one of the local women started running a small tea shop where the people of the village and visiting trekkers could find tea. She took the initiative by making simple meals to visitors during pilgrimage seasons and eventually began to provide empty rooms in her house as places where visitors could spend the night. Together with her husband, enterprise grew to be a formal homestay, followed by a small lodge and restaurant facility located in the vicinity of the Madmaheshwar temple. The family business has gained the inter-generational participation, where their son is in charge of the lodge and hiring workers locally in the seasons of high tourism activities.

Table 3: Gender, Livelihood Utilisation, Economic Behaviour Table

Income Use Category	Men (%)	Women (%)	Behavioural Insight
Daily Household Expenses	41.5	44.0	Women prioritise sustenance stability
Education of Children	18.0	21.0	Women invest more in human capital
Health & Medical	12.0	14.0	Women show higher welfare orientation
Savings	13.0	10.0	Men slightly more inclined to saving
Business Reinvestment	15.5	11.0	Women limited by capital access
Loan Repayment	Moderate	Moderate –High	Microfinance dependency visible
Asset Creation (Land/House)	Low	Low	Structural constraints remain

Tourism earned the household a substantial amount of income that enhanced the socio-economic position of the household and allowed the family to invest in the education of their children and housing and further enhanced the household in the long term financial aspect. The role of the women changed to an informal economic participation to a key decision-maker and influence in the community. Together with her husband, she opened a YouTube channel as well under the name 'Madhyamaheshwar Ghati' that highlights the local culture and brings more visitors to the region. Regulatory challenges however come along with empowerment. Building laws on the sanctuary areas have led to eviction warnings and continuing court battles with the forest administration, which show the institutional threats the tourism business people in ecologically sensitive areas are under. This initiative was successful as well, which led to a ripple effect in the adjacent villages.

No less motivated, one of the widowed women in Makkumba town, which lies nearby, turned her cattle shed into a homestay, showing how the involvement in tourism could trigger the confidence, peer learning, and empowerment between households regardless of structural limitations. The level of interaction with the visitors has boosted the confidence of women, their skills in communication, and exposed them to socialization as well as their involvement in homestays, self-help groups, and small enterprises has increased collective agency and communal involvement. Practical observations show that villages where the activity of the tourism industry is more significant, in particular, Triyuginarayan and Sari, reveal more visible changes in the social position of women and their interaction with the community.

4. Social Mobility and Changing Gender Norms

In addition to being an individual entrepreneur, the involvement of females in tourism has stimulated collective types of economic activity facilitated by government campaigns and training schemes.

Women Homestay Initiative, Makkumath Village: Collective Participation and Institutional Empowerment

The homestay program is another initiative that has helped women to be empowered in Makkumath village. There were seven homestays that were set up by seven women, and 6 of them are running. The financial assistance to every beneficiary was Rs. 7 lakh to build more rooms in traditional architectural style which connects the cultural preservation with the livelihood development through tourism. Each and every homestay is registered and the participants were provided with hospitality and interior management training by the Tourism Department of Rudraprayag.

These institutional practices empowered women in entrepreneurial skills, and they were able to interact with the visitors, handle finances and facilitate the local culture. The project represents the way in which collective tourism projects with the use of training programs and governmental programs can change informal domestic contributors by women into accepted economic actors, making them more independent, visible and involved in the household and village decision-making process.

Table 4: Integrated Socio-Cultural Impact & Gender Perception Table

Impact Variable	Men Yes (%)	Women Yes (%)	Social Direction	Long-Term Implication
Cultural Change	83.30	84.00	Transformative	Hybrid cultural identity
Language Shift	67.20	72.00	Adaptive	Increased multilingualism
Social Conflict Rise	63.80	58.00	Competitive	Resource competition
Women Safety Perception Improved	42.00	61.00	Positive	Increased female mobility
Interaction with Outsiders	78.40	96.00	Expansive	Confidence & exposure
Social Status Improvement	76.40	82.00	Upward	Community recognition

Table 4 shows the views of the respondents about the socio-cultural effects of tourism development in the study area. The results show that men and women have accepted tourism as a major source of cultural and social change in the local communities. A significant percentage of respondents noted that there was observed cultural change in an increasing interaction between the residents and the visitors of different backgrounds bringing about the cultural identities of hybrids, the gradual change in traditions of the residents. Exposure of tourism promotes the use of multiple languages since locals interact with other visitors with other regionalities and nations. Women registered greater rates of positive results as regards to communication with outsiders, better safety perception, and better social standing than male respondents. The effects of greater tourist interaction seem to boost the confidence and social exposure of women and enhance the perception of safety, which in turn leads to enhanced mobility and involvement in the public space. In general, the results indicate that tourism leads to social change as well as adaption in terms of the community, and women have been especially benefiting in the form of social awareness, movement, cultural participation. Participation in tourism has provided women, who are young, with a chance to venture into the field of public entrepreneurship, normally dominated by men.

Women-Owned Restaurant, Triyuginarayan Village: Youth Leadership and Norm Transformation

An example of increased integration of young women in the tourism sector is a 25 year old women in Triyuginarayan village. Although she is a graduate dropout and a mother, she opened a restaurant close to the Triyuginarayan Temple in 2020 through the help of her husband and father. The business is done in a rented structure, where it makes daily profits of about Rs. 2000 - Rs. 4000 during the seasonal times of marriage and Kedarnath yatra.

Being the only women shop owner in the village, this appearance in a traditionally male domain of the public business space is a significant change in the gender standards of the village, adding to her social status, confidence and mobility. Her visibility to the community and consistent tourist loyalty also adds to the strength of her position as a local role model of female entrepreneurship and encourages other young women to think about following in her footsteps.

5. Spatial Variations in Women's Empowerment

Table 5: Location, Gender, Empowerment Outcome Table

Location	Women in Tourism (%)	Mobility Increase (%)	Confidence Increase (%)	Business Participation (%)	Overall Empowerment Rank
Kedarnath	92.8	82	84	62	3
Sari	100	88	89	75	2
Tungnath	87.5	75	80	58	4
Triyuginarayan	96.1	91	95	84	1

The results (table 5) demonstrate that there are significant variations in the degree of women participation in tourism together with the associated indicators of empowerment across villages. Triyuginarayan has the greatest female percent of respondents and has good results on various indicators, such as mobility, confidence, and engagement in tourism related businesses. Triyuginarayan with 96.1 percent of women in tourism activities, and with the highest score of 91 percent in mobility, and 95 percent in confidence increase, has become the main empowerment cluster in the surveyed locations. The fact that the number of female business people (84 percent) is high is another pointer that tourism opportunities are available in this destination that offer a great avenue to women entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. There are high empowerment results in Sari village especially on the aspect of women engagement in tourism activities with all the female respondents affirming their engagement. Such indicators like mobility and confidence are significantly improved, which implies that tourism has had a positive impact on the social activity and presence of women in the community. On the contrary, Tungnath and Kedarnath present comparatively moderate levels of empowerment. Despite the fact that women in these places are rather active in the activities with tourism, it is observed that they are not as active in tourism businesses and decision making. These differences indicate that local tourism development, community-level efforts, and institutional facilitation are strongly related to the results of gender empowerment in various tourism destinations. All in all, the findings emphasize the relevance of location-specific tourism dynamics in determining the involvement of women, mobility and socio-economic empowerment of women in the rural hill communities.

In relation to physical tourism enterprises, online platforms are becoming the new avenue of participation so that rural women can participate in tourism marketing and cultural narration using the virtual media.

Digital Cultural Entrepreneurship, Triyuginarayan: Virtual Participation and Identity Empowerment

Online platforms have increased the horizons of tourism participation beyond the conventional businesses. A 35-year-old women of Triyuginarayan started making content on YouTube in the middle of the COVID-19 lockdown on a smartphone and self-taught editing. Her videos capturing Garhwali culture, food, lifestyle and beautiful landscape were easily popularized and in three and a half years she hit more than 6.6 lakh subscribers and earned an

estimated income of Rs. 1.5-2 lakh per month. Her presence in the online world has greatly marketed the village as a tourist destination especially in the Kedarnath yatra season and that is how online media can be used to influence the tourist flow to rural regions. Her increased publicity in addition to economic gains enhanced her leadership status in the community and she was subsequently elected as the village pradhan. Her experience depicts that digital entrepreneurship is capable of promoting culture, tourism, and new types of female leadership in rural mountain areas. Besides the socio-economic impacts, the participation of tourism influences environmental perception of the locals.

6. Environmental Awareness and Gendered Sustainability Perspectives

The respondents attitudes to the environment show a high level of awareness on the ecological impacts of the tourism development in the hill region. There was a high agreement on the environmental pressures experienced by both the female and the male respondents due to heightened tourist inflow, such as the production of waste, pollution and water shortage. Nonetheless, women proved to be more sensitive to these issues, and it can be associated with the fact that they daily engage in household resource allocation, including water gathering, waste management, and preservation.

These gender differences in environmental awareness are also brought out in the results in Table 6. In most indicators, women were a bit more concerned than men, especially on water shortages and higher generation of waste as it implies the immediate effects of the problems on the wellbeing of the household. Both genders agreed that helicopter services related to pilgrimage tourism depose a strong pressure on the local environment and tourism congestion and the wrong disposal of waste were frequently singled out as major challenges. All in all, the results can be summarized by the fact that the involvement of women in tourism is still presupposed by the increased level of ecological consciousness, which makes women target stakeholders in terms of sustainable tourism practices and environment protection in the hill communities.

Women's participation in tourism is not limited to economic activities but also extends into community governance and environmental stewardship.

Table 6: Environmental Awareness and Sustainability Perception Grid

Environmental Indicator	Men Yes (%)	Women Yes (%)	Severity Category	Gender Sensitivity Gap
Waste Generation Increase	88.95	94.00	High	+5.05
Pollution (Air/Water/ Noise)	90.40	94.00	High	+3.60
Water Shortages	82.39	88.00	High	+5.61
Forest Cover Reduction	79.70	82.00	Moderate –High	+2.30
Improper Waste Disposal	85.60	90.00	High	+4.40
Helicopter Service Damage	100	100	Critical	0
Tourism Congestion	94.90	98.00	High	+3.10

Eco Development Committees and Mahila Mangal Dals; Governance, Sustainability, and Collective Empowerment.

Women are involved in tourism in the arena of governance and environmental management taking the form of village level organizations like the Eco Development committees and the Mahila Mangal Dals. These groups incorporate representatives of various categories of caste and actively engage women in debates about natural resource management, cleanliness campaigns, tourist behaviour control and planning sustainability. The Mahila Mangal Dal groups that were originally established to carry out their cultural and devotional practices have been modified as forums where homestay management discussions and bringing of their skills as well as finding solutions to some of the problems in the tourism businesses. The members who are females state that they feel more confident, have more leadership, and can act collectively, signifying the fact that empowerment is not merely economic but social, political, and ecological.

7. Structural Barriers and Institutional Constraints

Although there are positive results that can be linked to the participation in tourism, the respondents noted that there are some structural issues that still act as a barrier to the degree of

empowerment women have in the tourism industry. As it is shown in Table 7, women complained much more of constraints at several dimensions as compared to men.

Table 7: Gendered Challenges and Structural Barriers Index

Challenge Dimension	Men (%)	Women (%)	Impact Level	Structural Cause
Lack of Capital	54	72	High	Credit inaccessibility
Lack of Training	46	69	High	Skill infrastructure deficit
Workplace Safety Issues	18	44	Moderate –High	Public space vulnerability
Mobility Restrictions	12	36	Moderate	Socio-cultural norms
Seasonal Employment Instability	100	100	Critical	Tourism seasonality
Market Access Barriers	38	61	Moderate –High	Transport/logistics issues
Digital Literacy Gap	41	63	Moderate	Tech exposure limitations

Access to capital was the most significant issue that the female respondents reported as 72 percent stated that their access to capital prevented them to grow or start businesses related to tourism. This indicates more systemic problems of access to credit and the existence of minimal financial resources among women who are willing to become entrepreneurs, but live in rural areas. On the same note, insufficiency of training and skill advancement opportunity came out as another significant limitation with the need to enhance institutional assistance and capacity development programs on skills related to tourism. Besides monetary and training constraints, some socio-cultural and infrastructural factors are still influencing the involvement of women in tourism activities.

A significant share of women said that they were worried about safety at work and limited mobility as one of the weak points of working in open tourism areas and existing social standards in rural communities. The barriers to accessing the market and digital literacy differences also seem to be even stronger in women, in which case they act as indicators of the lack of exposure to marketing platforms, online booking services, and digital tourism providers. More so, male and female respondents were in consensus over the instability that comes with seasonality of tourism that impacts on the continuity of income and security of livelihoods in the long-term. All in all, these results point to the fact that as much as tourism offers women economic opportunities, the structural barriers that still exist especially those that deal with access to financial resources, skill acquisition and movement still influence the extent to which empowerment results in hill tourism economies will be realized. Tourism-linked empowerment is visible in traditional craft sectors, where cultural heritage and handicraft production are integrated with tourism demand.

Deoriatal Handloom and Handicrafts, Sari Village; Skill Preservation and Gender-Collaborative Enterprise.

Within Sari village, the empowerment of the people as a result of tourism is experienced through the traditional craft industries that have been funded by the Rural Enterprise Acceleration Project (REAP). This program, which runs under the Nanda Devi Self Help Group, makes shawls, scarfs, mufflers, phanki wraps, waistcoats and caps with weaving skills that have been given by generations of women. The workshop, which is based close to family homes, serves as a production and education facility where men help in the logistics and sale, which is a gender-based economic approach. The production strategies are seasonal, and they facilitate the relation to the tourists in terms of design innovation. As the business makes the pressures of migration stable by providing stable additional revenues and decreasing the migration pressure, its members have to struggle with the costs of raw materials rising, the number of people who have digital marketing knowledge and experience decreasing, and the youth losing interest in weaving. However, the project shows how cultural heritage can be transformed into viable livelihoods and empower women economically and socially.

8. Perceptions of Tourism-led Development

Table 8 indicates the composite perception index of the tourism impact on various socio-economic levels and this analysis shows that there are gender variations in perception of tourism development in the study region. Those findings have shown that both the male and the female respondents acknowledge strongly that tourism is a significant employment creating sector and both groups of respondents agree unanimously. There were high rates of consensus on the aspects of tourism as a factor in enhancing infrastructure development and provision of employment opportunities to the youth. These results imply that tourism is generally viewed as an important contributor to local economic growth and diversification of livelihood among the hill communities in the case of the study. Nonetheless, the composite index shows that women always translate more socio-developmental benefits of tourism than men.

The female respondents indicated that they gave a greater concurrence in various domains such as enhancement of education amenities, health and women opportunity. The difference between women (88.60) and men (83.00) in the aspects of higher composite score implies that women perceive tourism as an economic chance as well as a trigger of the overall community growth and social advancement. Such perception could be related to the growing participation of women in tourism related activities and their personal experience of higher income, movement and the social awareness. Generally, the results indicate that the development of tourism has led to a broad spectrum of socio-economic benefits in the rural hill societies with women showing an impressive scenario of the positive developmental effects by tourism.

Table 8: Multi-Dimensional Tourism Impact Perception Index (Gender Composite)

Impact Domain	Men Agreement (%)	Women Agreement (%)	Relative Weight	Composite Score (M)	Composite Score (W)
Employment Increase	100	100	0.20	20.0	20.0
Quality of Life Improvement	56.4	62.0	0.15	8.46	9.30
Education Facility Improvement	72.2	86.0	0.15	10.83	12.90
Health Services Improvement	61.1	74.0	0.10	6.11	7.40
Youth Opportunity Growth	93.1	96.0	0.10	9.31	9.60
Women Opportunity Creation	95.8	100	0.15	14.37	15.00
Infrastructure Development	92.8	96.0	0.15	13.92	14.40
Total Composite Index			**1.00**	**83.00**	**88.60**

CONCLUSION

Tourism in the hill villages of Uttarakhand has emerged as a transformative socio-economic force, specifically to the women. The results reveal that women are not only involved in tourism related activities but they in most cases realize greater empowerment results as compared to men on the spheres of mobility, confidence, social acknowledgment and economic contribution to household economies. Nevertheless, empowerment is not uniform since structural hurdles such as the lack of access to capital and safety issues, internet connectivity, and seasonal nature of the tourism industry still limit the full entrepreneurial potential of women. Simultaneously, the process of tourism development poses complicated opportunity and pressure balance. Although it leads to the diversification of livelihood and social development, it enhances environment-related and cultural issues in ecologically vulnerable mountain areas. The results hence demonstrate a necessity of sustainable and gender-sensitive tourism planning to ensure that economic integration and ecological conservation are considered. The policy interventions should aim at enhancing access to skill development, micro-credit as well as digital platforms by women and enhance safety infrastructure and institutional support to rural tourism businesses. This can be further enhanced by strengthening the community-based tourism governance structures such as self-help groups and village tourism committees; this will boost women involvement in local decision making. Besides this, women should be actively included in environmental management strategies because they have high ecological awareness and interact daily with the natural resources.

All in all, the tourism of the hill villages in Uttarakhand is not only an economic phenomenon but also a social phenomenon transforming gender roles, community patterns, and development aspirations. It will be necessary to make sure that the development of tourism is inclusive, participatory and environmentally friendly to ensure that the empowerment of women and the vulnerable mountain ecosystems that these communities rely on is preserved.

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CMTHS

JOURNAL OF TOURISM
ISSN: 0972-7310. Vol. XXV, Issue 2 (December 2024), 46-60

Socio-Economic Impacts of Homestay Tourism in Garhwal Himalaya of Uttarakhand, India

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KEYWORDS

Homestay tourism; community-based tourism; sustainable livelihoods; empowerment; socio-economic development; Uttarakhand; mountain tourism

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the socio-economic and social-perception impacts of homestay tourism on rural communities in Garhwal Himalaya of Uttarakhand, India. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates quantitative analysis of 202 homestay owners with qualitative narratives drawn from semi-structured interviews across three districts Rudraprayag, Chamoli, and Uttarkashi. Two standardized instruments the Economic Impact Scale and the Social-Perception Impact Scale were applied to evaluate household income diversification, employment generation, community cooperation, empowerment, and cultural sustainability. Findings indicate that homestay tourism significantly enhances local income (M = 4.83), employment opportunities (M = 4.64), and youth engagement (M = 4.56), while fostering social empowerment (M = 4.29) and cultural responsibility (M = 4.33). Reliability tests confirmed high internal consistency (α = 0.872 for economic and α = 0.842 for social scales). Qualitative insights reveal that women's participation in hospitality management has strengthened gender equality, decision-making, and digital literacy. Despite these benefits, persistent challenges such as limited infrastructure, seasonality, and policy awareness impede scalability. The study contextualizes findings within the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), illustrating how homestays contribute to multidimensional livelihood capitals (financial, social, human, natural, and physical). Policy implications emphasize capacity building, cluster-based branding, green certification, and digital integration to achieve regenerative, inclusive mountain tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Context and Background

Tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors worldwide, contributing about 10 percent of global GDP and supporting one in ten jobs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNWTO, 2023). Within this expansive domain, rural and community-based tourism has gained prominence as a sustainable alternative that distributes benefits more equitably among host communities (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). Among the diverse forms of community tourism, the homestay model where visitors reside in local households and experience everyday rural life has proven particularly effective in linking livelihood improvement with cultural preservation (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015; Quang et al., 2024)). In India, the Himalayan states have embraced homestays as a strategic mechanism for

inclusive mountain development. Uttarakhand, with its vast natural beauty and fragile ecology, illustrates both the promise and complexity of this model. The Uttarakhand Homestay Scheme (2018) incentivizes residents to convert part of their homes into tourist accommodation, thereby curbing youth migration and generating supplementary income. Yet, despite the policy's proliferation over 5,000 registered units by 2024 (UTDB, 2024) empirical evaluation of its socio-economic and social impacts remains limited. This research thus investigates how homestay tourism contributes to livelihood diversification, community empowerment, and sustainability in Uttarakhand's rural regions. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, it addresses a crucial empirical gap in South Asian mountain-tourism scholarship.

Significance of Homestay Tourism

Homestay tourism embodies a distinctive nexus between economic development and cultural exchange. Unlike conventional hotel models, it allows direct host–guest interaction, facilitating social learning, mutual respect, and cultural continuity (Scheyvens, 2002). From an economic standpoint, homestays minimize leakage by retaining profits within the local economy and stimulating backward linkages with agriculture, handicrafts, and transport services (Mitchell & Ashley, 2009). For Uttarakhand's rural households many of which rely on subsistence farming subject to erratic monsoon patterns homestays serve as adaptive livelihood strategies that mitigate vulnerability and seasonal unemployment. They transform under-utilized domestic spaces into productive assets and create new roles for women and youth. Simultaneously, they enable visitors to engage with authentic Himalayan culture and environmental ethics (Bellato et al., 2023).

Regional and Developmental Context

Uttarakhand's topography ranging from the Gangetic foothills to high-altitude villages poses structural barriers to conventional industrialization. The population in mountain blocks faces out-migration, aging demographics, and shrinking agricultural returns (Naudiyal et al., 2019). Tourism, therefore, emerges as a viable pathway to revitalization, but its benefits depend on local participation and environmental stewardship.

Homestay initiatives bridge this gap by converting social and cultural capital into economic capital, consistent with the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework ((Pasanchay & Schott, 2021); Scoones, 2015). The model's success, however, hinges on supportive policy environments, infrastructure, and skill development areas where empirical data from Uttarakhand remain scarce (Pasanchay & Schott, 2021).

Literature Context and Knowledge Gap

Existing research across Asia highlights the multiple dimensions of homestay tourism. Studies in Thailand (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015) and Vietnam (Quang et al., 2024)) report positive outcomes in income, empowerment, and cultural exchange, while research in Darjeeling (Basak, 2021) underscores livelihood diversification. Nonetheless, gaps persist in three areas:

- **Integrated Measurement:** Few studies quantitatively evaluate both economic and social dimensions within the same analytical frame.
- **Mountain-Specific Evidence:** Most South Asian research focuses on plains or coastal zones; mountain contexts like Uttarakhand entail unique environmental and infrastructural challenges.
- **Gender and Governance Linkages:** The role of women and local governance mechanisms in sustaining homestays remains under-documented in Indian scholarship.

Addressing these gaps is vital for both academic advancement and evidence-based policymaking.

Conceptual Framework

The study is theoretically grounded in two complementary perspectives:

(a) Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

CBT emphasizes local ownership, participatory planning, and equitable benefit distribution (Tosun, 2006; Dangi & Jamal, 2016). It views communities not as passive beneficiaries but as co-producers of tourism value. In Uttarakhand, CBT principles manifest through cooperatives, self-help groups, and village committees managing homestay operations.

(b) Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)

The SLF conceptualizes livelihood sustainability as a balance among five capitals financial, human, social, natural, and physical (Scoones, 2015). Homestay tourism contributes simultaneously to each: income increases (financial), hospitality training (human), cooperation networks (social), environmental care (natural), and infrastructure improvement (physical). By synthesizing CBT and

SLF, the study posits that homestay tourism functions as a multidimensional livelihood system that enhances resilience while conserving cultural and ecological assets (Mensah, 2011).

Research Questions and Objectives

Guided by this framework, the study pursued the following core research questions:

1. How does homestay tourism influence household income, employment, and local investment in rural Uttarakhand?
2. In what ways does it affect social empowerment, gender roles, and community cooperation?
3. What are the perceived challenges and policy gaps constraining sustainable homestay operations?

Accordingly, the objectives were to:

1. To assess the economic impacts of homestay tourism on rural livelihoods.
2. To evaluate the social and perception impacts related to empowerment, cooperation, and cultural responsibility.
3. To identify policy implications for enhancing sustainability and equitable benefit sharing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Foundations of Homestay Tourism

Homestay tourism represents an evolving form of community-based hospitality where visitors reside with local families, sharing domestic spaces and cultural practices (Janjua et al., 2021). It is distinguished from traditional accommodation by its participatory nature, authenticity, and community control (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). Scholars conceptualize homestays as hybrid socio-economic systems that merge cultural exchange, informal entrepreneurship, and sustainable resource management (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015; Quang et al., 2024)). From a developmental perspective, homestays contribute to the decentralization of tourism benefits, allowing small-scale operators to access global markets. The model promotes inclusive capitalism where growth occurs not through corporate expansion but through grassroots innovation (Scheyvens, 2002). In the Global South, particularly in mountainous or peripheral regions, homestay tourism has become a strategic tool for poverty alleviation and resilience building (Yanes et al., 2019)

Evolution of Homestay Tourism Research

The academic trajectory of homestay tourism mirrors broader shifts in sustainable-tourism thought (Yasami et al., 2017). Early research in the 1990s emphasized cultural commodification and authenticity dilemmas (Cohen, 1988), while post-2000 studies reframed homestays as instruments of empowerment and local governance (Tosun, 2006; Dangi & Jamal, 2016).

Between 2015 and 2024, scholarly attention diversified into three thematic clusters:

- Socio-Economic Impact Studies: assessing income, employment, and multiplier effects.
- Socio-Cultural and Empowerment Studies: examining gender dynamics, identity, and community cooperation.
- Environmental and Policy Dimensions: linking tourism practices with conservation and governance.

Recent reviews (Janjua et al., 2021; Dredge, 2022)) highlight a paradigm shift toward regenerative tourism, emphasizing the capacity of homestays to restore ecological and social systems rather than merely sustain them.

Economic Impacts: Livelihood Diversification and Poverty Reduction

Homestay tourism contributes to rural livelihood diversification by generating direct employment and stimulating ancillary enterprises such as handicrafts, local transport, and agriculture (Mitchell & Ashley, 2009). Empirical evidence from Thailand demonstrates that community-operated homestays increase local household income by 30–40 percent annually (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015). Similarly, in Vietnam, (Quang et al., 2024) found that homestay participation significantly improved financial resilience among rural families.

In the Indian context, Macek (2012) observed that the Uttarakhand Homestay Scheme has created income streams that rival agricultural yields, enabling rural families to reinvest in property improvement and education. Basak (2021) reported similar outcomes in Darjeeling, where homestays reduced seasonal migration and strengthened local supply chains. However, researchers caution that these benefits are not automatically sustainable. Without adequate training and governance, rapid commercialization can lead to income inequality and loss of community cohesion (Sharpley, 2020). Thus, the literature underscores the necessity of integrating economic gains within broader social and institutional frameworks a rationale adopted in the present study.

Social and Cultural Dimensions: Empowerment, Identity, and Cooperation

Beyond economics, homestay tourism transforms social relations and cultural self-perception. Scheyvens (2002) emphasizes that tourism participation can empower marginalized groups by enhancing self-esteem, leadership, and control over resources. Empirical research across Asia validates these claims. In Nepal, Acharya and Halpenny (2013) documented how women's involvement in homestays fostered financial independence and collective agency. In Thailand, homestays enabled intergenerational knowledge transfer and the revival of traditional crafts (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015).

In the Indian Himalayan region, Kannegieser (2015) found that female homestay owners gained confidence in financial decision-making, challenging patriarchal norms. The current study builds upon this tradition, situating empowerment within a socio-economic systems framework where financial, social, and human capitals interact dynamically.

Another strand of literature focuses on community cooperation and social capital. According to (Prajapati et al., 2023)), effective community participation in tourism requires collective vision and equitable decision-making. Moscardo (2008) highlight capacity building as a precondition for sustaining social capital in developing contexts. These findings resonate with Uttarakhand's case, where self-help groups and village committees serve as anchors of social cohesion in homestay operations.

Environmental and Ecological Dimensions

The environmental dimension of homestay tourism has gained significant scholarly attention in the last decade due to its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Pasanchay & Schott, 2021). Becken and Hay (2012) argue that small-scale hospitality enterprises have a lower ecological footprint than commercial hotels. Recent works by (Dziadkiewicz et al., 2024)) introduce the notion of regenerative tourism, where host communities actively restore ecosystems through low-impact practices such as organic farming, solar energy adoption, and waste management.

In Uttarakhand, many homestays have begun integrating eco-certification standards, emphasizing biodiversity preservation and local architecture . Yet, limited policy coherence and inadequate training hinder comprehensive implementation. Studies in Ladakh and Sikkim indicate that green certification systems can provide both market advantages and environmental incentives (Thakur et al., 2024). The present research extends this discourse by empirically assessing environmental responsibility as part of social perception, contributing to an integrated sustainability metric.

Governance and Institutional Frameworks

Governance plays a pivotal role in determining the inclusivity and sustainability of homestay programs (Suardana et al., 2024). Ruhanen (2013) notes that local governments can either facilitate or inhibit tourism sustainability depending on administrative coordination and transparency. In India, fragmented bureaucratic structures often impede effective tourism planning (Prajapati et al., 2024)). Globally, models such as Thailand's Green Leaf Program and Nepal's Community Homestay Network illustrate how clear regulatory frameworks can ensure quality standards while preserving community ownership ((Ab Ghani et al., 2024; Acharya & Halpenny, 2013)). The literature suggests that participatory governance mechanismswhere communities share power with state agencies yield more equitable outcomes (Tosun, 2006).

Gendered Perspectives and Social Justice

The gendered analysis of tourism has evolved from descriptive accounts of participation to analytical explorations of power and identity ((Milano & Gascón, 2024). Scheyvens (2002) conceptualizes empowerment across four dimensions: economic, psychological, social, and political. Research in the Global South increasingly recognizes that homestay tourism functions as a gendered enterprise, where women's agency is both constrained by and exercised through cultural expectations (Promburom, 2022).

Empirical evidence from Uttarakhand (Prajapati et al., 2022) and Nepal ((Acharya & Halpenny, 2013)) shows that women often dominate operational roles cooking, cleaning, and guest relations yet seldom occupy leadership positions in cooperatives. The present study contributes to this discourse by quantifying women's participation and exploring its correlation with perceived empowerment and community cooperation in Uttarakhand's homestay sector.

Theoretical Integration: CBT and SLF

The Community-Based Tourism (CBT) framework remains central to understanding homestay dynamics (Milano & Gascón, 2024). CBT views communities as both hosts and stewards of tourism resources, advocating participatory governance and equitable benefit-sharing (Mensah, 2011). However, CBT alone does not fully capture the livelihood complexities of mountain economies. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) complements CBT by introducing the concept of five interdependent capitals financial, human, social, natural, and physical (Natarajan et al., 2022)). Recent scholarship emphasizes that the synergy between CBT and SLF provides a holistic model for sustainable rural tourism. The present study adopts this integrated approach to interpret how economic capital (income, employment) interacts with social capital (empowerment, cooperation) and natural capital (environmental responsibility) in Uttarakhand. This integration also allows the development of impact indicators that transcend income measurement, encompassing well-being, empowerment, and sustainability.

Emerging Research Directions

Contemporary literature (Dziadkiewicz et al., 2024) identifies three future trajectories for homestay research:

- **Digital Transformation:** Exploring how digital platforms reshape host–guest relationships and market access.
- **Regenerative Paradigms:** Investigating tourism's potential to restore ecological balance and cultural integrity.
- **Institutional Adaptation:** Understanding policy mechanisms that integrate tourism with regional development goals.

Research Gap

The review establishes a clear consensus that homestay tourism contributes positively to livelihood diversification, empowerment, and sustainability. Yet, it also reveals enduring challenges market dependence, capacity deficits, and governance fragmentation. In the context of Uttarakhand, these issues manifest as infrastructural gaps, uneven training access, and insufficient institutional coordination. Hence, while global literature provides robust conceptual tools, context-specific empirical evidence is required to validate their applicability in the Himalayan region of Garhwal Himalaya. The present study fills this void by systematically quantifying socio-economic and social impacts while grounding interpretation in qualitative narratives and policy realities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey analysis with qualitative interviews to achieve methodological complementarity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017)). The approach was selected because the economic and social impacts of homestay tourism encompass both measurable and interpretive dimensions quantitative indicators such as income change, employment generation, and investment growth, and qualitative aspects such as empowerment, cooperation, and cultural identity (Caruth, 2013). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0, while qualitative data were subjected to reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2019). The integration of these data sources ensured both breadth and depth of insight, enhancing the study's validity and interpretive robustness.

Study Area

The study was conducted in three geographically distinct districts of Uttarakhand namely Rudraprayag, Chamoli, and Uttarkashi selected to capture variation in altitude, accessibility, and tourism development. Rudraprayag, located at the confluence of the Alaknanda and Mandakini rivers, represents a mid-altitude transit corridor with comparatively strong connectivity and service infrastructure. Chamoli, extending into the higher Himalayan ranges, contains ecologically sensitive zones that support pilgrimage, adventure, and nature-based tourism. Uttarkashi, positioned in the upper Himalayan region along the Bhagirathi valley, is marked by high-altitude terrain, scattered rural settlements, sacred glaciers, and low-density yet culturally significant tourism activity. Together, these districts offer a geographically representative profile of Uttarakhand's emerging homestay sector (UTDB, 2024).

Sampling and Data Collection

A multistage purposive sampling method was employed. The sampling frame comprised all homestay units registered under the Uttarakhand Homestay Scheme (2018). From this list, 202 valid responses were collected between January and May 2024 through structured questionnaires

administered both in person and via online google forms. Respondents included homestay owners and co-owners actively managing their enterprises. Demographically, 62% were male and 38% female; 57% held at least secondary education, and the majority (71%) had operated homestays for three or more years. Additionally, 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with homestay owners, local leaders, and tourism officials to complement quantitative results.

Instrument Design and Measurement Scales

Two structured survey instruments were used to assess the effects of homestay tourism in Uttarakhand, each employing a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The first, a 12-item Economic Impact Scale, was adapted from Ap and Crompton's (1998) Tourism Impact Scale and modified after field pretesting to reflect local concerns such as income stability, employment generation, and improvements in village infrastructure. The second, a 12-item Social/Perception Impact Scale, drew on Scheyvens' (2002) empowerment framework and Tosun's (2006) work on community participation, with items tailored to capture community cooperation, cultural pride, women's involvement, and environmental responsibility. Together, these instruments provided a clear and context-sensitive way to measure both the economic and social changes linked to homestay tourism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to summarize participants' responses and to identify overall levels of agreement across the items. For each item within the Economic Impacts and Social/Perception Impacts instruments, means (M) and standard deviations (SD) were computed to capture both the central tendency and the variability of responses. To facilitate interpretation, the mean scores were categorized according to predefined thresholds, as outlined in tabele 1.

The descriptive results (Table 1) revealed that both instruments demonstrated predominantly positive perceptions, with average mean scores exceeding 4.0 for approximately 85% of the items. This indicates that respondents largely expressed agreement or strong agreement regarding the economic and social impacts under investigation. The low variability in standard deviations further suggests a high level of consensus among participants' views across the measured dimensions.

Interpretation Level	Mean Range	Description
A. Strong Agreement	4.20 – 5.00	Respondents consistently agreed or strongly agreed with the statements.
B. Agreement	3.50 – 4.19	Responses indicated general agreement with minor variation.
C. Neutral to Slight Disagreement	2.50 – 3.49	Responses reflected neutrality or weak disagreement.
D. Disagreement	< 2.50	Respondents generally disagreed with the statements.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive results (Table 1) revealed that both instruments demonstrated predominantly positive perceptions, with average mean scores exceeding 4.0 for approximately 85% of the items. This indicates that respondents largely expressed agreement or strong agreement regarding the economic and social impacts under investigation. The low variability in standard deviations further suggests a high level of consensus among participants' views across the measured dimensions.

Correlation and Chi-Square Analysis

To examine the relationships among the study variables, both non-parametric correlation and chi-square tests of association were conducted.

Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation (ρ)

Given that the variables were measured on ordinal or non-normally distributed scales, Spearman's rho (ρ) was employed to assess the strength and direction of associations among continuous variables such as income, employment, and empowerment.

The correlation analysis yielded several noteworthy associations:

- Income × Employment: $\rho = 0.63$, $p < .01$
- Cultural Responsibility × Environmental Responsibility: $\rho = 0.60$, $p < .01$

Both correlations were positive and statistically significant, suggesting that higher levels of income are associated with greater employment stability, and that enhanced cultural responsibility aligns with stronger environmental commitment. These findings indicate coherent linkages among economic and socio-environmental dimensions, reinforcing the internal consistency of the observed behavioural patterns.

Chi-Square Tests of Association (χ^2)

To explore potential differences across categorical demographic variables, Chi-square tests were conducted, examining whether perceptions differed significantly by gender and education level. The following associations were identified as statistically significant:

- Gender × Economic Improvement: $\chi^2 = 3.88$, $p = 0.049$
- Education × Government Promotion Awareness: $\chi^2 = 8.03$, $p = 0.018$

These results indicate that gender and educational background significantly influence respondents' perceptions of economic improvement and awareness of government promotional efforts. In particular, the findings suggest that gendered and educational variations exist in how individuals perceive and engage with development initiatives.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability analysis of the measurement instruments demonstrated high internal consistency across both constructs. The Economic Impact scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.872, while the Social/Perception Impact scale recorded an α of 0.842. According to the reliability benchmarks outlined by Hair et al. (2019), Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 are considered acceptable, and those exceeding 0.80 indicate a strong to excellent level of internal consistency. Hence, the obtained alpha coefficients confirm that the items within both scales are highly interrelated and consistently measure their respective underlying constructs, providing robust support for the internal reliability of the measurement instruments.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative data were obtained from 18 semi-structured interviews with purposively selected homestay operators and local stakeholders. Interview themes included economic changes, gender dynamics, community collaboration, and environmental practices.

Thematic Analysis Process

Following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-step approach:

1. Familiarization: Transcripts were read multiple times for immersion.
2. Coding: Initial codes (e.g., "income diversification," "digital marketing," "gender leadership") were generated using NVivo 14.
3. Theme Development: Codes were clustered into five overarching themes-Economic Transformation, Empowerment, Cooperation, Cultural–Environmental Integration, and Institutional Constraints.
4. Review and Refinement: Themes were verified against raw data for internal consistency.
5. Definition and Naming: Each theme was clearly defined.

Reporting: Verbatim quotes were embedded to illustrate each dimension.

Thematic Results Summary

Theme	Illustrative Quote	Interpretation
Economic Transformation	"Now we earn even in the off-season by hosting long-stay guests." (Chamoli host)	Homestays stabilize seasonal income and reduce migration.
Empowerment And Gender Roles	"Women handle bookings and payments, we feel proud." (Rudraprayag host)	Financial autonomy enhances self-efficacy and status.
Community Cooperation	"We share overflow guests to help each other." (Uttarkashi host)	Collective action strengthens social capital.
Cultural And Environmental Integration	"Keeping the village clean is part of our tradition."	Ecological care embedded in cultural ethos.
Institutional Constraints	"Roads and marketing support are still lacking."	Infrastructure and governance gaps persist.

Table 2. Thematic Result

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Analytical Approach

The results integrate quantitative and qualitative analyses to understand how homestay tourism influences economic well-being, social cohesion, and empowerment in Uttarakhand's rural communities. Quantitative data offer measurable

Item	Description	M	Sd	Interpretation
E1	Economic benefits to residents	4.83	0.38	Strong agreement
E2	Employment opportunities for locals	4.64	0.48	Strong agreement
E3	Local business linkages	4.29	0.57	Strong agreement
E4	Investment growth due to tourism	4.02	0.52	Agreement
E5	Rise in commodity prices	4.69	0.49	Strong agreement
E6	Increase in property values	3.85	0.63	Agreement
E7	Improvement in local infrastructure	4.08	0.54	Agreement
E8	Access to new community services	3.97	0.58	Agreement
E9	Steady income flow throughout the year	4.21	0.62	Strong agreement
E10	Improved living standard	4.43	0.5	Strong agreement
E11	Employment opportunities for youth	4.56	0.47	Strong agreement
E12	Dependence on outsiders	2.38	1.12	Disagreement

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Economic Impacts of Homestay Tourism

insights into income, employment, and perception changes, while qualitative narratives contextualize these trends within lived experiences. This integrated strategy reflects the triangulation principle of mixed-method research, wherein numeric results and thematic findings converge to illuminate a holistic understanding of tourism impacts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Economic Impact Analysis

Descriptive results (Table 3) indicate that respondents perceive homestay tourism to have strong positive economic effects. High mean scores were observed for economic benefits to residents (M = 4.83), employment opportunities for locals (M = 4.64), and improved living standards (M = 4.43), reflecting widespread agreement on tourism's contribution to income generation and livelihood enhancement. Moderate agreement on investment growth and infrastructure improvement suggests incremental but tangible development gains. Conversely, dependence on outsiders (M = 2.38) was rated low, indicating strong local participation and economic self-reliance. The findings confirm that homestay tourism significantly strengthens local economies in Uttarakhand through employment, income stability, and improved living conditions.

Qualitative Analysis:

Interview narratives echoed these findings:

"Tourism has given us a reason to stay; earlier, everyone wanted to leave for cities." – Male homestay owner, Chamoli

"My family earns more from homestays now than from farming." – Female host, Rudrapyag

Earlier, our youth migrated for jobs, but now they work with us in tourism." – Male host, Uttarkashi Garhwal

"Visitors have brought not just income but respect for our culture and traditions." – Female homestay owner, Chamoli

"With tourism, we can improve our homes and send our children to better schools." – Male respondent, Rudrapyag

These responses illustrate how tourism reverses rural out-migration trends, consistent with findings from Thailand and Vietnam (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015; (Quang et al., 2024)).

Social and Perception Impacts

Descriptive results (Table 4) indicate strongly positive perceptions of the social outcomes of homestay tourism. Respondents reported high agreement on participation in tourism (M = 4.83), benefits for residents (M = 4.65), and employment creation (M = 4.65), underscoring tourism's role in social inclusion and livelihood enhancement. High means for cultural (M = 4.33) and environmental responsibility (M = 4.26) reflect perceptions of sustainable and culturally respectful tourism practices. Moderate agreement on community cooperation (M = 4.14) and effective regulations (M = 3.82) suggest scope for stronger collective governance. Overall findings show that homestay tourism promotes community well-being, gender participation, and environmental consciousness in Uttarakhand.

Item	Description	M	SD	Interpretation
S1	Interest in participating in homestay tourism	4.83	0.38	Strong agreement
S2	Benefits for local residents	4.65	0.48	Strong agreement
S3	Promotion of ecotourism	4.21	0.89	Strong agreement
S4	Experience of peace and nature	4.31	0.46	Strong agreement
S5	Employment creation	4.65	0.48	Strong agreement
S6	Quality of life improvement	4.18	0.56	Agreement
S7	Environmental responsibility	4.26	0.52	Strong agreement
S8	Cultural responsibility	4.33	0.49	Strong agreement
S9	Community cooperation	4.14	0.58	Agreement
S10	Women's participation in the economy	4.29	0.51	Strong agreement
S11	Government promotion and support	4.45	0.47	Strong agreement
S12	Effective regulations for equity	3.82	0.63	Agreement

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Social and Perception Impacts

Qualitative Analysis:

"Before, women were silent; now we manage guests, payments, and decisions." – Female owner, Uttarkashi Garhwal

"We clean our village because guests notice every detail-it's part of our pride." – Young host, Chamoli

"Tourism has united our community; now we all work together during peak seasons." – Male homestay owner, Rudraprayag

"Guests are curious about our traditions, so we've started teaching local crafts and songs." – Female host, Rudraprayag

"Our income from homestays helps us send children to better schools and improve our homes." – Male respondent, Chamoli

Variables	ρ	p	Interpretation
Income × Employment	0.63	< .01	Strong positive
Employment × Business benefit	0.62	< .01	Strong positive
Investment × Infrastructure	0.45	< .01	Moderate
Cultural × Environmental responsibility	0.6	< .01	Strong positive
Quality of life × Empowerment	0.56	< .01	Moderate–strong
Government promotion × Cooperation	0.52	< .01	Moderate

Table 5. Spearman's Correlation Matrix

Correlation Analysis:

Spearman's correlation analysis identified strong and significant associations among economic and social variables.

The strong positive correlations (*Table 5)* suggest that economic progress reinforces social well-being. For instance, as household income and employment rise, community participation and empowerment also increase. This supports the CBT–SLF framework's assumption of inter-linked livelihood capitals (Kunjuraman, 2023)). The link between cultural and environmental responsibility (ρ = 0.60) indicates that preservation of culture and environmental ethics are mutually reinforcing, a dynamic observed in other eco-cultural destinations (Graafland & Noorderhaven, 2018).

Chi-Square Tests: Demographics and Perceptions

Chi-square analyses (*Table 6)* were conducted to examine associations between demographic factors (gender, education) and key perception indicators.

Variables	χ^2	df	p	Significance
Gender × Economic improvement	3.88	1	0.049	Significant
Education × Employment perception	7.62	2	0.022	Significant
Gender × Cultural responsibility	6.12	1	0.013	Significant
Education × Government support awareness	8.03	2	0.018	Significant

Table 6. Chi-Square Associations Between Demographic Variables and Perceptions

Gender and education significantly shape perceptions of tourism impacts. Women perceive stronger links between tourism and empowerment, while higher education correlates with greater awareness of institutional programs. These outcomes confirm prior findings from Nepal and Vietnam (Sapkota 2020; Quang et al., 2024)).

Qualitative Theme Integration

The qualitative narratives complement the quantitative findings by revealing contextual nuances of perception, agency, and adaptation within Uttarakhand's homestay tourism sector.

(a) Economic Transformation and Resilience: Homestay tourism has diversified income sources and reduced seasonal vulnerability. As one host from Chamoli noted, *"Earlier, monsoon months were idle. Now guests stay for trekking even off-season."* This reflects a transition toward year-round, resilient livelihoods driven by tourism demand stability.

(b) Gender Empowerment and Human Capital: Women's enhanced participation marks a shift in household and community dynamics. A female host from Rudraprayag shared, *"I handle the business, my husband helps. Tourism gave me confidence."* Such accounts illustrate gendered empowerment and leadership, aligning with Scheyvens' (2002) empowerment framework emphasizing control and self-efficacy.

(c) Community Cooperation: Collective reciprocity emerged as a defining trait of community-based tourism (CBT). As one respondent stated, *"When guests overflow, we refer them to other homestays."* This collaboration builds bonding social capital, a critical enabler of sustainable CBT systems (Tosun, 2006).

(d) Cultural–Environmental Nexus: The integration of local materials and traditions reinforces both cultural identity and environmental stewardship. *"Our houses are built with local stone and wood-guests love it."* Such practices exemplify regenerative tourism principles that preserve heritage while minimizing ecological footprints (Dziadkiewicz et al., 2024).

(e) Institutional Constraints: Despite positive outcomes, gaps persist in governance and capacity building. One host remarked, "Government support is good on paper, but training and marketing are still missing." This sentiment reflects implementation deficits consistent with Ruhanen's (2012) governance framework, which highlights misalignments between policy design and on-ground execution.

These themes reveal that homestay tourism fosters economic resilience, gender inclusion, and community solidarity; while sustaining cultural-environmental integrity yet its full potential depends on institutional coherence and sustained capacity support.

Theoretical Synthesis: CBT–SLF Model Application

The results validate the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) integration, showing interdependent relationships among livelihood capitals:

Capital Type	Indicators	Outcome
Financial	Income, employment	Economic resilience
Human	Training, digital literacy	Empowered hosts
Social	Cooperation, gender equity	Collective strength
Physical	Infrastructure, amenities	Improved accessibility
Natural	Environmental responsibility	Sustainability and ecological balance

Table 7. Conceptual Integration of CBT–SLF in Homestay Tourism

The findings substantiate the integration of the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), demonstrating how tourism-driven development simultaneously strengthens multiple livelihood capitals.

Financial capital is reinforced through higher income and stable employment, indicating economic resilience among host households. Human capital improvements such as training and digital literacy reflect capacity building and empowerment, particularly among women and youth. Enhanced social capital, characterized by cooperation and gender equity, signifies collective strength and inclusiveness within communities. Physical capital advancements, including better infrastructure and amenities, have improved accessibility and living standards. Finally, strong engagement with natural capital through environmental responsibility underlines a commitment to sustainability and ecological balance.

Comparative Analysis with Global Literature

The findings resonate with similar studies across the Global South. In Vietnam (Quang et al., 2024) observed increased resilience and female leadership. Likewise, Agyeiwaah (2018) reported that Ghanaian homestays enhanced community cooperation and cultural revival. However, the Uttarakhand case adds a mountain-ecological dimension absent from many tropical models, highlighting that terrain, climate, and accessibility significantly shape sustainability outcomes. Moreover, the presence of strong self-help groups and informal cooperatives provides an indigenous form of governance that strengthens long-term viability (Belbase, 2007).

Key Findings

The study reveals that homestay tourism has generated significant economic benefits, including increased household income, enhanced employment opportunities, reduced out-migration, and gradual improvements in local infrastructure. Socially, it has contributed to women's empowerment, strengthened community cooperation, and supported cultural revival. Environmental outcomes indicate rising ecological awareness and the adoption of sustainable local practices among residents. At the institutional level, however, gaps remain in the form of inadequate training, limited infrastructural support, and weak market linkages (Table 8). Overall, the findings strongly validate the integrated CBT–SLF framework, demonstrating a multi-capital reinforcement process that underpins sustainable homestay development.

Domain	Findings
Economic Impact	Income and employment growth; reduced migration; improved infrastructure.
Social Impact	Women's empowerment; strengthened cooperation; cultural revival.
Environmental Impact	Enhanced eco-awareness; sustainable local practices.
Institutional Gaps	Insufficient training, infrastructure, and market linkages.
Theoretical Validation	Strong alignment with CBT–SLF framework (multi-capital reinforcement).

Table 8. Key Findings

CONCLUSION

The study set out to examine the socio-economic and social–perception impacts of homestay tourism in Uttarakhand through a mixed-methods design combining household surveys (N = 202) and qualitative interviews (n = 18), and the evidence clearly shows that homestays function as a multidimensional driver of sustainable rural transformation. Economically, significant improvements were observed in income (M = 4.83), employment (M = 4.64), and local investment (M = 4.02), indicating that tourism has become embedded in rural livelihood systems. Social indicators such as empowerment (M = 4.29), cooperation (M = 4.14), and cultural responsibility (M = 4.33) show that tourism has strengthened community identity and agency, a finding further enriched by narratives of women gaining confidence, youth choosing to remain in their villages, and communities reviving cultural and ecological practices.

Theoretically, the research advances an integrated CBT–SLF model by showing how financial, social, human, natural, and physical capitals reinforce each other in a dynamic cycle rather than in a linear sequence, offering a more holistic understanding of sustainable tourism systems. The findings also contribute to the emerging discourse

on regenerative tourism, illustrating that homestays in Uttarakhand do not merely sustain existing conditions but actively restore cultural landscapes, reduce waste, and foster ecological stewardship.

Empirically, the study provides strong, item-level insights supported by reliable instruments ($\alpha > .84$) and demonstrates statistically significant relationships between economic progress, social empowerment ($\rho = 0.56$), and environmental awareness ($\rho = 0.60$), complemented by qualitative themes of cooperation and ecological care.

Policy implications span multiple scales, highlighting the need for skill development and eco-certification at the community level, coordinated facilitation mechanisms at the district level, and stronger integration of homestay programmes with state livelihood and green certification schemes. When viewed in the wider Global South context, Uttarakhand's experience aligns with findings from Thailand, Vietnam, Nepal, and Ghana, yet adds a distinctive mountain-region perspective where homestays help counter out-migration, revive cultural practices, and contribute to climate resilience. Overall, the research not only deepens understanding of homestay tourism in Himalayan regions but also positions it as a regenerative community enterprise with implications for sustainable development in similar ecologically fragile landscapes.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

This study confirms that homestay tourism in Uttarakhand contributes significantly to livelihood diversification, social empowerment, and ecological responsibility, yet persistent infrastructural gaps, uneven capacity building, and variable administrative support limit its long-term sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated interventions across micro, meso, and macro levels, consistent with SDGs 8, 11, and 12.

At the micro level, enhancing local capabilities is crucial for ensuring equitable participation. Despite high levels of enthusiasm and cooperation, many women, youth, and older residents face gaps in professional skills and digital literacy. Capacity-building initiatives should therefore include digital marketing, platform-based booking management, financial literacy, and eco-certification training. Gender-specific findings ($\chi^2 = 3.88$, $p = .049$) further justify promoting women's entrepreneurship through microfinance access, cooperative models, and leadership opportunities. Youth-focused schemes such as grants for digital promotion, linkages with adventure tourism, and incubation support would strengthen local retention and innovation.

At the meso level, institutional coordination and cluster development are essential for improving efficiency and enhancing destination identity. Homestay clusters can facilitate shared resources, common facilities, and joint marketing strategies, as evidenced in regions such as Ladakh and Sikkim. Uttarakhand could adopt similar models by developing thematic clusters in Chamoli, Rudraprayag, and Uttarkashi. Strengthening coordination among tourism, rural development, and women's empowerment departments, alongside district-level Integrated Homestay Facilitation Cells, would streamline registration, training, and financial support. A state-managed digital platform and strategic promotional partnerships would further enhance visibility.

At the macro level, long-term sustainability requires embedding homestay tourism within broader governance and livelihood systems. Integrating homestay programmes with the State Livelihood Mission and NRLM would reinforce the financial, social, human, and natural capitals identified in the study. Given strong community support for environmental responsibility, implementing a state-wide Green Homestay Certification covering energy use, waste management, and local materials is timely. Financial barriers can be addressed through a dedicated Homestay Development Fund, low-interest loans, revolving credit schemes, and targeted tax incentives. A multi-tier monitoring framework under the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board would ensure consistent oversight and SDG-aligned reporting.

These recommendations align with global frameworks such as Community-Based Tourism (Dangi & Jamal, 2016), the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Scoones, 2015), and emerging regenerative tourism approaches (Dziadkiewicz et al., 2024). Together, they position Uttarakhand to evolve as a leading model of mountain-regenerative tourism grounded in ecological sensitivity and inclusive development.

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CMTHS

JOURNAL OF TOURISM
ISSN: 0972-7310. Vol. XXV, Issue 2 (December 2024), 61-69

Trends and Patterns of Tourism Sector, Economy and Employment in Sikkim

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KEYWORDS

Tourism inflows, Growth rate, Tourism Receipts, GDP, GSDP

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses tourism's economic and experiential facets, its historical evolution, and distinguishes between domestic, inbound, and outbound tourism. The interchange ability of 'tourism' and 'travel' is highlighted, concluding with various tourism classifications. The paper underscores tourism as a travel-related economic activity with substantial impacts on revenue and employment. It delves into direct and indirect employment opportunities, highlighting the formal and informal sectors. Tourism stimulates economic development through investments, infrastructure growth, and brand value enhancement. The paper is focused on Sikkim state's tourism sector and identifies various types of tourism activities and the potential of the state in the sector. Sikkim's tourism significantly contributes to the state's economic growth, providing direct and indirect employment through diverse activities. The paper's main findings include, in spite of witnessing a substantial increase in tourist arrivals, it currently attracts less than five percent of India's total tourist influx. Overcoming challenges in connectivity and permits is crucial for capitalizing on the sector's immense potential.

INTRODUCTION

In 1936, the League of Nations defined a tourist as someone who travels abroad for at least 24 hours, a definition later updated by the United Nations in 1945 to set a maximum stay of six months (Theobald, 1998). The Tourism Society of England, in 1976, described tourism as the short-term movement of people to places outside their regular environment for any purpose (Beavor, 2002). According to the United Nations Tourism Satellite account, tourism involves traveling and staying outside one's usual environment for up to one consecutive year, excluding activities related to paid work (UN, 2001; WTO, 1995). The concept of tourism grew in significance during the early 20th century, particularly during the mass movements of people caused by the two world wars (Gyr, 2010). Tourism is characterised by three main criteria, travel outside one's usual environment, travel without financial gain, and travel with or without overnight stays (WTO, 1995). Tourism can be divided into three types, domestic (residents traveling within their own country), inbound (non-residents traveling to a country), and outbound (residents traveling to other countries) (UN, 1994). Those engaged in tourism-related activities are referred to as tourists (UN, 2001). Various forms of tourism include adventure, business, cultural, ecotourism, educational, health tourism, and more. Tourism has a strong connection to economic activities, particularly through the development of tourist sites, accommodations, restaurants, and travel infrastructure, all of which generate jobs and financial transactions (UN, 2001). Governments benefit from direct revenues through taxes on tourism-related jobs and businesses, as well as from indirect revenues on goods and services consumed by tourists (OECD, 2014).

As tourism expands, it stimulates additional economic activities, such as transportation, accommodation, and food services, leading to infrastructure development, increased tourist numbers, and higher employment (Lee & Chang, 2008). Employment in tourism is divided into direct and indirect opportunities. Direct employment includes jobs that interact directly with

tourists, like hotel staff and taxi drivers, who usually enjoy job security. Indirect employment involves roles that support tourism indirectly, like farmers and vendors, often operating in the informal sector, which is harder to regulate (Lee & Chang, 2008).

Tourism significantly drives economic development by attracting investments to create new attractions and increasing tourist flows (Waitt, 2001; Getz, 2008). The rising demand for improved infrastructure and services strengthens the service sector (Liasidou, 2012; Lew, 2011). Local governments often capitalise on tourism to enhance natural and cultural resources, creating jobs and boosting tax revenues (Hindley & Smith, 1984; Mihalič, 2002). In many countries, tourism significantly contributes to the economy and local livelihoods (Nowak et al., 2007).

Inbound tourism, in particular, generates foreign exchange earnings, which can be reinvested in infrastructure or social welfare programmes, depending on government priorities (McKinnon, 1964; Sugivarto et al., 2003). Globally, tourism is a major economic driver, accounting for approximately 7% of global GDP and generating 6-7% of total employment (WTTC, 2023). Consequently, tourism not only fosters economic growth but also promotes investment, employment, and sustainable development.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several notable works delve into the relevance of the tourism sector, offering comprehensive insights into its economic, policy, sustainability, and global trends. Fletcher et al. (2013) provided a detailed overview of the tourism sector, highlighting its economic significance, management principles, and its critical role in economic development. Similarly, Dwyer et al. (2010) explored the underlying economic principles of the tourism industry, emphasizing policy frameworks that influence its development. Their work also discussed the economic impacts of tourism, focusing on demand, supply, and the pivotal role of government in managing and promoting tourism.

Page (2009) took an interdisciplinary approach, offering a contemporary perspective on tourism by exploring its economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects. His work presents a holistic view of the sector's relevance to modern economies. Butler and Pearce (2017) further examined the dynamic nature of tourism, investigating its economic, social, and environmental impacts. They discussed the evolving patterns in the sector and the opportunities and challenges it poses to economies on various scales. Page and Connell (2019) covered a broad range of topics related to tourism management, including its economic dimensions, while also exploring the challenges and opportunities posed by an ever-evolving tourism industry.

Cook and Hsu (2012) focused specifically on the economic impacts of the tourism industry, exploring its financial dimensions. In contrast, Hall (2018) emphasised sustainability in tourism development, addressing the need for a balance between economic benefits and the environmental and social impacts of tourism. Wall and Vogiatzis (2018) contributed to the literature by examining demand and supply factors in tourism economics, along with destination competitiveness and economic impact assessments.

In the context of India, Singh (2019) offered an in-depth analysis, covering emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities. His work explored the sector's wide-ranging impacts on India's economy, society, and environment. Bhaskaran (2017) focused on sustainable tourism, examining the policies, strategies, and initiatives aimed at promoting responsible tourism in India, with a particular emphasis on environmental and social considerations. Gupta (2015) critically assessed the economic implications of tourism in India, while Verma (2016) expanded on the discourse by examining sustainability in Indian tourism. Kapoor (2019) highlighted the transformative role of technology in shaping tourism experiences, while Kumar (2017) explored community-based tourism initiatives, using case studies to show the role of local communities in tourism. Kumar's work assessed both the benefits and challenges associated with these initiatives.

Choudhury (2001) argued that community participation and sustainable development are deeply intertwined, particularly in Sikkim's mountain tourism sector. He emphasised that addressing local issues with local solutions is key to ensuring the sustainability of tourism in the region. Batabyal and Das (2022), using primary data from tourists and local communities in Sikkim, employed Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance to assess the socio-economic landscape of tourism. Their study focused on sustainable development indicators, highlighting tourism's impact on ecology and community benefits, as well as key trends in destination marketing and supply.

Subba (2019), applying social identity theory, examined the relationship between organizational behaviour and employees in Sikkim's tourism industry. Meanwhile, Chakrabarti (2014) found that a decrease in average tourist spending contributed to a decline in tourism's overall contribution to Sikkim's GSDP. Additionally, he identified a lower percentage of foreign tourists as a factor in the reduced contribution of transport, communication, trade, hotels, restaurants, banking, and insurance to the state's economy.

Collectively, these scholarly contributions provide a well-rounded understanding of tourism's economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions.

METHODOLOGY

This paper looks at the economic side of the tourism sector using both content analysis and quantitative analysis. First, it analysed relevant information from books, articles, government reports, and websites to find common themes, policies, and insights about the economic effects of tourism. Data from government reports was taken and applied statistical methods, like descriptive and inferential statistics, and correlation analysis, to understand patterns, relationships, and trends in the data. By combining these approaches, the paper provides a clearer picture of the economic contributions of the tourism sector, helping with informed decision-making and planning. This method helps to break down complex information found in government reports, giving a well-rounded view of tourism data.

TOURISM SECTOR IN SIKKIM

Sikkim became the 22nd state of India in 1975 (Chettri et al., 2010). Located in the eastern Himalayas, it shares borders with Tibet to the north, Bhutan to the east, Nepal to the west, and West Bengal to the south. As per the 2011 Census, its population is about 6 lakhs (Census, 2011). The state's religious composition includes Hindus (57.76%), Buddhists (27.39%), Muslims (1.62%), Christians (9.91%), Sikhs (0.31%), Jains (0.05%), and others (2.67%) (Sikkim Religion Census, 2011). The state's cultural diversity, comprising Bhutias, Nepalis, and Lepchas, adds to its tourism appeal through their unique festivals, languages, and traditions. Sikkim is divided into six districts, Gangtok, Mangan, Namchi, Gyalshing, Pakyong, and Soreng (Government of Sikkim, 2021).

Tourism is Sikkim's primary economic activity, with each district offering attractive destinations. Notable places include monasteries, Dharma Chakra centres, lakes, waterfalls, vallies (Tourism Department of Sikkim, 2019b). The state offers varied tourism experiences, including ecological, adventure, wildlife, and cultural tourism. Eco-tourism emphasises staying with locals, while adventure tourism, including biking, is popular among foreign tourists. The region's rich biodiversity and Kanchenjunga National Park attract wildlife enthusiasts.

Source: Tourism Department of Sikkim, 2020

Figure 1: Tourism Sector Growth rate

The figure 1 above presents compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of the tourism sector in Sikkim from 2011 to September 2022, which was 8.27%, and aligns with the national average. However, during 2014 and 2016, the growth rate was lower at 0.51% and 7.84%, respectively. This slowdown was primarily due to domestic political conditions, including the 2014 general elections and the West Bengal state elections in 2016. Despite these setbacks, the tourism sector in Sikkim experienced a remarkable recovery in 2017, with a growth rate of 36.34%, significantly exceeding the national average. Approximately 1.273 million tourists visited Sikkim in 2017, compared to 800,000 in 2016. In 2011, the number of tourists, both domestic and foreign, was around 575,000, and by the end of 2018, this figure had surged to nearly 1.5 million, marking a threefold increase from 2011.

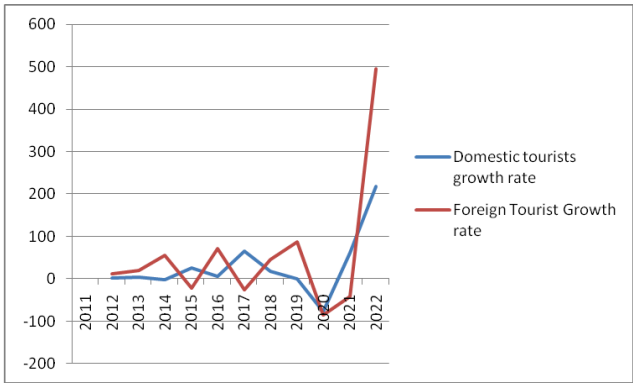
The growth rate of tourism in Sikkim has fluctuated over the years, with several periods of substantial growth. Positive growth was recorded in 2013 (4.00%), 2015 (21.57%), 2016 (8.51%), 2017 (57.83%), 2018 (17.59%), 2019 (3.87%), 2021

(55.55%), and a significant increase in 2022 (223.83%). However, 2020 saw a significant decline with a negative growth rate of -78.37%, attributed to the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely affected the tourism industry. The sharp recovery in 2022, with a growth rate of 223.83%, indicates a rebound, likely due to the easing of travel restrictions and a resurgence in tourist activities. This variation in growth rates highlights the vulnerability of the tourism industry to external factors such as political, economic, and global events. Despite the challenges, the tourism sector in Sikkim has shown resilience, with promising signs of recovery following the negative growth in 2020. Continued monitoring and strategic adaptation will be crucial to ensuring the sustainable growth of this sector.

Domestic tourism in Sikkim has seen rapid growth, with a compound growth rate of approximately 10% from 2011 to 2018. Notably high growth rates were observed in 2015 (20.23%) and 2017 (39.5%). The domestic tourism sector nearly tripled between 2011 and 2019. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions, 2020 and 2021 witnessed a sharp decline. In contrast, 2022 recorded the highest-ever number of domestic tourists, surpassing even the pre-COVID figures of 2019.

Foreign tourist inflows have also increased significantly, rising from 23,395 in 2011 to 133,388 in 2019, with a compound average growth rate of 9.87% during this period. Despite this overall increase, negative growth trends were observed in 2015 and 2017, which warrant further investigation to understand the underlying causes. Nevertheless, 2019 saw a significant rise in foreign tourist visits. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a sharp drop in foreign tourist numbers in 2020 and 2021, but by 2022, the inflow of foreign tourists had begun to recover, though it has yet to reach pre-pandemic levels. While the tourism industry in Sikkim has experienced periods of both growth and decline, it has shown a strong capacity for recovery, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sector's continued growth will depend on its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and mitigate the effects of external factors.

An examination of the growth rates in domestic and foreign tourist arrivals in Sikkim reveals intriguing patterns. Throughout the entire study period spanning from 2011 to 2022, the growth rates exhibit contrasting trajectories, consistently



Source: Tourism Department of Sikkim, 2020

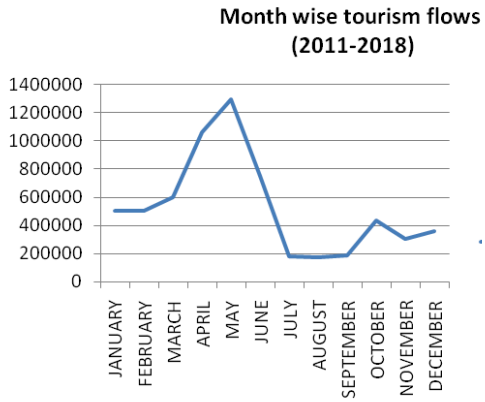
Figure 2: Domestic and foreign tourist growth rates

diverging without displaying any similar trends. The factors contributing to this divergence remain unidentified, emphasizing the necessity for a comprehensive investigation into the underlying reasons behind this phenomenon.

Further, both domestic and foreign tourist growth rates show fluctuating trends throughout the years. There are instances of positive and negative growth for both categories, indicating a dynamic tourism environment. Foreign tourist growth rates generally exhibit higher magnitudes compared to domestic tourist growth rates. Notable spikes in foreign tourist growth, such as in 2014 (55.14%) and 2022 (496.11%), stand out in contrast to the domestic tourism growth. In some years, domestic and foreign growth rates appear inversely correlated. For example, in 2015, domestic tourism spiked (25.36%), while foreign tourism experienced a decline (-21.75%), and vice versa in 2017. The year 2020 had a significant negative impact on both domestic and foreign tourism, likely due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, with both categories experiencing substantial declines. The year 2022 stands out with extraordinary growth rates for both domestic (217.71%) and foreign (496.11%) tourists. The inconsistent patterns and significant variations in growth rates highlight the need for a thorough investigation into the underlying factors influencing tourism trends in Sikkim. Identifying and understanding the reasons for the inverse correlation in certain years would be crucial for tourism planning and management.

The ideal time for tourism in Sikkim is February to June and September to November. As the February to June is Summer season in rest of the country and also considered as wormer months in Sikkim, tourists generally visits in these months.

Within these months, March to May is considered as peak season as summer vacation and scorching heat exists in many parts of the country. During September-October some states like West Bengal celebrates Puja vacation and it also reflects in tourist flows in Sikkim. The following figure depicts the tourist month wise flows to the state.



Source: Tourism Department of Sikkim, 2020

Figure 3: Month wise tourism flows

An analysis of the monthly tourist influx from 2011 to 2018, as depicted in the figure above, reveals consistent trends. During these years, the average tourist arrivals were consistently higher from March to May, with a subsequent peak from October to December. Notably, in April (16.6%), May (20.3%), and June (11.7%), a substantial number of tourists visited, collectively constituting over 48 percent of the total annual tourist arrivals. Conversely, during the period from October (6.8%) to December (5.6%), tourist visits accounted for approximately 17 percent of the annual total.

Tourism industry in Sikkim experiences peak periods between March to May and October to December, aligning with the tourist season. During these times, businesses associated with accommodation, sightseeing, and tourist operations witness their highest earnings. Seasonal prices adjust based on the demand and availability of services. While there is no specific data on the average earnings of firms engaged in tourism-related operations, general observations suggest occasional shortages in hotel availability and travel facilities within the state. This situation creates significant opportunities for external agencies involved in the industry. Additionally, the tourist season is interconnected with the tourist circuit in nearby regions, particularly in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Siliguri.

A snapshot of domestic, foreign and total tourist inflows in India, along with the direct and indirect employment generated by the tourism sector for the periods from 2008 to 2021, is portrayed in Table 3. Domestic tourist inflows increased from 563.03 million in 2008 to 2321.98 million in 2019. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic's negative impact in 2020, which saw a 74 per cent drop in total tourist inflow (both domestic and foreign) in 2020 compared to the previous year, it improved marginally in 2021. As per the Ministry of Tourism, the Government of India estimates, it climbed to 678.69 million in 2021 from 617.39 million in 2020, which is a 10 per cent increase in percentage terms. Domestic tourist inflows increased by 4.58 per cent between 2008 and 2021. Notably, foreign visitor inflows had a negative CAGR of 6.64 per cent overall. Understandably, a large decrease in international tourist inflows was caused by COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021.

Table 4 shows the per capita GDP and total tourist inflows from 1991 to 2021. During the study period, GDP per capita expanded at a CAGR of 4.72 per cent, while total tourist inflow (domestic + international) increased at a CAGR of 10.91 per cent. India's per capita GDP increased consistently from ₹29.69 thousand in 1991 to ₹108.25 thousand in 2021, while the total tourist inflow increased from 69.82 million in 1991 to 678.68 million in 2021. It is worth noting that between 1991 and 2019, total tourist inflow increased significantly, rising from 69.82 million in 1991 to 2353.39 million in 2019. At the same time, the GDP per capita also increased consistently from ₹29.69 thousand in 1991 to ₹108.25 thousand in 2019. However, the year 2020 witnessed a substantial decline in per capita GDP, from ₹108.25 thousand in 2019 to ₹100.03 thousand in 2020, as a consequence of COVID-19.

Table 1: Travel Agencies in Sikkim Upto June 2019

Sl No	District*	Total number of Travel Agencies
1	East	1238
2	West	101
3	North	4
4	South	74
	Total	1417

Source: Tourism Department of Sikkim, 2019c

Note: In 2021, the districts underwent reorganization and were subdivided into six. As registered with the Department of tourism.*

Travel agencies are backbone to Sikkim's tourism sector. There are 1417 travel agencies registered with Sikkim Government's department of tourism. Among these, the East District leads with 1238 travel agencies, predominantly concentrated in the capital city of Gangtok. The West District, encompassing towns like Geyzing and Pelling, is home to 101 registered travel agencies, while Namchi town in the South District accommodates 74 travel agencies. In the North District, about four travel agencies operate, with major towns like Mangan, Lachung, and Lachen within its jurisdiction.

Table 2: Commercial accommodation establishments (Hotels)

Sl No.	Area	Total No Hotels	Total No of Rooms	No of beds		Total Capacity	Number of Employees	
				Double	Single		Local	Non-Local
1	East	627	8710	7405	1312	16122	2587	2113
2	West	210	2161	2011	216	4238	445	505
3	North	140	1490	1424	111	2959	236	281
4	South	90	870	812	93	1717	305	196
	Total	1067	13231	11652	1732	25036	3573	3095

Source: Tourism Department of Sikkim, 2019a.

Above table depicts the registered hotels in Sikkim. There are about 1067 registered hotels with total capacity of 13231 rooms. These rooms can accommodate 25036 beds per day. Majority of these hotels, rooms and beds are located in Gangtok city in the East District. Out of 1067, about 627 hotels are in the East Sikkim, 210 hotels are in the West Sikkim, 140 hotels are in the North Sikkim and 90 hotels are in the South Sikkim (Tourism Department of Sikkim, 2019a). These hotels in Sikkim are providing employment to about 6668 work force, out of which 3573 are locals and 3095 are non-locals. Since majority of the hotels are on lease taken by agencies from out side the state, they employ people from outside the state.

Annual average income salary of a travel agent employed in Sikkim is about Rs 221,500 and this income spectrum spanning from a minimum average of around Rs 109,520 to about Rs 340,400. This income also depends on the experience, skills, location and gender (World Salararies, 2024).

Table 3: Registered Homestays for cultural and community-based tourism

Sl. No.	Area	Total No of Homestay	Total No of Rooms	No of Beds		Total capacity	Number of Employees	
				Double	Single		Local	Non-local
1	East	520	1932	1985	132	4104	454	108
2	West	281	830	776	100	1652	121	22
3	North	55	214	212	4	428	40	0
4	South	326	849	835	22	1692	82	2
	Total	1182	3825	3808	260	7876	697	132

Source: Tourism Department of Sikkim, 2019a.

Apart from hotels a number of homestays are also hosting tourists in Sikkim. These homestays provides home like accommodation mostly located in rural areas which are known for scenic beauty of the state. They provide cultural, social and local flavour to tourism. There are about 1182 homestays in Sikkim with about 3825 rooms with capacity of 7876 beds. Most of the homestays are located in the east district followed by south district and west district. Since special permits are required for the tourists to visit north Sikkim, the visitors find it difficult to travel and find a homestay in the north. Only 55 homestays can be found in the district. These homestatys are mostly run by the locals. It is reflected by the trends in employment as majority of employees working in these homestays are locals and very less number of people from outside are employed in these places.

Table 4: Combined accommodation options for tourists (Hotels and Home-stays) in Sikkim

Sikkim	Hotels & Homestay	Total No of Rooms	Total No of Beds		Total capacity	Number of Employees	
			Double	Single		Local	Non-local
Grand total	2249	17056	15460	1992	32912	4270	3227

Source: Tourism Department of Sikkim, 2019a

Above table reflects the total number of hotels and home-stays in Sikkim. There are all together 2249 hotels and home-stays available, with the capacity of about 32912 beds per day. Together they employ about 7497 workers out of which 4270 are from Sikkim and 3227 are from outside Sikkim.

The tourism sector generates economic activity in terms of travel, tour, accommodation and recreation activities. It not only provides employment to a large number of people from these activities but also employ a large number of people in allied services like business, shops, restaurants etc and creates employment directly and indirectly.

The economic dynamics of Sikkim over the years from 1980-81 to 2018-19, in its Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), GSDP growth rates, have been substantially contributed by the tourism sector. Notable trends in the GSDP growth rates reveal periods of substantial expansion, notably in 1993-94 and 2004-05. The tourism sector, a cornerstone of Sikkim's economy, experienced varying performance, marked by impressive growth in 1990-91, 2004-05, and 2011-12, alongside occasional contractions in 1998-99 and 2014-15. The percentage share of the tourism sector in GSDP, peaking at 2.82% in 2011-12, exhibited fluctuations and a gradual decline to 4.10% in 2018-19. Overall, the tourism sector played a crucial role in shaping the state's economic landscape, demanding nuanced strategies to address challenges and ensure sustained growth amidst economic variations. Consideration of the factors influencing negative growth years and exploration of diversification opportunities could enhance the resilience of the tourism sector and fortify its contribution to Sikkim's economic prosperity.

The state's GDP is consistently growing at the rate of about 7 percent per annum for the last two decades. The compound average growth of state GDP from 1981 to 2018 is about 12.65 percent in constant prices, which is more than the national average. It is substantiated by tourism sector with a compound average growth of 11.58 percent. It can also be noted that the growth in tourism sector has contributed to growth in GSDP. The compound contributive share of tourism sector in GSDP has been 5.85 percent over a period from 1980 to 2018, which is higher than the national average. The trend of GSDP growth rate and tourism sector growth rate is depicted below.

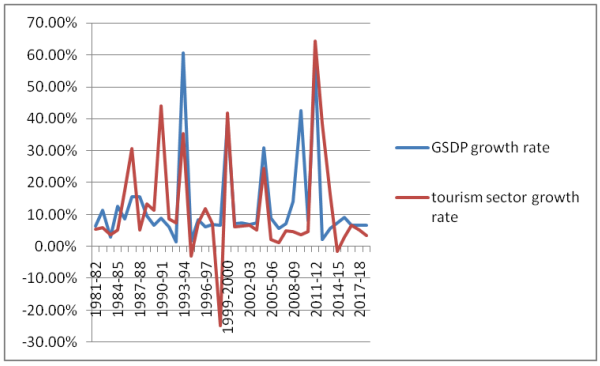


Figure 4: GSDP growth rate and Tourism sector growth rate

Above figure indicates the correlation between GSDP and tourism sector in Sikkim. The trends demonstrates that whenever there is a growth in tourism sector it is also reflected in growth in GSDP. Except few financial years like 1994-95, 1998-99 and 2014-15 the tourism sector has always recorded health growth rates. In these years of negative growth rate, the tourist inflows recorded less than the previous years because of domestic and regional problems such as agitations for Gorkhaland and natural calamities like heavy rainfall etc which blocked the roads.

Table 5: Percentage Shares and Rank of Sikkim in Domestic (DOM) & Foreign (FOI) Tourist Visits, 2018

State	2018		Percentage share		Ranking	
	DOM	FOI	DOM	FOI	DOM	FOI
Sikkim	1426127	71172	0.08	0.25	26	24
Total	1854933384	28872384	100	100		

Source: India Tourism Statistics, 2019

The above table depicts percentage share of tourist flows (domestic) in Sikkim in 2018. The state receives mere 0.08 domestic and 0.25 foreign tourists. This shows that there is a huge scope for increase in tourists, if the state takes adequate measures. Although the state records about 45 percent growth in foreign tourists and about 3.65 percent growth in domestic tourist than the previous year, still the state does not even take the share of one percent in total tourist visits in India. Sikkim ranks 26th position in domestic tourism and 24th position in foreign tourist attractions, standing in the last 10 states and Union Territories in attracting tourists.

CONCLUSION

Sikkim tourism sector makes important contributions to both GSDP and employment generation. A large number of people are employed directly and indirectly in the sector. The indirect employment figures though are not available, the sector provides livelihood to people through various activities including general stores, souvenir shops, handlooms and handicrafts, woollen cloth shops, local transport etc. Sikkim has witnessed substantial increase in the tourist arrival in the last 6-7 years. According to state's tourism department, in 2011 the number of domestic tourists visited Sikkim recorded at 552453. By the end of 2017 it has increased almost two and half folds with a recorded number at 1375854. This growth also contributed enormously to the state. The per capita tourist arrivals vis a vis state population is quite higher than national average.

The tourism sector in the state holds immense potential for expansion, considering that it currently attracts less than one percent of total tourist arrivals in India, ranking in the last ten positions for both domestic and foreign tourist visits. To capitalise on this potential, the state must actively promote its tourist destinations and government policies. Primary obstacles to sector growth include challenges in physical connectivity and the permit system. Exploring extensive areas of the state often necessitates obtaining prior permits, and tourism in the state is often associated with neighbouring Darjeeling hills, renowned for their tea plantations. However, over the past decade, the state has experienced significant growth in tourist inflows, emerging as a prominent tourist destination. Efforts to overcome connectivity issues and streamline the permit process could further propel the state's status in the tourism industry.

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CMTHS

JOURNAL OF TOURISM
ISSN: 0972-7310. Vol. XXV, Issue 2 (December 2024), 70-83

Rural Entrepreneurship Training: A Critical Systematic Review of Concepts and Outcomes

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KEYWORDS

Rural entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship training, capacity building, rural development, skill development

ABSTRACT

Rural entrepreneurship training plays a critical role in developing entrepreneurial capabilities, fostering business creation, and generating employment and reducing poverty in rural communities. A growing body of literature examines training interventions in rural environments; there is little integration, consistency, and theory on how to do this in non-Western and digitally underserved environments. The paper provides a critical systematic literature review (SLR) of peer-reviewed research and institutional reports on rural entrepreneurship training. Using the PRISMA framework, this review critically evaluates definitions of training, teaching models, documented outcomes, and key structural and contextual challenges. Findings indicate that training programs tend to enhance entrepreneurial intention, skill acquisition and short-term income, but they have limited studies on their sustainability in the long run. Evidence suggests that experiential approaches are generally more effective than traditional classroom-based methods. Theories and theory use is found to be a critical gap as is the longitudinal evaluation frameworks, gender disaggregation analysis, and the integration of technology. Finally, the review suggests a future research agenda with a special focus on mixed-method long-term designs, place-based sensitivity to context, and post-training support infrastructure as the next frontier for rural entrepreneurship scholarship and practice.

INTRODUCTION

Rural regions around the world continue to have deep-rooted structural issues, such as growing population ageing and depopulation, inadequate economic diversification, and diminishing productive bases (Lopez & Pastor, 2015). In this context, entrepreneurship has increasingly been seen as a route to the revitalization of rural economies, the creation of jobs locally and the mobilization of unused resources within the community. However, defining entrepreneurship in rural contexts remains challenging. As Fortunato (2014) has noted, the concept of "entrepreneurship" has not been properly researched and defined for decades, and any definition of entrepreneurship for rural areas needs to be sufficiently generic to cover the variety of motivations, resource structures and business entities that can be seen throughout the countryside. Further complexity is introduced by Korsgaard et al., (2015), who differentiate between two analytically distinct phenomena: entrepreneurship in the rural (place embeddedness is limited, and it's done in accordance with mobile and profit-oriented logics) and rural entrepreneurship (nested in local resources; place is re-connected to space). This distinction has important implications for the design, targeting, and assessment of training programs.

Based on the above definition, Feher (2014) defines rural entrepreneurship as the formation of new organisations that offer new products, new markets or new technology in rural areas, including non-agricultural farm business diversification. Rural entrepreneurship has also been defined as the potential for creating economic, social and ecological value through entrepreneurial activities in the communities (Baumgartner, Schulz and Seidl (2013). The existence of different definitions shows that the field lacks conceptual clarity, which directly limits the scope of comparative research and any policy development.

Importance of Training in Rural Development

Training has always been identified as an integral part of rural development programs. Kroesen and Darson (2013) call for a comprehensive approach, with capacity development following incremental introduction of technology to get smallholder farmers and unemployed youth into agricultural entrepreneurship. This research study is consistent with the findings of Zollet et al. (2024), which confirmed that entrepreneurship education in rural areas is designed to nurture entrepreneurial mindsets, competencies and skills, and that the objectives of entrepreneurship education are generally aligned with broader poverty alleviation and economic diversification aspirations, especially in Global South contexts. Loucks (1988) also found training to be a fundamental component of entrepreneurship development programs in rural India and other developing settings, which are designed to motivate, educate about management and to provide direction for preparing a business plan for people with little formal education.

There are empirical evidence-based links between training and development outcomes, which are context-specific. A European survey undertaken by Skuras et al., (2005) shows that human capital accumulation processes such as education and training are the key to successful rural businesses, ranging from 23 to 43 percent of an increase in the likelihood of business growth in different study areas. Yet, Shiferaw (2020) warns that training is not enough for pastoralists to sustain their livelihoods changes unless coupled with financial and productive resources. The results are contrasting, highlighting the difficulties of isolating developmental outcomes from training inputs.

Problem Statement

Although there is growing research on rural entrepreneurship training, it is fragmented, methodological, and lacks any comparative synthesis. Studies focus on individual program interventions, in a single geographic setting, with little consideration of theory-based foundations or comparative cross-contextal analysis, or long-term follow-up. The challenges to the building of cumulative knowledge include definitional ambiguity about the definition of rural entrepreneurship training, almost exclusive reliance on short-term, self-reported outcomes measures, inadequate assessment of gender-specific effects, and almost complete lack of evidence of the effectiveness of digital training approaches. Moreover, Romijn (1989) points to the fact that the task of proving the effectiveness of the programs in practice is complicated by many methodological issues, such as inaccurate data and the lack of interest among the program implementers in conducting comprehensive cost-effectiveness analysis.

Each region has unique socio-cultural and economic characteristics that influence women's participation and empowerment in homestays. Studies suggest in Darjeeling, homestay involvement has improved women's income and decision-making power (Kannegieser, 2015). However, challenges like lack of training and cultural barriers persist (Datta & Banerji, 2015). For Sikkim, homestays empower women, but capacity building and marketing support are needed (Chakraborty & Chakma, 2016). Homestay tourism is rising in Kalimpong region with diverse ethnicities. While research is limited, preliminary studies suggest positive impacts on women's social status and income generation. Women homestay hosts in these regions earn supplementary income, alleviating household poverty and enhancing financial resilience. Their involvement allows them to invest in education and healthcare, improving their overall quality of life. This study aims to fill this gap by comparing women's empowerment in homestay tourism across Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Sikkim with a view to provide an overview of women's involvement in homestay-tourism and its effectiveness as a women's-empowerment and economic influencers of women's participation and assess the current level of women's empowerment achieved through homestay ventures based on weighted index assessment in each region.

Research Objectives and Scope

The research objectives for this systematic review are as follows: (1) critically review the concept and definition of rural entrepreneurship in the academic and practitioner literature; (2) identify and compare teaching models and programme design found in rural entrepreneurship training interventions; (3) synthesize evidence on outputs of entrepreneurship training programmes such as entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurship skills, income and employment outcomes, and business success; (4) critically discuss methodological limitations and inconsistencies in the existing literature; and (5) identify theoretical, methodological, and contextual gaps and suggest future research directions.

This review is a contribution to the literature in a number of ways. It is hoped to be a theoretical mapping of the conceptual space for entrepreneurship training in rural areas and to highlight certain points of ambiguity in the definitions and theoretical development. Methodologically, it shows systematic weaknesses in measures of and assessments of outcomes across studies that can be used to inform methodological progress. In practice, it draws on the available evidence of what does and does not work in programs and emphasizes the need for structural conditions that support training to lead to long-term entrepreneurial activity. It also highlights the under-explored aspect of the field such as gender, digital technology, and post training support, all of which are priorities for future research and policy engagement.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study is Critical Systematic Literature Review (CSLR) that is a method with a combination of structured database search and clear inclusion/exclusion criteria, as well as critical appraisal and thematic synthesis. The CSLR is not a descriptive literature review, but rather a critical examination of the theories and methods employed in the existing research, and its internal consistency and external validity. This method is especially suited for a field as diverse as rural entrepreneurship training, in which the vast differences in disciplinary traditions, geographic backgrounds, and program designs often make it difficult to make one-to-one comparisons without an organizing analytical framework.

The literature search included various peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, edited book chapters, and institutional reports that focus on rural entrepreneurship training. The sources came from various fields such as entrepreneurship, education, rural development, agricultural economics, vocational training and international development. Search keywords were developed iteratively and incorporated to combine the following: “rural entrepreneurship training”; “entrepreneurship education rural”; “capacity building rural entrepreneurs”; “entrepreneurial skill development rural”; “agricultural entrepreneurship education”; “rural incubation mentoring”; “vocational training rural areas”. Both conceptual sources and empirical sources were used to cover definitional debates as well as program evaluations. 35 studies meeting the inclusion criteria were selected for detailed examination. The reviewed studies were published between 1995 and 2024, enabling the identification of long-term developments, emerging trends, and persistent challenges in rural entrepreneurship training research.

Studies that explored entrepreneurship training, education, and/or capacity building in rural or semi-rural settings, studies that discussed outcomes such as entrepreneurial intention, skill development, income, employment, or business performance, studies that focused on program design, implementation, and/or evaluation, and/or studies that developed theory or concepts relevant to rural entrepreneurship training were included. Studies were not included if they did not have a rural component (even though they were about urban entrepreneurship), if they were purely descriptive or if they were not in English. The geographic scope was intentionally wide to allow for cross-regional comparisons and to allow context-specific patterns to be identified from both developed and developing country contexts.

Systematically information was extracted from each of the sources, including study context, study geography, theory used, training model and program design, outcomes measured, and findings reported, as well as methodological approach. Then themes were used to categorise the findings in common themes in similar ways to systematic reviews recommended by the social sciences. The themes were inductively derived from the data and guided deductively by the research objectives.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Many definitions of rural entrepreneurship and training can be found in the literature. The most analytically clear taxonomy is that of Korsgaard et al. (2015), who differentiate place-embedded rural entrepreneurship from generic entrepreneurship in rural places. Fortunato (2014) warns that definitional ambiguity may lead to the mixing up of market orientated business creation with other aspects of community based innovation which are also central to rural development. Islas-Moreno, Muñoz-Rodríguez and Morris (2021) offer a process-based definition, which sees rural entrepreneurship as a phenomenon that occurs through the interaction between the process, the entrepreneur, the context, and the benefits that the community enjoys. In this sense, context is not just background but plays an active role in defining possibilities and constraints for entrepreneurs.

For training, there is a spectrum of literature ranging from skills-based to capacity development approaches. Kroesen and Darson (2013) explicitly separate capacity from simple knowledge and/or skills, and suggest that capacity development is about changing the capacity to act entrepreneurially within the community itself, not just transferring de-contextualized information. According to Lopez and Pastor (2015) training in rural development is a mobilizing activity which is aimed at allowing people to internalize new entrepreneurial patterns and to gain knowledge about the possibilities of their territorial development. Le and Loang (2024) use a knowledge transfer approach that emphasizes passing on theoretical concepts and practices that would make entrepreneurship easier. As a result, there are practical implications for these different conceptualizations: Programs based on knowledge transfer approach to implementation in different ways than programs based on holistic capacity development, such as in terms of how long they last in implementation and what is considered success and failure.

A variety of theoretical frameworks can be found in the reviewed literature, but occur less frequently and are not always explicitly tested. The most commonly cited theory is Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which guides the design of programs that focus on learning through doing, reflection, and experimenting (Motta & Galina, 2023; Garcia & Hackbert, 2023). Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been used in research on entrepreneurial intention, for instance by Bouichou et al. (2021) and Rahmi et al. (2022) who all used variables derived from TPB to model the effect of training on intention, such as subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. Purusottama et al. (2018) use TPB to assess the effectiveness of the model of entrepreneurship that is carried out in the community in order to increase the rural micro-enterprise commitment.

In a critique of both agglomeration based and ecosystem based models as not appropriate for the rural context, Muñoz and Kimmitt (2019) propose a new theoretically-integrated model: Rural Entrepreneurship Framework for Local Economic and Communal Thriving (REFLECT). Adhikari et al. (2018) provide a framework that builds on the model of entrepreneurship as a method of Sarasvathy and Venkataraman, as well as the Community Capitals Framework of Emery and Flora, to offer a deeper understanding of existing community assets and inhibitors to support rural development practice. The human capital theory is not clearly stated, but many quantitative studies investigating training inputs and economic results rely on this theory (Skuras et al., 2005; Baumgartner et al., 2013; Bairagya, 2021). Future studies should apply these theoretical perspectives more systematically and explicitly, since they are used implicitly, and so no theory consistent evidence can be accumulated.

Many models of training have been documented from agricultural literacy in schools to community-based training incubators to models based on institutions of learning. Heinert and Roberts (2018) pinpoint Supervised Agricultural Experience Program (SAEP) as the prevalent pedagogical method for rural agricultural entrepreneurship education in the U.S., along with business plan writing and experiential capstone presentations. In the global context, Bamiro et al. (2024) present a collection of agripreneurship curricula, such as the Youth-in-Agribusiness model, School Based Agricultural Education and the Social Enterprise Model in the Philippines. The EMER-N mentoring program in Portugal is an institutional mentoring approach that integrates access to financing, sectoral network of businesses and expert support to enable rural business creation (Galvao, Mascarenhas, Marques, Braga, and Ferreira, 2020). Each model reflects a distinct perspective of the purpose of training and its audience, showing that the field has no shared model programmatic.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Training Approaches and Methods

The underlying methodological difference found in the literature on rural entrepreneurship training is between a traditional, classroom-based training and an experiential, hands-on training. Cooper, Bottomley and Gordon (2004) firmly believe that the traditional lecture-based approach to entrepreneurship is ineffective for cultivating entrepreneurial skills needed to take entrepreneurial action; they call for experiential approaches that are high involvement, such as working in a start-up company. The comparative empirical evidence presented by Farashahi and Tajeddin (2018) shows that students believe that the simulation and case study methods are much better than the lecture method in developing problem-solving skills and self-awareness among students, which are important abilities for entrepreneurial competence. This is echoed by Chang, Benamraoui and Rieple (2014) in their research on social entrepreneurship education, which found that learning-by-doing resulted in better skills development than classroom-level involvement.

Motta and Galina (2023) systematically analyze this literature and conclude that experiential learning activities have unique and mostly positive impacts on the teaching-learning process in entrepreneurship education, and practice-oriented courses result in stronger entrepreneurial intentions than theory-oriented courses. But several studies challenge this apparent consensus. Despite the general assumption that designing a formal curricular program is the most important factor in entrepreneurial development, Pukkinen et al. (2024) conclude that formal curricular entrepreneurial activities do not improve entrepreneurial self-efficacy or entrepreneurial desirability among rural youth, but in contrast, extracurricular activities do. The findings suggest that informal learning environments may be more influential than formal curricular activities.

The literature shows a gradual transition towards more flexible, hybrid and digital delivery modalities. The study carried out by Popescu and Simion (2012) proves the viability of e-learning as a tool for offering entrepreneurship courses in geographically distant rural areas in Romania. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sie Hoe et al. (2021) assess online training for rural entrepreneurs, highlighting that training via Facebook and WhatsApp significantly improved digital skills and ICT confidence of participants. Though these are encouraging results, they are not without limitations: Bouichou, Fadlaoui and Benbrahim (2024) point to the lack of effective Internet connections, digital devices that rural learners cannot afford, and the need for digital content to be localised to the language and culture in which it is used as obstacles to the effectiveness of digital training in rural Morocco.

Skill and Competency Development

There is a widespread consensus in the literature that training in entrepreneurship builds up many skills, but the emphasis is quite diverse in respect to program type, target group, but also cultural context. Galvão, Marques and Ferreira (2020) report that training programs foster innovation, proactivity, risk-taking appetite, opportunities recognition, creativity, problem solving, leadership and networking, and that most of the business ideas that participants generate are focused on rural tourism, agricultural activities and regional trade (Bagri, 2022). Varma (2023) differentiates between hard skills, which are technical and managerial, and soft skills, which are cognitive and behavioural such as communication and problem-solving and finds that the participants felt that they acquired both sets of skills after the Entrepreneurship Development Programs (EDPs) in India.

The SEED program in Uganda was evaluated by Chioda, Contreras-Loya, Gertler, and Carney (2021), adding an important comparative dimension to the analysis, because it offered two different curricula: hard business skills (accounting, business creation, finance) and soft skills (goal setting, self-management, risk tolerance, negotiation, and leadership). More importantly, the study revealed only the soft-skills curriculum had measurable effects on self-efficacy, persuasion and negotiation skills; the hard-skills curriculum did not have any such effects. It contradicts the programs that focus on technical and managerial skills, and less focus on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and also confirms the Jayaram and Musau's (2017) findings that soft skills are not being treated as a priority in program designing for entrepreneurial effectiveness. Muñoz and Steinerowski (2012) also cite opportunism, leadership and networking as three key domains of entrepreneurial capabilities that relate to successful social enterprise development in rural communities.

In the context of rural youth, Kalule et al. (2017)

show that practical agri-entrepreneurship methods enhance entrepreneurial skills among University students in Sub Saharan Africa students such as entrepreneurial knowledge, creativity, critical thinking and entrepreneurial mindsets. The competency development architecture of Baxter et al. (2014) provides a more comprehensive list of competency areas including vocational skills, life skills, peer mentoring, financial literacy, and career counseling which recognizes that rural youth need a multidimensional approach to preparing them for success, rather than just a focus on technical skills.

Outcomes: Entrepreneurial Intention, Income, and Business Performance

The literature that has been reviewed focuses on impact of training on entrepreneurial intention as the theoretically close variable to entrepreneurial behavior. Ghouse, Barber and Alipour (2024) report a strong positive correlation among entrepreneurial training, self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intentions among the rural students indicating that self-efficacy and perceived capacity act as a mediator between entrepreneurial training and entrepreneurial intentions. Authors of the Bouichou et al. (2021) study note that training has an positive effect on the intentions of members of Moroccan rural youth cooperatives, but not so much in the case of low access to training, which leaves a structural gender gap. The findings are more positive in this regard, as Zollet et al. (2024) find that participation in entrepreneurship training programs boosted chances of starting up a business and acquiring capital, with no significant difference between rural & urban clients, which contradicts the notion that rural entrepreneurs do not gain as much as urban entrepreneurs from traditional training measures. However, Braun (2012) sees a contrast between 'container knowledge' approaches that only overload learners with knowledge and real entrepreneurial learning and believes that former can actually impair entrepreneurial motivation instead of encouraging it.

The evidence is mostly positive and often qualified in terms of income and livelihood outcomes. This effect is confirmed using propensity score matching in Wonde, Tsehay and Lemma (2022), which showed that the training provided at Ethiopian Farmers Training Centers led to an increase in net income from wheat production of 19.64 percent per year. The average income of agripreneurs from the agricultural training programme provided by the Nigerian GUYS was also found to have increased by 46 percent after accounting for selection bias (Adeyanju, Mburu, and Mignouna, 2021). Bairagya (2021) supplements these results with evidence on the importance of the duration of vocational training: longer programs yield much greater earnings gains for rural Indian self-employed workers than do shorter programs. While these are positive results, there are a few studies that recommend caution. Pompa (2013) reaches a nuanced conclusion in authors review which indicates that training alone does not have a significant effect on the survival of the enterprises or stimulation of start-up business rates, but has a positive effect on the practices of enterprises, profit and sales provided that suitable support mechanisms are provided. The conflicting results indicate that trainability is not guaranteed, but rather is linked to the wider enabling environment from which trained people move once they finish training.

Challenges and Barriers

Individual, institutional and structural challenges have been identified in the literature as influencing the success of rural entrepreneurship training at various stages. Kumar and Kumra (2023) at the individual level identify negative family and social attitudes as the most important inhibition achieving positive outcomes for entrepreneurship growth for rural Indian trainees, followed by financial constraints and poor planning skills. Transfer of training is a critical issue in the field of entrepreneurship training, as learned skills can only be transferred to real situations if the trainee possesses certain traits, such as age, gender, education level, and prior entrepreneurial experience (Minja et al., 2022). This discovery is consistent with the results of Martin et al., (2013) that indicate the lack of a link between training attendance and skill use that hinders the expected effects of many programs.

Institutional barriers are equally significant. Regardless of the quality of the training, lack of specialized advisors, financing mechanisms with high interest rates and bureaucratic loan procedures and lack of formal business networks are systemic constraints that hinder the entrepreneurial development of the rural population, according to Ataei, Ghadermarzi, Karimi, and Norouzi (2020). Institutional challenges to entrepreneurial activity in the

Nigerian rural contexts are cited as poor road networks, inadequate financial support, and education curricula that fail to address entrepreneurial practice by Adewumi and Keyser (2020). The challenge continues to persist, is that training providers are not providing content, timing and format that are suitable for small rural businesses, as Bennett (1995) was highlighting. Mayombe (2017) also introduces the factor of post-training institutional linkages and discovers that poor links between training centers and the resources available in the community, financial institutions, and market networks are a significant structural imbalance that keeps trainees from getting the necessary practical support to start a viable business.

Women's challenges are widespread and entrenched. In Iran, Movahedi and Yaghoubi-Farani (2012) report on nine dimensions of barriers that limit the participation of rural women as entrepreneurs, including demographic, cultural, knowledge and access. In ASEAN contexts, unequal education opportunities and lack of access to capital and social norms are cited as main constraints by Ramle and Mardikaningsih (2024). The findings of Azis et al. (2023) further highlight how these challenges in education and training, financial exclusion and sociocultural bias intersect to create disproportionate disadvantages for the Malaysian rural women. Among the farm women in India, socio-personal and gender factors such as gendered seclusion and unequal household responsibilities are the most negative factors affecting women's entrepreneurial trajectories, according to Senapati et al. (2017). These studies collectively suggest that training designs which are gender neutral systematically disadvantage women, directly affecting program redesign.

Policy and Institutional Support

Government programs are an important pathway for the provision of rural entrepreneurship training, especially in developing country contexts, but rarely have been documented with respect to their impact and effectiveness. Aggarwal (2013) examines Indian government-sponsored Rural Entrepreneurship Development Programs (REDPs) and concludes that the ones that focused on skill training in the local voluntary sector had start-up success of between 40 and 65 per cent, though he also points out that this was not the case for all programs and delivery partners. Dzapasi (2019) arrives at more critical findings from Zimbabwe, where he finds that the impact of government vocational training on the growth of rural businesses, business profitability and productivity were small to none, and that this was partly due to limited outreach and inactivity in general entrepreneurship and mentoring support. Adeyanju et al. (2021) have a more positive view on the Nigerian GUYS program, suggesting that government spending on targeted agricultural training has tangible performance benefits and that there is a need for increased program investment.

A land-grant institutionally embedded model that connects the academic resources of land-grant institutions with the needs of underserved entrepreneurs in rural communities is a community-based government initiative documented by Robinson et al. (2004) in the American South, called the USDA 1890 Entrepreneurial Outreach Initiative. North and Smallbone (2006) provide a comparative European view, describing variations between member states in governance systems, cultural histories and levels of development in different EU countries leading to varying policy responses to rural enterprise support and warning against models being transplanted into different institutional contexts. These observations match Kasabov's (2016) critique that one-size-fits-all policies for rural entrepreneurs fail, as they leave out some of the more critical capabilities, attitudes and constraints of entrepreneurs they are meant to target.

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE LITERATURE

Methodological Weaknesses

The reviewed literature exhibits several methodological limitations, limiting the validity and generalizability of the reported findings. There are numerous studies that have few participants in their single program evaluations – less than 100 – and have weak external validity and tenuous statistical inferences. Some studies use an intervention (pre-post) design, but few have an intervention or control groups and/or have included counterfactual methods, making it challenging to attribute any observed change to training instead of temporal effects or selection effects. While some studies do make use of matching techniques to reduce selection bias, such as Adeyanju et al. (2021) and Wonde et al. (2022), who use propensity score matching to control for selection bias and isolate training effects, respectively, the use of such

methodological sophistication is the exception.

Another important weakness are self-reported measures. Studies that focus on skill development, entrepreneurial intention, and income rely on the self-assessment of the participants, which is prone to social desirability bias, recall bias, and post program optimism. Romijn (1989) points to the challenge of empirical verification which is endemic in entrepreneurship training evaluation, that is, there is not an inclination for organizations that have undertaken training programs to conduct rigorous impact assessment, especially if they are responsible for the delivery of the training. Braun (2012) extends this critique to evaluation frameworks, which he argues most programs in developing countries do not have systematic designs to evaluate the impact at personal, regional, or national levels, leading to a prevalence of self-reported program success that is not independently verified. While Burman and Singh (2024) suggest a composite model of training evaluation based on Kirkpatrick, which merges reactions, learning, behavior change, and entrepreneurial outcomes, the use of such an approach in the rural entrepreneurship training literature is limited.

Inconsistencies and Contradictions in Findings

The examined literature has some important substantive conflicts that need to be addressed in future studies. Regarding the effectiveness of formal and informal education, Pukkinen et al. (2024) show that curricular activities do not have an impact on entrepreneurial self-efficacy, whereas extracurricular activities do. This result challenges the notion of institutions based learning programs. This is at odds with the positive results observed by Zollet et al. (2024) on institutional delivery of training programmes, with similar positive impacts for rural and urban entrepreneurs, suggesting that contextual factors may play a role in this relationship that has yet to be fully understood.

Martin et al. (2013) report a general lack of connection between training and transfer to application and Gyimah and Lussier (2021) found that capital adequacy, industry experience and marketing skills rather than training itself, are the main factors between successful and failed rural businesses. Pompa (2013) presents a more nuanced perspective by showing that business training is beneficial to practices and profits, but has no significant effect on enterprise start-up or on enterprise survival, implying that training has mostly a maintenance rather than a transformative role in rural entrepreneurial ecosystems. These inconsistencies remain insufficiently explained by the more positive findings of Oladapo et al. (2019) and Bairagya (2021) and are evident across a literature that suggests context, program design and measurement approach all have a major moderating influence on training effects that has not yet been fully reconciled in this cross-study comparison.

Limitations of the Current Literature

In addition to certain methodological shortcomings, there are inherent weaknesses in the literature. There is geographic concentration, with a disproportionate amount of scholarship for rural entrepreneurship training in Europe, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, whereas Southeast Asian, Latin American, and Central Asian contexts are less explored despite there being substantive programmatic activities in them. Similarly, theoretical diversity is limited with the dominance of experiential learning theory and theory of planned behavior, while other theories, such as feminist theory, post-colonial frameworks, and complexity theory are mostly ignored in the study, even though they may be relevant for the understanding of gendered, place-specific and adaptive aspects of rural entrepreneurial development. Lastly, there is a major focus on the outcomes of training, with few studies looking at the capacity of the providers or the quality of the training content, instructor competence, or institutional arrangements that contribute to training effectiveness.

GAPS, FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Gaps

The major theoretical void in the literature is the lack of a comprehensive theory that can be developed specifically for rural entrepreneurship training. As Muñoz and Kimmitt (2019) state, the current frameworks designed in urban or general entrepreneurship context are not sensitive to the place-specific, community embedded and resource constrained nature of rural entrepreneurial activity. To develop explanatory models that more explicitly address the unique context in which rural training takes place and results, future theoretical efforts need to combine place-based theory for community capitals, and some of the theories of entrepreneurship. Moreover, the psychological processes by which training influences entrepreneurial cognition and behavior in rural

environments are underdeveloped; the use of more sophisticated theoretical frameworks, such as identity theory, role model theory, and social cognitive theory, could significantly contribute to the understanding of the formation of entrepreneurial intention and the factors that limit its manifestation in action in rural areas.

Methodological Gaps

The concept of a methodological architecture for research on rural entrepreneurship training deserves a basic consolidation. The need is the most immediate for long-term study designs that can follow participants over multi-year periods to determine the longevity of training effects on income, employment, business survival and community development. More systematic use of experimental and quasi-experimental designs, such as randomized controlled trials and difference-in-difference analyses, should be used to establish causal, not correlational, links between training inputs and outcomes. In addition, multi-method studies that integrate quantitative outcome measures and qualitative process-tracing and participant's narrative analysis would allow researchers to determine not just whether training is effective, but how and under what conditions it most effectively promotes the desired outcome.

Contextual Gaps

In terms of the proportion of the global rural population and the extent of training interventions undertaken in rural contexts in the Global South, the latter is underrepresented in the literature compared to the share of the population living in and the extent of training interventions for people living in rural contexts in the Global North. Kroesen and Darson (2013) call out two groups that are most targeted for capacity development but least reached by the training models: smallholder farmers and unemployed youth. These groups are the ones that are least likely to have a basic reading and numeracy literacy. Training effectiveness and changes to training design to meet the needs and interests of populations with low levels of formal education should be a specific focus in future research. Program level evaluations in context from South and Southeast Asia, West Africa, and Andean Latin America would also substantially expand the geographic breadth of the evidence base and allow for more valid cross-regional generalization.

Emerging Areas: Digital Technology and Sustainability

Digital technology is likely one of the most dynamic and rapidly changing arenas within the field of rural entrepreneurship training, and the research evidence base is sparse and poorly developed. Research like Sie Hoe et al. (2021), Popescu and Simion (2012), and Zhu et al. (2020) shows the possibility of delivering training online and through mobile technology, but these studies offer little rigorous evidence on comparative effectiveness compared to in-person training, long-term recall of knowledge, or in what circumstances digital training can replace a lack of in-person infrastructure. It is also important to begin with interventions that gradually and deliberately develop digital literacy prior to delivering entrepreneurial content via digital channels, as emphasized by Nipo et al., (2024). The authors Bouichou et al. (2024) highlight three challenges that have remained unaddressed and need a coordinated policy and infrastructure solution as well as programmatic innovation: connectivity, affordability, and content localization.

Another emerging field of training research that has received limited attention is sustainability entrepreneurship in rural settings, which encompasses agro-ecological entrepreneurship, circular economy and nature-based solutions. While the literature on training rural entrepreneurs in sustainability-oriented business models is limited, Martinez-Campillo et al., (2019) provide evidence of students' authentic commitment to sustainability and professional skills arising from their contact with rural sustainability projects in a service-learning program conducted in Spanish higher education. Embedding sustainability concepts into rural entrepreneurship education programs is a need and a research priority, because of the growing pressures climate change is placing on rural livelihoods and ecosystems.

Implications

The findings of the evidence reviewed have several direct implications for the design and delivery of rural entrepreneurship training. At the policy level, this review aims to identify the need for coordinated and multi-sectoral support systems that place training in its wider enabling environments. Sustainable business outcomes cannot be achieved without infrastructure, finance, market access and regulations that enable trained entrepreneurs .However good the individual training program, it can't replace infrastructure,

finance, market access and regulatory environment needed to generate sustainable business outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The present critical systematic review has covered the study of rural entrepreneurship training from conceptualization, pedagogy, outcomes and challenges aspects, with a wide range of scholarship literature from multiple disciplines, regions and institutional practice. The findings of the review provide strong empirical evidence that training as a rural development tool can contribute to positive outcomes to the entrepreneurial intention, acquisition of skills, income and business performance of rural people and thus justifies ongoing investments in training. The size, length and extent of the benefits, however, vary significantly depending on the quality of program design, the environment within which the trained people are placed upon exiting the programs, and the availability of post-training support, and whether programs are truly tailored to the rural people they serve.

The review also shows that there are significant theoretical and methodological immaturities in the field. These factors, including definitional inconsistencies, cross sectional designs, small sample size, self-reported outcomes, and attention to only short-term effects and outcomes at best, and ignoring gender, place, and long term effects and outcomes at worst, are combined to limit the collective knowledge that can be generated from the literature. These gaps need to be complemented with better individual study designs, as well as a greater emphasis on theoretical integration, methodological rigor, following up on studies over time, and cross-regional comparison research.

The main strength of this review is its ability to bring together a wide and fragmentary literature across its methodological diversity into an analytically clear critical assessment of the state of the art that charts existing achievements and remaining limitations in the field of rural entrepreneurship training. This review outlines a clear programme of future research, offering a diagnosis of the key gaps and offering a programme to practitioners and policy makers in designing more effective and equitable systems for rural entrepreneurship training. With the simultaneous need to strengthen rural economies and to implement ecological sustainability, the quality of evidence that training programs are based on and assessed will become more and more critical for success and its implications for communities.

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