A Sociological Analysis of Tourism Research in Pokhara, Nepal: Perspectives and Key Findings

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Abstract

This study explores the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism in Pokhara, Nepal, and examines how sustainable tourism practices can be integrated into the region's development for long-term benefits. Tourism in Nepal, particularly in Pokhara, significantly contributes to the national economy by generating employment, stimulating local businesses, and promoting rural development. However, it also brings challenges such as cultural erosion, social inequalities, and environmental degradation. Despite the growing interest in sustainable tourism, there remain research gaps regarding the impacts on lesser-known areas, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and community-based tourism (CBRT). This research employs a systematic literature review and content analysis to address these gaps and provide insights into balancing tourism growth with sustainability. Key themes explored include the role of tourism in community participation, the economic benefits and challenges faced by marginalized groups, and the integration of sustainable practices. Findings indicate that while tourism in Pokhara has led to economic growth, it has also caused displacement of traditional livelihoods and widened socio-economic disparities. The study emphasizes the need for inclusive governance, participatory decision-making, and the implementation of sustainable tourism practices to mitigate these negative impacts. The research aims to offer recommendations for policymakers and tourism professionals to develop more sustainable, inclusive, and culturally sensitive tourism strategies, ensuring lasting benefits for both the community and the environment.

Introduction

Tourism is a complex and dynamic phenomenon involving individuals traveling beyond their usual residence for temporary stays, driven by leisure, business, or other motivations (UNWTO, 2021). Scholars recognize tourism as not merely a form of travel but a broader socio-economic and cultural process encompassing transportation, hospitality, attractions, and the interactions between tourists and host communities (Page & Connell, 2019). Hall (2020) stated that tourism's role in global economic development by generating employment, improving infrastructure, and fostering cross-cultural exchange. However, Smith (2015) cautions that while tourism can promote cultural appreciation, it may also contribute to issues such as over-tourism, cultural commodification, and socio-economic disparities within host societies.

Nepal has established itself as a renowned tourist destination due to its geographical diversity, cultural richness, and adventure tourism prospects (Nepal & Karna, 2020). The tourism sector significantly influences Nepal's economy by contributing to GDP growth, employment generation, and rural development (Sharma & Adhikari, 2022). Ghimire (2019) identifies key attractions, including Mount Everest, Lumbini the birthplace of Buddha and Pokhara, which is particularly known for adventure tourism. Despite its strengths, Nepal's tourism industry faces structural and social challenges, such as seasonal employment fluctuations, inadequate infrastructure, and environmental degradation (Thapa, 2021). In response to these challenges, Nepal has prioritized sustainable tourism initiatives. Regmi and Bhatt (2021) highlight how community-based tourism (CBT) has empowered marginalized groups by ensuring economic benefits are equitably distributed. Similarly, Banskota and Sharma (2020) emphasize responsible tourism's role in balancing economic growth with environmental conservation. Additionally, Poudel and Nyaupane (2017) examine the socio-economic effects of tourism-induced migration, stressing the need for policies that safeguard local traditions, social cohesion, and economic equity.

Tourism has significantly shaped Nepal's social, economic, and cultural fabric, particularly in Pokhara, one of the nation's most visited destinations. With its breathtaking landscapes, strong cultural heritage, and adventure tourism opportunities, Pokhara has become a focal point for tourism-related academic discussions (Nepal & Karna, 2020). Tourism studies in Pokhara have explored several critical social variables, including community participation, cultural transformation, economic benefits, and environmental sustainability (Ghimire, 2019). Scholars argue that while tourism has created job opportunities and stimulated local businesses, it has also led to cultural erosion, displacement of traditional livelihoods, and widening socio-economic inequalities (Thapa, 2021). Furthermore, concerns regarding resource

management and environmental preservation remain central to debates on tourism sustainability (Sharma & Adhikari, 2022).

A key issue in tourism research is the extent to which local communities benefit from the industry (Poudel & Nyaupane, 2017). While tourism generates substantial revenue, scholars highlight concerns about unequal economic gains, with small business owners and marginalized groups struggling to access tourism-related opportunities, thereby exacerbating social inequalities (Banskota & Sharma, 2020). Additionally, tourism-driven migration has altered local demographic structures, leading to cultural shifts that influence traditional practices and social identities (Khatri, 2018).

From a policy standpoint, Nepal's government and local authorities have implemented several initiatives to encourage responsible tourism in Pokhara. However, researchers suggest that these policies require thorough evaluation to assess their impact on local communities (Bhattarai, 2023). Many scholars advocate for participatory governance approaches, emphasizing the need to involve local stakeholders in tourism decision-making processes (Regmi & Bhatt, 2021). The rapid expansion of tourism in Pokhara has spurred scholarly interest in its socio-economic consequences, sustainability, and governance. However, there are still gaps, such as the impacts of tourism on lesser-known areas, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), and environmental sustainability, with limited exploration of community-based tourism. Additionally, the long-term effects of rural and smart tourism and the practical implementation of CBRT to balance economic growth with cultural and environmental preservation remain underexplored. The central argument of this study is that while tourism in Pokhara has driven socio-economic development, it has also caused cultural erosion, social inequalities, and environmental degradation. Despite growing interest in sustainable tourism, research on the impacts of tourism on lesser-known areas, SMEs, and CBRT remains limited. This study, therefore, seeks to address these gaps by critically examining the existing literatures with the sociological analysis.

Based on secondary sources of available data, this research aims to explore the key socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in Pokhara, Nepal, as well as how sustainable tourism practices can be integrated into the region's tourism development for long-term benefits. The research will focus on identifying the socio-cultural and environmental effects of tourism in Pokhara based on recent studies, while also exploring strategies to incorporate sustainable tourism practices into the region's development plans to ensure lasting positive outcomes for both the community and the environment. Through these objectives, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into balancing tourism growth with sustainability.

Literature review

A comprehensive review of prior studies is essential for understanding existing research, identifying knowledge gaps, and establishing the significance of new inquiries. Smith and Johnson (2020) argue that this process involves systematically analyzing literature to provide contextual understanding, refine theoretical concepts, develop research hypotheses, and prevent redundancy or errors. Such evaluations facilitate the adoption of innovative methodologies, highlight core challenges, and reinforce the necessity for further exploration. According to Brown (2019), a chronological examination of existing studies ensures a robust foundation for research and validates its contemporary relevance. Thus, past studies serve as a critical resource for background knowledge, methodological advancements, and problem identification, reinforcing the need for continued scholarly inquiry. Tourism in Pokhara, Nepal, plays a vital role in the local economy by contributing to GDP, generating employment, and supporting infrastructure expansion. However, the economic gains are unevenly distributed, particularly disadvantaging marginalized communities, thereby exacerbating social inequalities. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) struggle to adopt sustainable practices, despite recognizing their significance (Khatiwad et al., 2024).

The influx of tourism also brings cultural and environmental concerns, including the commercialization of indigenous traditions, cultural homogenization, and ecological harm such as pollution and depletion of natural resources. Additionally, the evolving tourism sector influences social structures, leading to shifts in gender roles, intergenerational relationships, and traditional livelihoods (Bhatta, 2019). The emphasis on sustainable tourism in Pokhara aims to harmonize economic development with environmental conservation and cultural preservation. Community-based tourism (CBT) and responsible tourism initiatives seek to empower local populations, safeguard cultural heritage, and promote equitable economic benefits. Achieving these goals necessitates strong governmental policies, improved infrastructure, and collaboration among local businesses, policymakers, and community organizations (Sharma, 2013).

Although efforts toward sustainability have progressed, ongoing challenges persist, particularly in addressing the socio-economic needs of vulnerable groups. Moreover, external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed the fragility of the tourism industry, underscoring the urgency for adaptive governance and resilient policies (Gossling, Scott, & Hall, 2021). Tourism extends beyond being merely an economic enterprise; it is a social phenomenon that profoundly shapes local identities, traditions, and societal structures. From the perspective of social exchange theory, interactions between tourists and local residents are reciprocal but often

unequal, leading to disparities in the distribution of tourism's benefits (Revilla & Moure, 2016).

This inequality can generate social tensions, particularly when economic advantages favor certain groups over others based on factors such as class, ethnicity, or access to resources. A significant concern in tourism research is the commodification of culture, which is particularly evident in destinations like Pokhara (Shepherd, 2002). As tourism expands, local customs, traditions, and heritage are frequently modified or commercialized to meet tourist expectations, potentially eroding cultural authenticity. This process can disproportionately impact marginalized communities, whose cultural expressions may be reshaped or exploited without equitable participation in economic returns. The challenge, therefore, is to balance economic growth with cultural preservation, ensuring that local identities remain intact (Coria & Calfucura, 2012). Sustainable tourism development is essential for long-term environmental protection and the well-being of local communities. Incorporating local voices into tourism planning enhances social inclusion and ensures a fair distribution of economic benefits while mitigating negative social and ecological effects. Community-based tourism (CBT) represents a shift toward a more equitable model, where tourism serves as a catalyst for socio-economic development, particularly benefiting disadvantaged groups such as indigenous populations and low-income households (RSCN, 2023) Furthermore, globalization has introduced new dynamics in Pokhara's tourism industry through advancements such as smart city initiatives and digital platforms. While these developments create economic opportunities and improve infrastructure, they also introduce external pressures that may challenge traditional ways of life. By integrating sustainability principles with modern technological advancements, Pokhara can position itself as a leading global destination that prioritizes both economic prosperity and social well-being (Khatri, Upadhyay, Baral, Regmi, & Sigdel, 2024).

Recent study carried out by Khatri et al. (2024) investigated Pokhara Metropolitan City's transformation into a smart city through sustainable tourism practices. The study focused on socio-economic and infrastructural variables such as tourist perceptions, the quality of amenities, and development prospects in underexplored locations like Damside, Begnastal, and Pumdikot. Employing a mixed-methods approach, findings suggested that while Lakeside remains the primary tourist hub, peripheral areas possess untapped potential. The research emphasized integrating smart infrastructure, enhancing public transport, and implementing electronic payment systems to improve visitor experiences. The correlation between high-quality accommodations and service satisfaction underscored the necessity for better lodging and pedestrian-friendly urban planning. Additionally, Pokhara's commitment

to achieving carbon neutrality by 2043 through digital solutions like free Wi-Fi and mobile applications aligns with its goal of sustainable tourism development, offering long-term socio-economic benefits for residents and the environment.

Sharma (2024) explored the outlook of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) on sustainable tourism in Pokhara. Given the sector's economic contribution and its associated environmental and socio-cultural challenges, the study utilized qualitative research and semi-structured interviews to examine SMEs' roles, motivations, and barriers in implementing sustainable tourism initiatives. Although SMEs acknowledge their responsibility in balancing economic, environmental, and cultural sustainability, they face challenges like limited financial resources, insufficient awareness, and intense market competition. Their dedication to sustainable practices stems from corporate responsibility and potential economic benefits; however, additional support through financial incentives, educational initiatives, and collaborative efforts is essential.

The findings highlight that SMEs play a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism and need both governmental and non-governmental support to achieve long-term success. Ghimire and Pathak (2023) examined the influence of rural tourism in Kaski District, particularly in community-based tourism's role in fostering economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. Through qualitative analysis, the study highlighted job creation, local business expansion, and cultural continuity, particularly benefiting homestay operators and traditional artisans. However, it also acknowledged environmental concerns such as increased waste accumulation, despite ongoing sustainability efforts. Findings indicated that tourists contribute to local economies and cultural sustainability while seeking authentic cultural and natural experiences. The study recommended community skill development, infrastructure enhancements, and improved environmental policies to ensure tourism-driven socio-economic stability.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected multiple sectors, with tourism in Pokhara, Gandaki Province, being particularly impacted. Research analyzing investment trends, employment patterns, and financial transactions in the tourism sector revealed that hospitality businesses faced widespread closures, leading to substantial job losses and economic downturns, with estimated losses exceeding Rs 70 million per day during lockdowns. Despite these challenges, industry stakeholders implemented crisis mitigation strategies such as partial wage payments and basic resource distribution for informal workers. Additionally, local governance structures increased tourism development funding, while provincial and federal authorities introduced financial relief initiatives, including low-interest loans and tax incentives (Khatiwada, Sharma, & Ranabhat, 2021).

A study by Poudel and Upadhyay (2021) further examined COVID-19's impact on Pokhara's tourism industry, focusing on attractions such as lakes, hills, and cultural sites. Key informant interviews and observational methods indicated a drastic decline in visitor numbers, contributing to economic stagnation and job displacement. Findings emphasized the concentration of high-end hotels around Phewa Lake and the necessity for similar infrastructure expansion in other regions. Recommendations included diversifying tourism activities, adjusting paragliding zones due to the new Pokhara International Airport, and implementing government-backed financial relief measures such as subsidies and refinancing options to revitalize the sector.

Ikonen (2021) investigated local residents' perceptions of tourism using Doxey's Irritation Index and social exchange theory. The study revealed predominantly positive attitudes toward tourism due to its economic benefits, including employment opportunities and increased income. However, concerns were raised about environmental degradation and cultural shifts induced by tourism. While many residents supported tourism expansion, the study challenged the conventional social exchange theory, noting that individuals actively engaged in tourism were not necessarily more supportive of its growth. The research stressed the importance of environmentally responsible tourism policies and incorporating local perspectives into future tourism planning. Nepal, known for its natural landscapes and cultural richness, faces socio-economic challenges associated with tourism's impact on traditional ways of life. While tourism drives economic progress, it can also lead to cultural homogenization and social stratification. Social Darwinist and Neo-Marxist perspectives suggest that tourism, in some cases, exploits local communities for the benefit of developed economies. To mitigate this, Sharma (2020) advocates for Community-Based Responsible Tourism (CBRT) as a sustainable framework that balances ecological preservation, economic stability, and cultural integrity, thereby reducing the adverse effects of mass tourism.

Devkota et al. (2020) explored tourism entrepreneurs' expectations in Pokhara from the Gandaki provincial government, emphasizing socio-cultural values' preservation to enhance tourism. Using structured surveys with 393 entrepreneurs, findings showed that 85.5% experienced business challenges under the new government structure, with 58.27% citing bureaucratic hurdles. Strengths such as natural beauty were counterbalanced by weaknesses including pollution and rapid urbanization. Entrepreneurs sought policy interventions such as improved business security, tax relief, and insurance programs. The study underscored the need for strategic governmental support in preserving socio-cultural heritage while fostering economic tourism development.

Subedi and Bhandari (2019) examined the socio-economic impact of village tourism in Nepal, particularly in culturally diverse rural regions. Surveying 75 respondents across three villages, findings demonstrated that tourism significantly enhanced education, local employment, and domestic tourist movement. However, challenges such as inadequate tourism education, poor transportation, and a shortage of skilled labor hindered sustainable development. The study noted shifts in traditional occupations, potentially threatening indigenous cultural identities, and suggested targeted interventions to sustain rural tourism. Adhikari (2019) assessed Pokhara's tourism potential by analyzing employment generation, income growth, and economic impact. The research highlighted constraints such as inadequate workforce training and governmental neglect, impeding adventure tourism expansion. The study recommended infrastructure enhancements, improved hospitality services, and strategic marketing to position Pokhara as a global tourism destination. Governmental and non-governmental collaboration in skill development and resource management was emphasized to promote long-term economic benefits.

Methods and materials

This study explores the sociological aspects of tourism in Pokhara, Kaski, by reviewing academic literature to analyze the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism. The primary aim is to address existing research gaps, especially regarding the broader social and cultural dimensions of tourism, such as community participation, sustainability practices, and cultural preservation. The study employs a systematic literature review and content analysis to provide insights for policymakers, researchers, and tourism professionals, with the goal of developing more sustainable and inclusive tourism strategies for the region. Key themes from recent research include the effects of tourism on local communities, the role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and the integration of sustainable tourism practices for long-term benefits. The analysis uses thematic and comparative methods to develop recommendations for effective tourism development strategies. Ultimately, the study seeks to deepen the understanding of tourism's impact on Pokhara and offer practical suggestions for improving its socio-economic, environmental, and cultural sustainability.

Since this research relies entirely on secondary data (existing literature), there is no direct sampling of individuals or groups. Instead, the "sample" consists of relevant academic studies, research papers, and reports on tourism in Pokhara. The sample size is determined by the availability and relevance of existing studies. A thorough search was conducted to identify sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government publications, and NGO reports concerning the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental impacts of tourism. Conference papers,

working papers, and unpublished reports were also included, provided they were recent (within the last 10-15 years) and aligned with the research focus on socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts, as well as sustainable tourism practices.

The data collection process involved several steps: Literature Search: A systematic search was conducted across academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate, as well as government websites and tourism-related research platforms. Keywords related to tourism in Pokhara, its socio-cultural impact, economic development, sustainability, and environmental effects were used to identify relevant studies. Document Selection: Studies were selected based on their relevance to the research questions. Inclusion criteria focused on publications specifically addressing tourism in Pokhara, examining socio-cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions, and discussing sustainable tourism practices applicable to the region. Content Analysis: The selected literature was reviewed and analyzed thematically. Key findings were categorized according to major themes, including socio-cultural impacts, economic benefits, environmental sustainability, and governance.

Several tools and techniques were employed for data analysis, focusing on secondary literature sources. Thematic analysis was used to identify and report patterns in the literature, specifically regarding the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism in Pokhara. Data was coded and grouped into key themes such as socio-cultural impacts and sustainability. Content analysis helped assess the frequency of relevant themes and terms, while comparative analysis was used to compare different studies and identify similarities and variations. The researcher synthesized the findings to create a comprehensive overview and draw connections between studies, providing valuable insights into the socio-cultural and environmental effects of tourism in the region. Since this study relies entirely on secondary sources of data, the ethical considerations primarily focus on proper citation, respecting intellectual property, and adhering to guidelines for the use of existing research. The researchers ensured that all the sources used in the study were appropriately credited, and all references are listed at the end of the research. This adherence to proper citation ensures that the intellectual property of other researchers is respected and avoids any form of plagiarism.

Results and discussion

Results

The findings suggest that while tourism provides economic benefits, these advantages are not evenly shared within local communities, with marginalized groups often left out, thus worsening social disparities. The commercialization of local culture and the shifting of social norms, especially in places like Lakeside, reflect these changes, including increased materialism and altered gender roles. These shifts align with Neo-Marxist views, which argue that international corporations benefit disproportionately from tourism, while local communities bear the environmental and cultural costs. A more inclusive approach to tourism, such as CBRT, is essential to ensure that the benefits of tourism are more equitably distributed. Furthermore, the lack of effective implementation of government tourism policies calls for more inclusive, sustainable frameworks that prioritize both economic and social fairness to support long-term community well-being.

Figure1

*Tourism Hotspot Popularity in Pokhara*
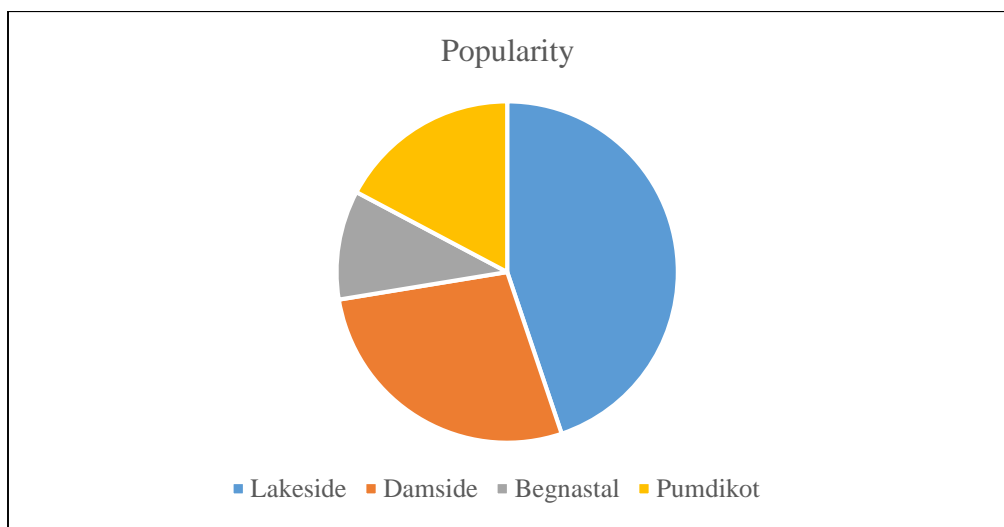
As illustrated in Figure 1, Lakeside is the most popular tourism hotspot in Pokhara, attracting the highest number of visitors. However, other areas such as Damside, Begnastal, and Pumdikot also contribute to the region's tourism appeal. While these locations may not match Lakeside in popularity, they offer unique attractions and experiences that draw tourists. Damside provides a quieter lakeside experience, Begnastal is known for its scenic beauty and boating activities, and Pumdikot features panoramic views and cultural landmarks. Together, these

destinations enhance Pokhara's reputation as a diverse and vibrant tourism hub (Khatri, Upadhyay, Baral, Regmi, & Sigdel, 2024).

Figure 2

Perception of Tourists of their First Impression in Pokhara
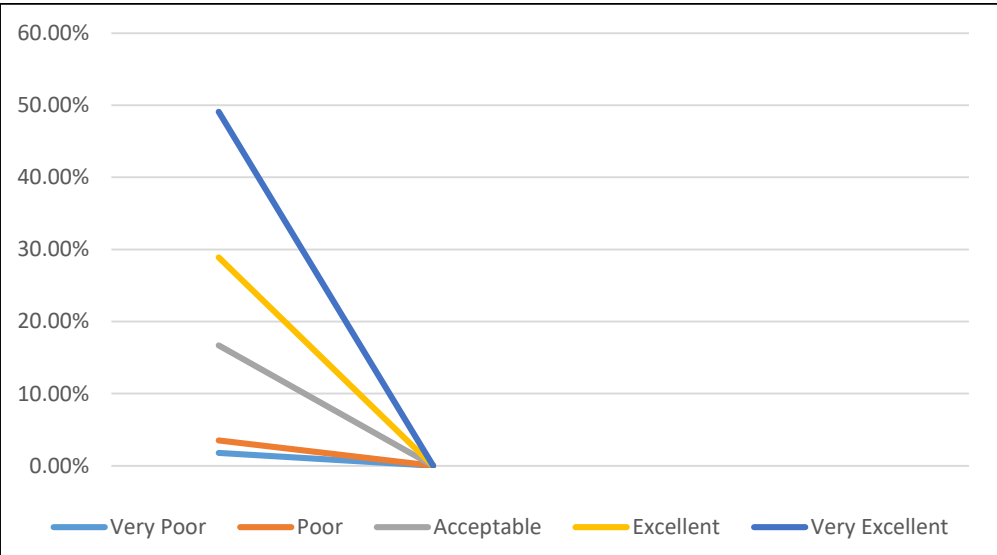
Khatri et al. (2024) found that most tourists had a positive first impression of Pokhara, with 49.1% rating their arrival as "Very Excellent", 28.9% as "Excellent," 16.7% as "Acceptable", 3.5% "Poor", while only 1.8% found it "Very Poor." This demonstrates that Pokhara is largely successful in creating a favorable first impression, likely through its aesthetics, hospitality, or overall atmosphere. While accommodation and staff communication were well-received, port entry, arrival transfers, public transport, and QR scanning at sightseeing spots showed mixed reviews, indicating areas for improvement in infrastructure and services.

Table 1

Tourism Research in Pokhara

Themes / Authors	Primary themes of discourse
Sustainable Tourism Development *Khatri et al. (2024), Sharma (2024), Brown (2019), & Sharma (2020)*	- Smart tourism infrastructure (ICT solutions) - Sustainable practices in urban areas - Expanding tourism to less-visited areas

COVID-19 Impact
Khatiwada, Sharma, & Ranabhat (2021), Poudel & Upadhyay (2021), Parajuli & Paudel (2014)
	- Economic setbacks (job losses, business
	  shutdowns)
	- Tourism recovery strategies
	- Government support and infrastructure
	  investment

Impact of Rural Tourism *Ghimire & Pathak (2023), Subedi & Bhandari (2019), & Sharma (2020)*	- Job creation - Cultural preservation - Waste management - Community-based responsible tourism (CBRT)
Socio-Cultural Impacts *Ikonen (2021), Sharma (2008), & Bhusal (2010)*	- Local perceptions of tourism - Socio-cultural changes - Resident-tourist interactions
Tourism's Dual Impacts *Sharma (2008), Bhusal (2010), Khand & Maharjan (2016)*	- Economic benefits - Environmental degradation - Socio-cultural consequences - Sustainable development strategies

Table 2

The Key Suggestions for Policy Actions

Policy Area	Key Actions
Sustainable Infrastructure	Integrate ICT, Transport Upgrades
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) support	Financial Incentives, Trainings
Skills Training	Improve workforce Development
Financial Support	Subsidies, refinancing options
Responsible Tourism	Promote Community-Based Responsible Tourism (CBRT) Models
Regulatory Reforms	Simplify Regulations, Tax Benefits
Adventure Tourism	Develop adventure tourism sites
Waste Management	Enhance waste control measures
Marketing and Promotion	Boost digital and traditional marketing

Discussion

Through the lens of Social Exchange Theory, the findings suggest that while tourism generates economic advantages such as job creation, business expansion, and infrastructure upgrades, these benefits are not shared equitably. Marginalized groups within local communities often find themselves excluded from tourism opportunities, exacerbating existing social inequalities and deepening divisions. This economic disparity leads to stratification, with some individuals reaping substantial rewards while others struggle to access the benefits, heightening social tensions.

A Neo-Marxist perspective also emerges in the study, highlighting the exploitative aspects of tourism in some cases. Developed countries or international tourism corporations often gain the majority of profits, while local communities bear the environmental and cultural costs. This inequality points to the need for more inclusive governance and community-based tourism approaches, where local stakeholders play a role in shaping tourism development to ensure more even distribution of benefits.

Regarding community empowerment, strategies like Community-Based Responsible Tourism (CBRT) have proven effective in fostering social cohesion and economic equity. These approaches promote local involvement in decision-making, ensuring that tourism development aligns with the community's cultural and environmental values. However, challenges such as resource scarcity and inadequate infrastructure persist, revealing the need for systemic change at both local and national levels to better support community-driven tourism models.

The research presents both positive and negative aspects of tourism in Pokhara, Nepal. Khatri et al. (2024) found that most tourists had a favorable first impression, with high ratings for accommodation and staff communication. However, there were mixed reviews regarding port entry, arrival transfers, public transport, and QR scanning at tourist spots, pointing to areas in need of improvement in infrastructure and services. Poudel and Upadhyay (2021) highlight the importance of tourism to the local economy, particularly before the COVID-19 pandemic, contributing significantly to revenue. However, the pandemic severely impacted the sector, leading to economic setbacks. Additionally, Ghimire and Pathak (2023) found that while male-dominated sectors like homestay ownership and tour guiding were common, there is a need to encourage more female involvement in tourism businesses to promote gender equality.

A research carried out by Poudel and Upadhyay (2021) Pokhara, a major tourism hub in Nepal, has long been a popular destination, especially since the 1960s and 1970s, attracting both international and domestic visitors. The region became a

gateway to the Annapurna mountains after French mountaineer Maurice Herzog scaled Annapurna I in 1950. Ghimire and Pathak (2023) interviewed 22 Nepalese respondents, including internal tourists, homestay owners, handicraft entrepreneurs, and tourist guides, to examine internal tourism trends post-COVID-19. Conducted in English and Nepali, the study found male dominance in homestay ownership and tour guiding, while handicraft entrepreneurship had a more balanced gender mix. The findings emphasize the need to promote female participation in traditionally male-dominated tourism sectors to enhance gender diversity and economic opportunities.

Subedi and Bhandari (2019) studied the socio-economic effects of tourism in Sikles, Dhampus, and Langdruk villages of Kaski district, Nepal. These Gurung-majority villages, located in the Annapurna Conservation Area, were surveyed using a descriptive research design with 75 households selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected via structured questionnaires, validated through a pilot survey and literature review. Analysis used descriptive statistics, a Likert scale, and non-parametric tests (Kruskal-Wallis H and Mann-Whitney U) due to data non-normality. The study was processed using MS Word, Excel, and SPSS (version 20). The comparison of findings from the review of previous studies are presented as follows:

i. Sustainable tourism development

Recent studies like those of Khatri et al. (2024) and Sharma (2024) align in emphasizing the importance of sustainable practices in tourism development in Pokhara. Khatri et al. focus on integrating smart tourism infrastructure, including ICT solutions and sustainable practices in urban areas, while Sharma highlights the critical role of SMEs in adopting such practices despite challenges. Both studies stress the need for government support and infrastructure development to ensure long-term sustainability.

Brown (2019) and Sharma (2020) echo these findings by pointing out the necessity for balancing economic growth with environmental and cultural preservation. Khatri et al.'s (2024) focus on less-visited areas like Damside and Begnastal also mirrors the historical emphasis in earlier studies (e.g., Upreti et al., 2013) on expanding tourism beyond the overexploited Lakeside area to mitigate pressure on popular sites and promote regional economic growth.

ii. COVID-19 impact

Khatiwada, Sharma, and Ranabhat (2021) and Poudel and Upadhyay (2021) provide an in-depth analysis of the pandemic's effects on Pokhara's tourism industry. These studies underscore the significant economic setback caused by the pandemic, including massive job losses and the shutdown of tourism-related businesses. The findings align with earlier work by Parajuli and Paudel (2014), who noted a decline in tourist arrivals during the "Nepal Tourism Year 2011" campaign and the socio-cultural challenges associated with tourism downturns. These studies collectively suggest that despite economic setbacks, recovery strategies including government financial relief, infrastructure investment, and innovative tourism offerings (such as new tourism activities and relocation of attractions) are essential for post-pandemic recovery.

iii. Impact of rural tourism

Research by Ghimire and Pathak (2023) highlights the positive socio-economic impact of rural tourism in the Kaski district, emphasizing job creation and cultural preservation. These findings resonate with earlier work by Subedi and Bhandari (2019), which also underscores the potential of village tourism in boosting local economies while maintaining cultural heritage. However, both studies point to challenges such as waste management and the need for sustainable tourism practices—issues raised in Sharma's (2020) advocacy for community-based responsible tourism (CBRT) in Nepal. These similarities point to the ongoing necessity for strategic planning in rural tourism development to balance ecological conservation with economic growth.

iv. Residents' perceptions and socio-cultural impacts

The research by Ikonen (2021) stands out in addressing local residents' perceptions of tourism. This study builds on the theoretical framework established by Doxey's irritation index and social exchange theory, which is also applied in previous studies by Sharma (2008) and Bhusal (2010). Both Sharma and Bhusal explored the socio-cultural effects of tourism on local communities, focusing on the changes in lifestyle and the tension between economic benefits and cultural preservation. Ikonen (2021) also critiques the assumptions of social exchange theory, noting that increased involvement in tourism does not necessarily lead to more positive perceptions. This perspective adds depth to existing literature by acknowledging the complexities of resident-tourist interactions, particularly in a rapidly evolving destination like Pokhara.

v. Tourism's dual impacts

Several studies, such as those by Sharma (2008) and Bhusal (2010), highlight the dual-edged nature of tourism's impact, emphasizing both positive economic contributions and negative environmental and socio-cultural consequences. Sharma's (2008) work on the socio-cultural changes in Lakeside versus Sarangkot provides a contrast that is still relevant in discussions about sustainable tourism. Similarly, Khand and Maharjan (2016) point to the need for sustainable development strategies to mitigate the negative effects of tourism, such as environmental degradation and the displacement of local culture. From all these considerations, it has clearly seen that recent studies emphasize the importance of integrating sustainable practices in tourism development, particularly in Pokhara.

Conclusion

Sustainable tourism development in Pokhara encounters several sociological challenges, such as the need for enhanced eco-friendly infrastructure, public transportation systems, and information and communication technologies (ICT) to achieve carbon neutrality by 2043. Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) require access to financial resources and training in adopting sustainable practices, which are crucial for fostering local economic resilience. While tourism plays a significant role in job creation and stimulates local economies, it also brings about social and environmental concerns, including environmental degradation, waste management difficulties, and social inequality, issues that were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these concerns necessitates investments in infrastructure, waste management systems, cultural tourism, and the promotion of Community-Based Responsible Tourism (CBRT), which emphasizes community empowerment and collective decision-making in tourism management. Additionally, efforts to attract international tourists are vital for positioning Pokhara as a leading sustainable tourism destination. Policy recommendations to promote sustainable tourism in Pokhara stress the importance of supporting SMEs through financial incentives, skills development, and waste management programs. The development of rural tourism, improvements in infrastructure for adventure tourism, and the simplification of regulatory frameworks are essential for long-term socio-economic recovery. Ensuring effective waste management and promoting cultural tourism also play a crucial role in establishing Pokhara as a socially and environmentally sustainable destination. However, the study's limitations include the reliance on outdated sociological research, a focus on Pokhara that limits broader generalizability, and a lack of in-depth analysis on long-term sustainability in the context of socio-cultural dynamics. Future research should address the long-term impacts of sustainable tourism technologies, community attitudes towards balancing economic,

cultural, and environmental priorities, and how tourism affects social structures and local communities.

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