

TECHNOPRENEURSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN INDIA SPECIAL FOCUS TO UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

Religion is the way people live and become inseparable part of the society. Human behaviour includes most of the components and influence from religious facts and it gets inherited in generations, so it becomes part of the learning which hold an important aspect in Indian society. Religion is primarily derived from beliefs, rituals, norms and lifestyle primarily. Another aspect of religious system is the activities an individual involved in; it can be at the workplace as well. These rooted values and integrity influence decision making process at each step of our lives and hence it may be considered as a major condition for entrepreneurs in their ethical selection. By this paper researcher wants to analysis tourism entrepreneurship and show the pivotal role in economic development of India with special reference to Uttarakhand.

KEYWORDS: *Technopreneurship, Sustainable, Religious Tourism, Tourism Entrepreneurship.*

Introduction

Religious tourism is the oldest form of tourism and a global trend in the history of religion. It contributes to preserving the culture and sustainability of people's livelihoods. Local residents commonly operate their tourist-related businesses in religious or sacred places as entrepreneurs. Most of the businesses are small- and medium-sized, and employ a people from a family who take advantage of the job opportunities they offer. Thus, religious tourism positively impacts small business income and influence in poverty reduction. However, there are a number of issues affecting religious tourism and entrepreneurship, including risk and uncertainty, marketing, lack of business knowledge, capital, employee management, competitor risk, and livelihood problems.

To understand importance of entrepreneurship in religious tourism we should start with religious tourism and try to understand it into two parts religion and tourism. Some scholars considered that religion is a second market comprising numerous supplies and buyers of religious and spiritual experiences. by this way it is easy to understand religious tourism at it provide both physical resources and experience. The physical resources involve Temples, Churches, mosques cathedrals and associated rituals and events which facilitates and support religious tourism in all possible ways.

To regulate these body there are corporate agencies and organisation play very important role in order to control and manage these structures including the premises and support activities provided to these. The key factor which derives all this is **Faith**. The faith includes cultural, social, spiritual and pilgrim management approaches.

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Entrepreneurship in religious tourism involves creating and managing businesses that cater to the needs of travelers visiting destinations of religious significance. This sector combines elements of tourism with spiritual or faith-based experiences. Here are a few key aspects:

- **Destination Development:** Developing and promoting destinations known for their religious significance, such as pilgrimage sites, temples, mosques, or churches. This includes enhancing infrastructure and creating visitor-friendly amenities.
- **Tour Packages:** Designing specialized travel packages that offer guided tours, accommodations, and activities related to religious practices or historical events. This might include pilgrimage tours, religious festivals, or spiritual retreats.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensuring that services and experiences are respectful and aligned with the traditions and practices of the religious communities involved.
- **Digital Platforms:** Utilizing technology to reach potential tourists through online booking systems, virtual tours, and social media marketing to showcase religious destinations and experiences.
- **Local Engagement:** Collaborating with local religious communities and organizations to provide authentic experiences and support community development.
- **Educational Components:** Offering educational content and experiences that enhance visitors' understanding of the religious and cultural significance of the destinations.

Successful ventures in religious tourism often balance the commercial aspects of tourism with the spiritual and cultural values of the destinations they serve.

There are various models built around understanding the Heritage tourism in order to provide opportunities for the mission into generate revenue for the maintenance of their establishments.

These religious bodies are complacent with routine management and organisations because they understand that visitor numbers are less likely to decrease any time and there are certain days when it may increase beyond numbers. There is enormous opportunity for advancement of entrepreneurship in religious tourism. From this industry perspective it is easy to identify the activities associated with religious tourism and evolution of new parameters to generate more revenue in this dimension of tourism.

The major sectors involved for tourism are as follows:

- **Input Sector:** This dimension is a basic aspect of any sector and here it is related to direct suppliers who have direct interaction with tourists like hotels, homestays, service providers like shopkeepers, restaurants, transport services and retailers.
- **Support Sector:** This sector does not interact directly with tourists in most of the cases and provides support to the input sector like tour agencies, tour brokers, research analysts, raw material suppliers for food and hospitality services.
- **Development Sector:** This dimension basically caters to the developmental part of tourism which involves government agencies, brokers, financial institutions, private firms involved in developmental activities and coaching centres.

To understand this interdependence of sustainability on technological advancement in entrepreneurship especially for religious tourism, let us look at our very own prestigious, beautiful, serene and spiritual place in India i.e. Uttarakhand. The state has shown great progress in sustainable development in various sectors. In this, the foundation is technology which is playing an inevitable role in multi-dimensional growth for the state. Make in India has brought a lot of start-ups and is contributing in growth in all possible manners.

In Dec 2023 Prime Minister inaugurated Uttarakhand Global investor summit which encompasses nature, culture, heritage and tourism and it is emerging as a brand.

Throwing light on the tourism sector of Uttarakhand, the Prime Minister noted the enthusiasm of people across the world to visit India. He informed about the creation of theme-based tourist circuits intending to introduce tourists to nature and the heritage of India. He stressed the investors to prioritize and to explore and create opportunities in the Yoga, Ayurveda, Teertha and adventure sports sectors.

Uttarakhand – A case study on Technological Entrepreneurial advancement for sustainable religious tourism

Tourism which has evolved as one of the biggest service sector is a key contributor to the growth of Uttarakhand. The geographical, cultural, and environmental diversity of Uttarakhand has positioned it as one of the most visited states in North India. The number of tourists visiting Uttarakhand has consistently increased from ~22 million in 2014 to ~39 million in 2019 and registered a CAGR of 11.97%. A recent World Tourism & Travel Council (W TTC) report has pegged India as the 7th largest tourism economy globally in terms of absolute size, and further forecasts the sector to grow at 7% between 2017 and 2027. The state of Uttarakhand is expected to match this trend in terms of tourist arrivals.

The **New Tourism Policy** envisages to chalk out a strategy which should be sustainable for tourism sector in Uttarakhand. The role of the State Government and its Departments is envisaged to revolve around Policy, Regulation and Promotion of tourism; while provision of services like accommodation, tourist facilitation, transportation, organization of tours, activities, events, etc. will be the purview of the private sector, with State playing an enabling role.

Uttarakhand strives to be a technology savvy state when it comes to Tourism. Use of IT-enabled tools is to be prioritized in all areas, such as state-wide MIS for capturing accurate footfall data, state-backed online travel aggregator (OTA), online accreditation of service providers & individuals in the tourism sector, information dissemination, promotion, etc. The state would also create multiple axes of entry into the state, develop connectivity infrastructure including provision of Heli-services, improve tourist utilities, wayside amenities, waste management, and telecom infrastructure at all destinations where tourists may probably visit.

Uttarakhand is home to many historic religious monuments. Moreover, it has also got a significant history as the site of former colonial settlements like Ranikhet, Nainital, etc. Many towns of the state are dotted with colonial buildings and relics like bungalows, museums, churches, and other government buildings. The maintenance of the historical monuments is done by various government agencies / departments, including State Archaeology, Archaeological Survey of India, etc. while some lie abandoned. The state shall prepare a list of sites which hold potential for tourism promotion. Master Plans for these sites would 33 Focus Tourism Segments Winter sports at Brahmatal, Mundoli 34 be prepared with focus on heritage conservation, improvement in basic tourism amenities and tourist engagement. Aside from this, the state aims to incentivise development of culturally influenced tourist products which would allow tourists to have an immersive experience of Uttarakhand's heritage.

The state is also famous as '**Dev Bhoomi**' ("**the 'land of Gods'**") Uttarakhand is the most desirable Hindu pilgrimage in India. Uttarakhand has rich cultural and mythological background which involves religious mythology, heritage and enriched spiritual temples, rivers and ancient sites. Pilgrims are always excited for Char Dham (four religious centres namely Kedarnath, Badrinath, Yamunotri and Gangotri); to Panch Prayag, the confluence of rivers in five sites that ultimately form the River Ganga, one of India's most sacred rivers; and visits to several other destinations of religious importance (Bageshwar, Joshimath, Baijnath to name a few). It also houses world's highest Gurudwara (the Hemkund Sahib) and Piran Kaliyar Sharif, a 'dargah / mausoleum and major Muslim attraction, which symbolise unity in diversity. The policy intends to reinvent religious tourism by creating exciting packages for pilgrims, as well as for tourists who may be keen in learning about religious mythology, architecture and cultural practices associated with places like these places of worship and spiritual significance.

Entrepreneurs in religious tourism majorly try to invest in developing new accommodation, transportation and allied services. it may include development of new infrastructure to increase economic activity and support functions like conveyance management and hospitality management.

In last few years the tourism sector has seen unprecedented changes mainly dependent on technology advancements. There are multiple start-ups which are dependent on innovative accommodation models to grow interest in wellness and adventure which has transformed the sector. The government is also considering eco-tourism as one of the options for sustainable growth. More than 50 sectors have been shortlisted for skilled ecopreneurship. Skills for ecopreneurship in more than 100,000 persons will be developed in a phased manner during upcoming three financial years.

Tourism report also says that the number of visitors and the investment in tourism projects in Uttarakhand has predominantly grown up and the expectations for various kinds of tourism is constantly changing from tourist end.

The policy envisages technology interventions to be leveraged not only for boosting online presence but also for other purposes like integrating tourism entities onto a common platform for outreach and reservations, establishing an MIS system to capture tourist statistics and behaviour, and providing a tech-enabled tourist facilitation & grievance redressal system.

Integrated Tourism Platform for Uttarakhand

The Platform shall cater to the following 3 major functions:

- Information Dissemination to tourists visiting Uttarakhand (planning & pretravel, visit, post-visit sharing) as well as to potential visitors.
- Accreditation of verified tourism service providers and industry players.
- Ease of visits, travel by enabling bookings (travel, accommodation, experiences, guides, service providers, etc.) on the website and app.

Uttarakhand Tourism Website

Uttarakhand Tourism Website shall be revamped to make it a “one-stop destination” to assist visitors in their travel, including pre-travel, visit and post visit phases of a trip. The aim is to make destination discovery easier through interfaces to search destinations by interest and activities. The website shall be made user-friendly and comprehensive by including information on all tourism themes like Adventure and Nature, Health and Wellness, MICE, etc.

An app is also planned to be developed-The Uttarakhand Tourism App is envisioned to deliver a seamless experience for the tourist. It shall be an extension of the tourism website, offering key functionalities to make the tourist's journey in the State seamless, comfortable, secure, and informed. Ideally, the tourist should be able to access all information, support, and resources at any point of time.

All registered tourism enterprises / projects shall be required to showcase Uttarakhand Tourism's brand kit at their reception, which will feature a QRcode scanner to redirect the tourist to the Platform.

The Platform shall ensure a high degree of data privacy and security. Further, compliance with all statutory protocols of the Government of India, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, and Reserve Bank of India, regarding website development, money transfers, foreign exchange, etc. shall be observed.

In the long term, it is envisaged to leverage the Platform as a revenue generating asset. Private sector synergies shall be sought for the development, operations and management of the website and app.

The Tourism Policy is driven by the philosophy of enabling all stakeholders involved in the tourism sector to benefit from Uttarakhand's growth story. Religious Tourism in Uttarakhand has its own importance. The tourism department need to create interest of pilgrims in other parameters like- Origin of the Ganges, Mahabharat tales and association with pilgrimage, Story of Shiva and importance of the jyotirlinga located in the State etc. With such rich culture there are lot of mythological stories associated, which can create utmost importance in mind of tourist.

In addition to this, Uttarakhand is emerging as a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. It is driving across various sectors like promotion of traditional handicrafts, revolutionizing agriculture by technological advancements and supporting sustainable tourism keeping in view the new tourism policy 2030 and new entrepreneurial assignments in Uttarakhand are becoming decisive factors. . It also has a growing entrepreneurial ecosystem with various notable entrepreneurs contributing to its development. Some prominent figures include:

- **Shivendra Singh:** Co-founder of the successful food processing company, Sattviko, which focuses on traditional Indian snacks with a modern twist.
- **Ravi Bhargava:** Founder of the eco-friendly startup, Bhargava's Eco-Friendly Solutions, which specializes in sustainable packaging solutions.
- **Rishabh Malik:** Known for his work in the tech sector, Rishabh is the founder of a startup focused on AI and machine learning solutions.

These entrepreneurs are involved in diverse sectors, including technology, food processing, and sustainability, helping to drive innovation and growth in the region.

Let's look at a few startups that are redefining Uttarakhand's entrepreneurial horizons with their innovative ideas and ideas for sustainable change towards people.

- **Go4Ethnic:** Located in the foothills of Himalayas, Go4Ethnic is a start-up which depicts beautiful amalgamation of ERP and cultural involvement. The firm excels in traditional Indian handicrafts and connects local artisans with global consumers. It fosters economic empowerment and depicts true cultural heritage of Uttarakhand. It has beautifully engaged the local artisans and connected them with correct consumers using e-platform, hence knitting the technology in sustainable development of both artisans and Uttarakhand's heritage.
- **EcoSolutions India:** Rishikesh the spiritual town having utmost mythological importance a start-up called EcoSolutions India has decided to take up charge for a greener future. The main motto of the firm is to reduce plastic pollution and offer better eco-friendly alternatives to everyday products to promote sustainable living. EcoSolutions India is not only an organization doing normal business but also a movement towards a more conscious way of consuming and motivating individuals and businesses to opt for sustainable options.
- **Farmkart:** This organization is true example of innovation in the field of agricultural advancement using technology. Through data analytics and IoT devices, Farmkart empowers farmers with real-time insights into crop management, weather patterns, and soil health. Its promoting sustainable farming practices and increasing agricultural productivity using healthier options and resulting into sustainable solution.
- **WellnessTree:** As the name suggests this start-up firm believes in nurturing holistic wellness through Ayurveda and yoga. It is located in the city of lakes Nainital. It also uses the digital way of tracking progress and wellness for individuals to track their goals.
- **TrekNomads:** Located in terrain of Uttarkashi, TrekNomads is redefining adventure tourism. It encompassed the nuances of adventure and religious tourism. Offering trekking expeditions and spiritual experiences, this startup wants to connect tourist with the beauty and spiritual dimensions of the valley.

*Women transforming lives with technology, a book by the Reliance Foundation and Observer Research Foundation, describes the stories of Indian women leaders from India who have emerged as agents of technological change and socio-economic inclusion and are using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to help their communities build pathways to better futures. There is an influential woman **Nisha Ben** who is promoting Homestay Tourism in Uttarakhand.*

Uttarakhand is primarily an agrarian state, but due to change in climate and wildlife violation farming is not a continual source of income, resulting in a need for diversified sources of income. Through Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Atithi (a grassroots enterprise led by women in hospitality, was designed in 2019 to help women to device diversified income sources promoting community-based tourism), women farmers in the Almora and Rudrapur districts began renting their homes to tourists exploring Uttarakhand's local culture, heritage, and natural environment. Additionally, the Uttarakhand tourism department has launched various schemes to promote homestays in hilly areas by providing financial assistance under the 'Veer Chandra Singh Garhwal Yojana'. This has not only accelerated tourism and family incomes, but has also reduced migration to other states in search of jobs. Homestay tourism is an emerging concept and provides an important opportunity to generate employment and economic gains. However, ignorance of government schemes, skilled human resources, and the requirement for digital literacy, creativity, and entrepreneurial skills are some of the main challenges to running successful homestays in Uttarakhand. Through Nisha's work many women are able to support their families. She is also empowering the ladies by making them learn a technology platform Udyami Sakhi in which by using technology women can upgrade themselves and manage the clientele.

Entrepreneurial development in Uttarakhand, a state in northern India, has seen significant progress in recent years. The state government and various organizations have launched initiatives to foster entrepreneurship and support small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Key areas of focus include:

- **Government Schemes and Incentives:** Programs like the Uttarakhand Investment Policy and the Startup Uttarakhand policy provide financial incentives, tax benefits, and infrastructure support to startups and businesses.

- **Infrastructure Development:** Investments in infrastructure, such as industrial parks and IT hubs, are aimed at creating a conducive environment for businesses.
- **Skill Development and Training:** Various skill development programs and training workshops are offered to entrepreneurs to enhance their capabilities and business acumen.
- **Access to Funding:** Initiatives to improve access to venture capital and loans, along with support from institutions like the Uttarakhand State Infrastructure Development Corporation, help entrepreneurs secure necessary funding.
- **Support for Specific Sectors:** Emphasis on promoting sectors like tourism, agriculture, and technology, which are vital to Uttarakhand's economy, through specialized support and incentives.

These efforts aim to boost the entrepreneurial ecosystem, create job opportunities, and stimulate economic growth in the region.

Technological entrepreneurship in religious tourism in Uttarakhand is a burgeoning sector, leveraging technology to enhance the pilgrimage experience and improve tourism infrastructure. For integration of technology into religious tourism for Uttarakhand in few ways are given below:

- **Virtual Tours and Augmented Reality:** Start-ups are creating virtual tours of temples and pilgrimage sites, allowing people to explore sacred locations online. Augmented Reality (AR) apps offer interactive experiences, providing historical context and enhancing visitor engagement.
- **Mobile Apps:** Apps dedicated to religious tourism offer features such as temple maps, real-time crowd updates, and digital darshan (viewing of deities). These apps also provide information about local accommodations, transport options, and amenities.
- **Smart Pilgrimage Management:** Technology is being used to manage large influxes of pilgrims, especially during peak seasons. Solutions include crowd management systems, online booking for accommodations and rituals, and digital payment platforms.
- **GPS and Navigation:** GPS-based services and navigation apps help pilgrims find their way to remote temples and holy sites more easily, reducing travel stress and improving safety.
- **Online Platforms for Services:** Various platforms offer online booking for religious services, pujas, and rituals. These platforms streamline the process and provide access to services even before reaching the destination.
- **Sustainable Tourism Technologies:** Innovations in green technology and sustainable practices are being adopted to minimize the environmental impact of increased tourism. This includes waste management systems and energy-efficient infrastructure.
- **Data Analytics:** Analyzing tourist data helps in understanding visitor patterns and preferences, which can improve the management and promotion of religious sites.

These technological advancements are helping to modernize and improve the religious tourism experience in Uttarakhand, making it more accessible and enjoyable for pilgrims.

There are several challenges which Uttarakhand faces, a state known for its spiritual and cultural significance. Here are some common problems and potential solutions:

- **Environmental Impact:** The influx of tourists can lead to environmental degradation, including pollution and deforestation.
Solution: Implement sustainable tourism practices, such as limiting visitor numbers, improving waste management, and promoting eco-friendly infrastructure.
- **Infrastructure Strain:** High tourist numbers can overwhelm existing infrastructure, leading to inadequate facilities and services.
Solution: Invest in infrastructure development, including roads, sanitation, and accommodations, and enhance the capacity of existing facilities.
- **Cultural Erosion:** Excessive tourism can have negative impact like the commercialization of religious practices and local culture.

Solution: Promote responsible tourism that respects local traditions and ensure that tourism development is aligned with cultural preservation efforts.

- **Safety and Security:** Increased tourism can strain local law enforcement and emergency services.

Solution: Strengthen safety measures and emergency response systems, and facilitate better communication and coordination between tourism operators and local authorities.

- **Economic Disparities:** Tourism revenue might not be evenly distributed, leading to economic disparities within local communities.

Solution: Develop policies to make sure that benefits of tourism are distributed uniformly, such as supporting local businesses and creating employment opportunities for residents.

- **Overcrowding:** Popular religious sites can become overcrowded, diminishing the quality of the visitor experience and impacting the spiritual ambiance.

Solution: Implement crowd management strategies, such as timed entry systems and off-peak promotions, to spread visitor numbers more evenly.

Addressing these issues requires an equilibrium in approach that prioritizes both the preservation of Uttarakhand's natural and cultural resources and the enhancement of the visitor experience.

Conclusion

Uttarakhand case has clearly shown the development of sustainable technological solutions in promoting tourism specifically religious. Technological entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in religious tourism by enhancing visitor experiences and improving operational efficiencies. Here are several ways it contributes:

- **Enhanced Visitor Experiences:** Technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) offer immersive experiences of religious sites, allowing visitors to explore historical and cultural aspects interactively.
- **Improved Accessibility:** Mobile apps and online platforms facilitate easy access to information about religious sites, including maps, schedules, and ticketing, making it easier for tourists to plan their visits.
- **Personalization:** Data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) can personalize travel recommendations based on visitor preferences and past behaviour, creating tailored itineraries and experiences.
- **Efficient Management:** Technology streamlines operations in religious tourism, from booking systems to customer relationship management (CRM), enhancing overall efficiency and service quality.
- **Sustainability:** Technological solutions can support sustainable tourism practices by optimizing resource use and reducing environmental impact.
- **Marketing and Outreach:** Digital marketing tools and social media platforms help promote religious sites to a global audience, increasing visibility and attracting more visitors.

Overall, technological entrepreneurship drives innovation, boosts engagement, and supports the sustainable development of religious tourism.

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