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**Impact of the COVID-19 in Tourism Industry in Nepal
and Policy Recommendation**

Bishnu Prasad Khanal

Research Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism Science, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Japan
khanal_bishnu2016@yahoo.com

Article

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Abstract

For the first time in history, almost all the domestic and international tourism destinations have restrictions for travel worldwide because of coronavirus pandemic. Coronavirus disease calls the COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing problem in more than 210 countries in the world. The purpose of this study is to find the tourism impact of COVID-19 in Nepal and purpose recommendations for the preparation of evidence-based policy and strategies for further development of the tourism industry in Nepal. Secondary data used in this study were obtained from the ministry of tourism in Nepal and other various web sources and primary data were collected from the online survey and collected 52 samples. They are involved in the hospitality, education & consulting, travel & tours, adventure & expedition, trekking agencies, and government officials from national tourism originations. The study highlights that the tourism contribution in Nepal's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as a significant sector that has a linkage with other sectors. Also, the Nepalese tourism industry is dependent on international factors and the Nepal tourism industry highly relies on foreign tourists and cancellation of the mountain climbing permits for the year 2020, affects the income of foreign currency as well as the local economy, the loss of thousands of jobs in the tourism sector and others sectors. Overall analyses suggest that

Keywords

COVID-19,
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policy implications

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Ramesh Raj Kunwar
kunwar.dr@gmail.com

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building the capacity of stakeholders and public-private partnership initiatives to promote and work together to develop and manage in future tourism fields.

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (WHO, January 2020; Mahtani et al., 2020) on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020 after which lockdown measures began to be taken. (WHO, March 2020). Such measures have allowed the functioning only of essential sectors to decrease the speed of virus transmission in the country. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The First confirmed case has been traced back to 17 November 2019 in Hubei, China (Ma, 2020).

COVID-19 has given a significant impact on economic development worldwide. With large-scale quarantines, travel restrictions, and social-distancing measures drive a sharp fall in consumers and business expenditure. This situation was created as an economic recession globally. However, many efforts have been done by the government to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Nashira & Sofia, 2020; Darryl, 2020). For example, a few countries were performing a lockdown approach as well as declared emergency for control human movement both domestic and overseas travel. As a result, the impact of this approach is that consumers stay at home, the business loses revenue and lay off workers, and the unemployment rate increases day by day (Nashira & Sofia, 2020). According to Tourism Economic Report (2020), The effects of Covid-19 are expected to extend for eight months and result in a decrease of 39% in the global tourism volume. The tourism industry is expected to recover to 2019 pre-crisis levels, not before 2023 (*Tourism Economics, 2020*).

COVID-19 outbreak in Nepal

The first case of COVID-19 pandemic was confirmed in Nepal on 23 January 2020 when a 31-year-old student, who had returned to Kathmandu from Wuhan, China on 9 January, tested positive for the disease (Shrestha et al, 2020). After two months the second case was confirmed on 23 March 2020 in Kathmandu. On April 4 in Kailali District the first case of local transmission was found. And after 111 days of a first confirmed case, the first death occurred on 14 May caused by COVID-19. Till July 31, 2020, the Ministry of Health and Population announced, a total of 19771 COVID-19 positive cases have been confirmed, 14399 of them have been recovered, 5315 cases still active and 56 people have died.

Effects of travel restriction and lockdown in the tourism industry

In a bid to fight this global pandemic, countries have implemented necessary preventive and control measures, including lockdowns to reduce the spread, mortality

rate, and in general the effect of the virus on the global economy (Qiu et al., 2017). Global restrictions on travel have dealt a devastating blow to Nepal whose tourism industry depends on international tourists and their hard currency to support an industry that employs millions of people. Informal workers are more vulnerable and immediately affected by the intensity of lockdown measures (ILO, 2020).

In 2019, the number of international visitors to Nepal was about 1.19 million, which was the 24% growth compared with the year 2018. The picture changed when the Nepal government imposed a lockdown from March 20, 2020, and arrivals for April, May, June, and July were almost zero.

On March 7, 2020, the government of Nepal announced the suspension of On-Arrival-Visa for nationals of China, South Korea, Japan, Italy, and Iran which countries badly affected by COVID-19. Later on, March 14, 2020, the government of Nepal decided to suspend On-Arrival-Visa for all countries with exception to diplomatic and official visas. The government closed land border entry points for third-country nationals and canceled all mountain climbing expedition permits including Mt. Everest. On March 22, 2020, the Government of Nepal has stopped all international flights and on March 23, 2020, vehicular movement on long routes in Nepal also closed. Same day Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) announced the suspension of issuance of trekking permits and the government decide to close its land border with India and China on the same day. On March 24, 2020, the Government of Nepal decided countrywide lockdown.

The travel restrictions affect hotels, camping sites, or other types of accommodation, but also restaurants, museums, and other activities frequented by local as well as international tourists alike. The pandemic is also expected to have a longer-lasting effect on international tourism, while other economic sectors might recover more swiftly. The “Visit Nepal 2020” campaign, officially introduced on January 1st, 2020, aimed to attract 2 million tourists, generate \$2 billion and create thousands of new jobs, also canceled because of COVID-19.

Tourist source markets in Nepal and the impact of COVID19

During the last few years, the Nepalese tourism industry was heavily dependent on mass tourists from India, China, the USA, UK, and Sri Lanka. In 2019, Indian tourists made for the biggest share of the Nepali tourism industry with a contribution of 21.23% of the total tourists arriving in the Himalayan nation. Followed by China (14.16%), United State of America (7.79%), United Kingdom (5.11), Srilanka (4.67%), Thailand (3.48%), Australia (3.26%), Germany (3.06%), Myanmar (3.03%) and France (2.56%) (Table 1.1). Out of those countries only China, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar have recorded an early recovery from the impact of COVID-19. In Table 1.1 shows Nepal’s source markets of international tourists and the impact of COVID-19 on them.

Table 1.1: Top 10 tourist source markets in Nepal and the impact of COVID19

Country	Total Tourist Arrival in 2019	Total Confirmed Cases	Total Recovered	Total Deaths	Active Cases	Death Rate
India	254150	1697054	1095647	36551	564856	2.2%
China	169543	84292	78974	4634	684	5.50%
USA	93218	4705455	2327572	156771	2221112	3.33%
UK	61144	303181	N/A	46119	N/A	15.21%
Sri Lanka	55869	2815	2391	11	413	0.39%
Thailand	41653	3310	3125	58	127	1.75%
Australia	38972	16905	9978	201	6726	1.19%
Germany	36641	210665	192300	9224	9141	4.38%
Myanmar	36274	353	296	6	51	1.70%
France	30646	187919	81500	30265	76154	16.11%
Nepal		19771	14399	56	5316	0.28%

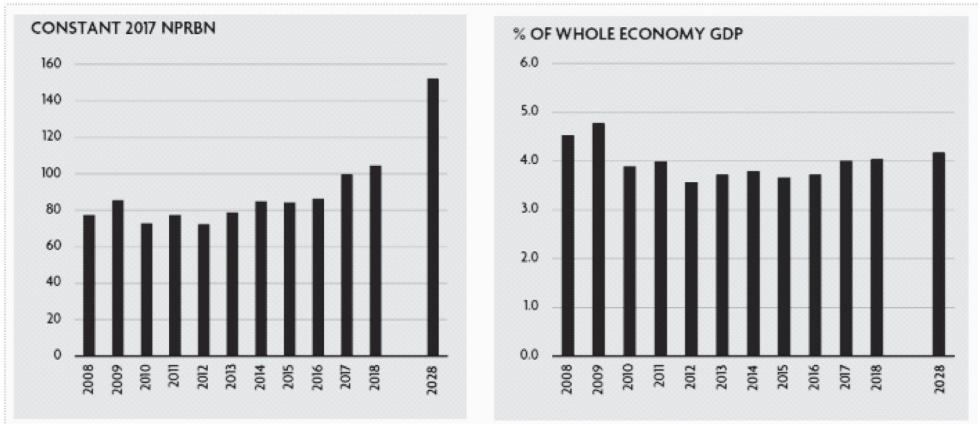
Source: Developed by the author using Tourism Statistics Nepal 2019 and world meter (Up to July 31, 2020) data

Table 1.1 shows, about 68% of the foreign tourists arrived in Nepal from ten source countries in 2019. Out of these 10 countries, China, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar have been successful in combatting the COVIS-19 as of now. From the above table Buddhist countries, China, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar contributed to 22.31% of the total tourists arriving in Nepal.

Economic contribution of tourism industry

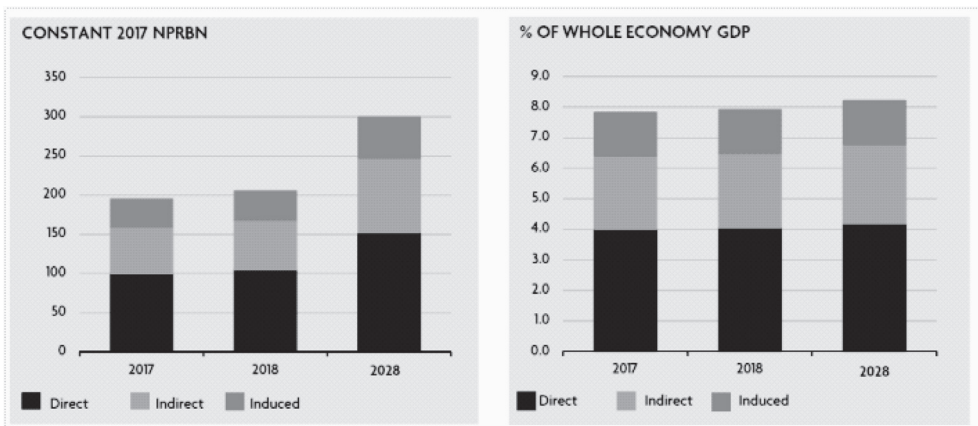
According to the WTTC, the direct contribution of travel and tourism in the GDP of Nepal was NPR 99.8 billion (USD 982.5mn) in 2017 which covers the 4.0% of the total GDP of the country. It is forecasted to rise to NPR 104.7 billion in 2018 which is 4.9% more than in 2017. The money generated by hotels, travel agents, airlines, and transportation services is the major contributors here (WTTC, 2018).

Figure 1.1: Direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP (WTTC, 2018)



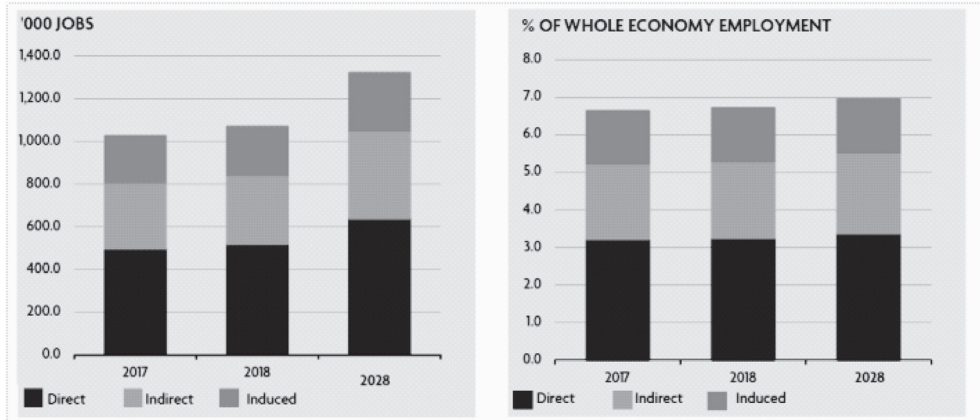
In the year 2017, **Figure 1.2** shows, the total contribution of travel and tourism to the GDP of Nepal was NPR 195.0 billion (USD 1,919.8mn) which covered 7.8% of the total GDP of the country. It is estimated to grow by 5.2% more than 2017 which would result in NPR 205.2 billion in the year 2018. This would cover the 7.9% of the total of GDP that year.

Figure 1.2: Total Contribution of travel and tourism to GDP (WTTC, 2018)



According to the report of WTTC, **Figure 1.3** shows, travel, and tourism generated 497,500 jobs in the year 2017 which is 3.2% of the total employment of Nepal. It is estimated to grow by 3.9% in 2018 which would result in 638,000 jobs. This would cover 2.1% of total employment in Nepal.

Figure 1.3 Direct contributions of travel and tourism to employment of Nepal (WTTC, 2018)



Research objectives

The main purpose of this research study is to analyze the impact of COVID-19 in the tourism industry of Nepal. The following research objectives are formulated to guide this research work;

1. To evaluate the economic implications of the Corona outbreak on the Tourism industry in Nepal.
2. To purpose recommendations for policy implications based on the findings.

Data and research methodology

A mixed-method was employed by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches for this study. In this research work with secondary data collected from various sources and primary data from an online survey, this was conducted from March 2020 to July 2020.

Research design

This was a quantitative research design that employed a survey design. The information gathered from the various respondents was rendered measurable through the method of data analysis. Questionnaires were administered as an instrument to collect the data from the chosen respondents. The subjects of the study were provided with a self-administering the questionnaire which was both closed and open-ended to enable the collection of as much and rich data as possible.

The sample size

The targeted sample for this study was stakeholders in the tourism industry in Nepal, namely tour operators, hoteliers, trekking agencies, and other tourism

providers. From March 2020 to July 2020, the total 65 sample data got from the online survey but only 52 useable respondents' samples for this study.

Sampling technique

The sampling technique employed in this study was the stratified sampling technique. The study sample was selected from a pool of tour operators, hoteliers, trekking agencies, and other tourism stakeholders.

Data collection instrument

This study used a closed and open-ended questionnaire to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire was administered to the sampled population by online google form. The questionnaire was, however, pre-tested on a smaller sample drawn from the hoteliers and tour operators which will enable correction and validation.

Data analysis

The data collected was collated and sorted based on different and emerging thematic issues as outlined in the study objectives. The data were coded and analyzed. The findings of the study have been presented in the form of a narrative in conformity with the qualitative study being undertaken. To analyze data SPSS 25 was used.

Results and discussion

Demographic profile of respondent

In this research Table, 1.2 shows the gender of the respondents, out of 52 respondents, the majority of respondents, 92.30% were male and 7.70% were female.

As per the findings illustrated in Table 1.2, the respondent majority of industry involvement was travels & tours were 28.85%, followed by trekking (26.92%), Adventure & Expedition (15.38%), Hospitality (13.46%), others (5.77%) and the National Tourism Organization (3.85%).

Table 1.2 also shows the type of organization of the respondent, private sectors (82.69%), Public sector (7.69%), Non-Profit organizations (7.69%), and others was 1.92%.

Respondents are requested to indicate their job rank in the organization. The findings were indicated in Table 1.2. The position of the respondents was Top Level Managers (13.46%), Business Owner (7.5%), Middle-Level Manager (5.77%), Normal Employee (3.85%), and Low-Level Manager (1.92%).

As per the findings illustrated in Table 1.2, the experience of employees was found Less than 5 years (40.38%), 5 to 10 years (26.92%), 11 to 15 Years (7.69%), and Over 15 years (2.5%).

From the study findings in Table 1.2, the number of employees in the organizations was less than 5 (21.15%), 5 to 25 (53.85%), 26 to 50 (11.54%), 51 to 75 (3.85%), 76 to 100 (7.69%), Over 101 (1.92%).

Table 1.2 Demographic profile of respondent

Group	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	48	92.30%
	Female	4	7.70%
Type of Business	Tourism Education & Consulting	3	5.77%
	Hospitality	7	13.46%
	Travel & Tours	15	28.85%
	Adventure & Expedition	8	15.38%
	Trekking	14	26.92%
	National Tourism Organization	2	3.85%
	Others	3	5.77%
Type of Organization	Public Sector	4	7.69%
	Private Sector	43	82.69%
	Nonprofit Organization	4	7.69%
	Others	1	1.92%
Role in the Organization	Business Owner	39	75%
	Top Level Manager	7	13.46%
	Middle-Level Manager	3	5.77%
	Low-Level Manager	1	1.92%
	Normal Employee	2	3.85%
Duration of Work	Over 15 Years	13	25.00%
	11 to 15 Years	4	7.69%
	5 to 10 Years	14	26.92%
	Less than 5 Years	21	40.38%
The employee in the Organization	Over 101	1	1.92%
	76 to 100	4	7.69%
	51 to 75	2	3.85%
	26 to 50	6	11.54%
	5 to 25	28	53.85%
	Less than 5	11	21.15%

Data source: Online Questionnaire Survey, from March 2020 to June 2020

Economic implication of Covid-19 on tourism industry in Nepal

Respondents were asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements about the economic impact of COVID-19 outbreak on Nepal's tourism industry. The findings were shown below in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 Respondents opinion on economic implication

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tourism is a major contributor to Nepal's GDP.	4.02	1.09
The Nepalese tourism industry is dependent on international factors.	4.02	1.24
A big number of the Nepalese population is employed in the tourism sector.	3.54	1.23
The other sectors in Nepal depend on the growth of the tourism sector in Nepal.	3.58	1.05
Nepal tourism industry highly relies on foreign tourists.	3.94	1.38
Most of the star hotels in Nepal are dependent on inbound tourism.	3.62	1.46
Cancellation of the mountain climbing permits for this year affects the income of the foreign currency.	3.98	1.41
Total	26.70	8.86
Average	3.81	1.27

Data source: Online Questionnaire Survey, from March 2020 to June 2020

From the findings, the respondents agreed that the tourism industry is a major contributor to Nepal's GDP (Mean 4.02), this was followed by the Nepalese tourism industry is dependent on international factors (Mean 4.02). Respondents further agreed that cancellation of the mountain climbing permits for this year affects the income of the foreign currency (Mean 3.98) and this was followed by the Nepal tourism industry highly relies on foreign tourists (Mean 3.94).

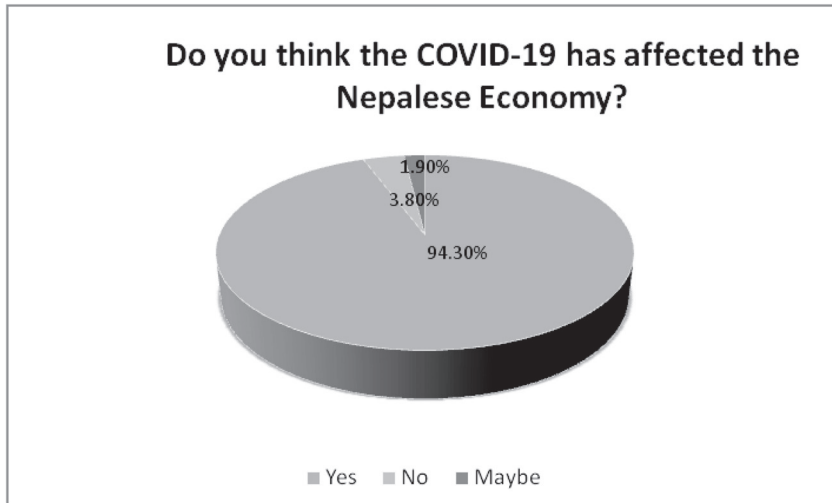
Respondents had no opinion of a big number of the Nepalese population is employed in the tourism sector (Mean 3.54) and the other sectors in Nepal depend on the growth of the tourism sector in Nepal (Mean 3.58), this was followed by most of the star hotels in Nepal are dependent on inbound tourism (Mean 3.62).

However, Most of (Average Mean 3.81) respondents agreed that there are economic implications of the COVID-19 outbreak on the Tourism Industry in Nepal.

Effect of COVID-19 in Nepal

The respondents were requested to indicate whether the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nepal has affected the Nepalese economy. The findings are as presented in Figure 1.4 below.

Figure 1.4 Effect of COVID-19 in Nepal



As per the findings in Figure 1.4 majority 94.3% of the respondents indicated the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nepal has affected the Nepalese economy, where 3.8% of the respondents indicated maybe it will be affected, while 1.9% were of a contrary opinion. This depicts that the outbreak of COVID-19 in Nepal has affected the Nepalese economy.

Among the respondent in Figure 1.4 who indicated yes, they revealed that the government announced the lockdown and issued to travel bans for domestic and international tourists cause substantial revenue losses to the tourism industry.

The restrictions on movement, including lockdowns as well as the high level of families, worldwide, thrown into bereavement, job loss, and the general economic downturn, any expected revenue from the theatrical release are also postponed, if not lost (Olaniwun, 2020). Commending the effect of COVID-19 on tourism industry respondent R4 revealed:

“Since tourism is one of the largest employment generating industries of Nepal, it affects the livelihood of many people across Nepal. There is no plan from the government to address it.”

And also, respondent R16 revealed:

“Because no tourists are allowed by the government so many people are jobless.”

The travel restrictions imposed by governments subsequently led to the reduction in the demand for all forms of travel which forced some airlines to temporarily suspend operations (Ozili & Arun, 2020). Commending the economic impact respondent R34 revealed:

“More than 1600 trekking agencies who have been serving in Nepal are badly affected because more than 98% of booking has been canceled due to the coronavirus problem. It affected the Nepalese Economy.”

And also, respondent R46 revealed:

“I think it will difficult to come down normal situation, coronavirus hits minimum 1 year to be control and that time many businesses can be bankrupt and create worldwide economic crises, no job, no saving, no tourism, ultimately it directly impacts to revenue generation, unemployment, poverty increment, so it's hampered GDP and especially the tourism industry.”

Hotels across the world witnessed booking cancellations worth billions of dollars, and the hotel industry sought a \$ 150bn bailout (Ozili & Arun, 2020). Commending the impact in hotel industry respondent R7 revealed:

“Corona has badly hit the tourism industry. There has been almost 90% cancellation in tourist arrivals. The most affected is the airline segment and the hotel industry.”

And also, respondent R10 revealed:

“Tourism and Hospitality Industry is the most important factor that affects the economy in Nepal.”

From our findings, The Tourism business is already affecting quite badly and this will affect the coming season. And, tourism sector support to the Nepalese economy is big. When the tourism business is down, that affects many other businesses. So definitely this will impact to Nepalese economy.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings the study recommends preparedness should be strengthened by developing, evaluating, and revising response plans based on a comprehensive risk analysis considering all prevalent hazards. In the tourism industry, there is a very low flow of tourist and most of the bookings are canceled. Most of the hotels are offering their services at a nominal price. Even the travel agency lack business from within and fully closed for outside the country. And most of the small-scaled travel agencies are on the verge of closing permanently. Thus, there is a profound need for all tourism stakeholders to take a far-sighted view and plan how

best tourism industry of Nepal can, the government need to support private sectors with survival, revival, and restart package.

Tourism has become a major and integral part of the economic, social, and physical development (Vijaya, 2016). The importance of creating loyal clients will be more crucial for tourism service providers as trust will play a major role in the decision-making process (Pektas & Hassan, 2020). Here are some recommendations based on our findings for survival, revival and post corona policy implications:

S.No.	Issue	Stage	Responsibility
1	This is a need for government intervention by way of palliative measures to assist key stakeholders in tourism and other sectors. Such intervention will include granting loan repayment waiver and moratorium to business and soft loans with a low-interest rate. Established a Travel & Tourism Stabilization Fund- to avoid monetary and job loss.	Survival	Public Sector
2	The tourism industry will require a government bailout. This is because many tourism stakeholders were in a weak financial state which was further exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic. Even though, to revive the tourism business continuing the government of Nepal has to come out with relief Package cooperating with the tourism entrepreneur of Nepal.	Survival	Public Sector
3	Government need to work on, what could be the possible plan to restore the Nepali tourism from this pandemic (Like; value maximization Techniques, sustainable way out of such tragedy, the confidence level of employee which determined the future of the tourism industry).	Revival	Public Sector

S.No.	Issue	Stage	Responsibility
4	Post lockdown- Instead of international destination domestic travel will be preferred, at least for a year or two. Need to promote domestic destinations and offer suitable package and offer for domestic tourists with safety and security.	Revival	Public/Private Sector
5	Develop national norms and standards for safe tourism operations inspired by globally- recognized Biosecurity protocols across the value chain to enable safe travel and rebuild traveler confidence.	Revival	Public/Private Sector
6	Hygiene will be the topmost priority; clean and virgin places will be the first choice for both domestic and international tourists.	Revival/ Post Corona	Private Sector
7	There will be fewer people willing to go to a travel agency for booking. Hence online channels will be an even more important focus on digital marketing.	Revival/ Post Corona	Private Sector
8	The Nepal tourism industry has not brought important sessions on the education & preventative measures regarding the COVID-19. In the earlier stages of the spread, Nepal was still encouraging tourists to visit Nepal. Tourism stakeholders and government never did the risk assessment of these sort of pandemic. The tourism industry has a good lesson. The government should be prepared and thus include a disaster like this on the training of tourism manpower.	Post Corona	Public/Private Sector
9	After the pandemic Corona Virus down, Public-Private Partnership (PPP) initiative to promote and work together to develop and manage in future tourism fields. Nepal Government Should work together with the private sectors in tourism fields.	Post Corona	Public Sector

S.No.	Issue	Stage	Responsibility
10	Based on our findings Nepal can attract tourists from Buddhist countries and promote Lumbini (The birth Place of Lord Buddha) and introduce new tourism products like meditation, yoga as wellness tourism.	Post Corona	Private Sector
11	Review and transform the tourism policy and institutional architecture to deliver efficient, effective and purpose-led support for sector growth and development	Post Corona	Public Sector

Conclusion

Because of COVID-19, Visit Nepal 2020 was postponed amid the threat of the Virus. Tourism is interconnected in all aspects, from employment, hotels, restaurants, transportation, etc., with the cancellation of all Nepal travel and now the lockdown there has been a chain reaction economically. Instead of an international destination, domestic travel will be preferred, at least for a year or two, the recovery is expected to start from domestic tourism, after than south Asian countries, and continue with recovered destinations which were usually first affected (Asia, Europe than Americas).

This study evaluated the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry in Nepal using tourism stakeholders' opinions. Result shows, that respondents agreed that tourism is a major contributor to Nepal's GDP. We also find the Nepalese tourism industry is dependent on international factors and the Nepal tourism industry highly relies on foreign tourists. And respondent also agreed, Cancellation of the mountain climbing permits for the year 2020, affects the income of foreign currency. Further, it states that the country also experienced the loss of thousands of jobs in the tourism sector.

The significance of this study is the findings of this research help the government to manage the dynamic behavior of the economic sector in the tourism industry. At the same time, government policy needs to address a proper solution in preventing the spreading of COVID-19 and elevating the status of economic activity in the tourism industry.

Further study can be extended to analyze the impact of Covid-19 on tourism, recovery, mitigation, and adoption strategies during and after Covid-19 for different tourism stakeholders, the role and actions of governments to subsidize tourism

industry, possible changes in customer behavior and transformations in tourism services and tourist markets.

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