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BREAKING THE SILENCE: EXPLORING THE PREVALENCE AND EFFECTS OF SH IN SRI LANKA'S WORKPLACES

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Abstract:

Purpose - Sexual Harassment (SH) in the workplace is a significant problem for Sri Lankan women, leading to various challenges. Despite ongoing efforts to address the issue, SH remains pervasive, negatively impacting on many women. A recent study aimed to explore how SH in the workplace affects the personal lives of female employees.

Design/methodology/approach - This research follows a quantitative method that seeks to study the impact of SH in the workplace on women's personal life. Convenience sampling was used to select 351 female employees from different workplaces, who then completed standardized instruments. Correlation and regression analysis were performed to examine the association between variables and the impact of SH on the participants. The study revealed that SH in the workplace has adverse effects on the personal lives of female employees. SH was associated with a range of psychological, physical, work-related, and interpersonal problems, including depression, anxiety, and fear; physical symptoms such as sleep disturbance, low energy, and chronic pain. Additionally, job satisfaction, productivity, motivation, and relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and clients were negatively impacted.

Findings - The findings underscore the need for greater community awareness of SH and preventative measures in the workplace. Organizations must take action to avoid SH by developing comprehensive policies and procedures, providing training to employees and management on identifying and addressing SH, and establishing reporting channels that allow for timely and appropriate responses to reports of SH.

Originality of the Research - the study highlights the significant impact of SH in the workplace on the personal lives of Sri Lankan women. To eliminate this pervasive issue from Sri Lankan workplaces, collective action is required. Organizations must take a proactive approach to address this issue to ensure the safety and well-being of all employees. The study provides valuable insights into the consequences of SH on employees and emphasizes the need for continued efforts to create a safe and inclusive work environment for women.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Women, Workplace Personal life, Psychological impact

1. Introduction

Sexual Harassment (SH) is a prohibited offence in Sri Lanka under the Penal Code. The fundamental human rights to work, safety, and fair treatment are protected by law (EFC & ILO, 2013). SH in the workplace is unique in its direct impact on an individual's life. It is often utilized as a means

of exerting power during the employment cycle, from recruitment to promotion (WageIndicator Foundation, 2020). Male co-workers often make it difficult for female employees to work by using gestures, language, physical aggression, and sexual discrimination (Derana, 2021). Despite the prevalence of reported incidents of SH, no effective action has been taken to address this issue in Sri Lanka (Perera, 2017). Despite legislative efforts to promote gender equality, SH continues to be a concern in the workplace, affecting both men and women. In this region, it is not uncommon for men to sexually assault women (Selvaras, 2017).

The patriarchal culture in Sri Lanka, as in other Asian countries, continues to oppress women, particularly sexually (Adikaram, 2018). Concerns have been raised by various segments of Sri Lankan society regarding the safety of female workers in the workplace. Although more than half of the female population is employed, all have experienced SH at some point in their working lives (Niriella, 2015). Despite the Shops and Offices Act, No. 19 of 1954, which guarantees private sector workers' rights, a lack of knowledge of labor rights and employer disregard for those rights can prevent workers from organizing. As a result, many women become victims of workplace SH and are hesitant to report it because there is no formal complaint system in place (Yogeshwari, 2021).

The Women Working partnership between IFC and the Australian Government conducted a study on the "Business Case for Creating Respectful Workplace in Sri Lanka," which revealed that three out of every five respondents had experienced some form of workplace violence or harassment. One in five had felt insecure at work (ECONMYNEXT, 2022). SH in the workplace is not limited to the private sector but also affects women in the media industry. A Sri Lankan journalist, Sarah Kalpatha, disclosed on Twitter that she was threatened with rape by a male professional colleague while working in media institutions (Ceylon News, 20 January 2021). Women in the media face SH not only from authors and editors of institutions but also from male journalists (Perera, 2017). Gender-based violence, including SH, is prevalent in the clothing industry, where women constitute the majority of the workforce in trade zones. Nearly 90% of them have been sexually harassed at least once during their stay (Rathore, 2020).

Several incidents of SH in institutions have been reported in Sri Lanka. For instance, the principal of Mahanama College and a close colleague were found guilty of sexually harassing a music teacher in the music department of the school (Mawbima Newspaper, 2016). Sexual assault cases can cause physical and mental illnesses due to repeated threats and abuse (MediaLK, 2021). The case brought by a government schoolteacher against the Secretary of the Ministry of Education (SC/FR/No.76/2012) is an example of the gravity of sexual assault. Women fight to punish those in positions of power and politics, as demonstrated when the teacher spoke out in a weekend newspaper on a rare occasion (Kariyawasam, 2016).

SH is a pervasive issue affecting women in various socio-economic contexts across the world. The global #MeToo movement is just one example of the widespread SH and assault experienced by countless women worldwide (Perera, 2017). In the workplace, SH remains a common occurrence, causing numerous problems and costs for both employees and businesses. Despite the existence of laws in most countries prohibiting SH, it continues to persist and market incentives alone are insufficient to eradicate it (Hersh, 2015). Women are the most vulnerable group to SH, and due to underreporting, instances of SH often go unnoticed in the workplace.

Research suggests that women who experience SH or violence at work often do not report their experiences (Jonsdottir et al., 2022). As a result, many women find it difficult to continue working, as documented by Pathiraja (2018). The consequences of workplace SH can be far-reaching, causing physical and mental health issues, marital problems, career interruptions, reduced opportunities for promotion and advancement, lower pay, forced job changes, and unemployment, as highlighted by Shaw et al. (2018). In cases where victims lack representation or third-party support, the employee

may feel resentment and anger, resulting in aggressive and reactive behaviors such as procrastination, neglect, work avoidance, resignation, and reduced willingness to collaborate (Zakaria et al., 2015). According to Karunarathne (2015), rural women who migrate to industrial areas for economic reasons are particularly vulnerable to SH due to their lack of experience and familiarity with the new environment. Victims of SH may even be tempted to commit suicide due to their cultural and religious backgrounds. Female maids who have experienced SH are often afraid to speak out, as they fear that their employers or other relevant parties will not believe them. The repercussions for victims of SH can be significant, including job loss, emotional suffering, disrepute, spiritual and mental illness, and dissatisfaction.

SH remains a pervasive and damaging issue that affects women worldwide, irrespective of their socio-economic status or geographical location. Despite laws prohibiting SH in the majority of countries, reporting and addressing the issue continues to pose significant challenges. Women who experience SH in the workplace may choose not to report their experience, which can have serious physical and emotional consequences. For instance, workplace SH can lead to chronic health problems and reduced work quality, ultimately affecting employee motivation and productivity (Henry & Adams, 2018). The victims of SH may also experience reduced earnings and financial hardship. Additionally, the social stigma associated with SH and the perception of the victim can lead to consequences in the personal lives of women, such as neglect, hostility, domestic violence, and divorce (Suresh, Sridhar & Kairanna, 2014).

The consequences of SH can also extend to the workplace environment. SH victims may experience career interruptions, reduced opportunities for promotion and advancement, lower pay, forced job changes, and unemployment (Shaw et al., 2018). The absence of a third party to represent the victim at work may lead to the employee feeling resentment and wrath, which can result in procrastination, neglect, work avoidance, resignation, and a reduced willingness to collaborate (Zakaria et al., 2015). The risks of SH may be greater for some groups of women. Rural women who migrate to industrial areas for economic reasons are particularly vulnerable to SH due to a lack of familiarity with the new environment (Karunarathne, 2015). Women who wear uniforms at work may also be at risk of SH (Karunarathne, 2015). It is also notable that SH can occur in various settings, including the workplace, public transportation, and public places. The attempt to justify SH by claiming that women's clothing is responsible for it is unacceptable and unjustifiable.

In conclusion, SH is a severe issue that can have significant personal, professional, and societal consequences. It is essential to take steps to prevent SH and provide support to those affected by it. To this end, it is necessary to create a culture of respect and gender equality in the workplace, where SH is not tolerated, and victims can seek help without fear of retribution. Additionally, raising awareness and education about SH and its effects can lead to more effective prevention and intervention efforts.

1.2. Problem Statement

Sri Lanka is a country with a rich history and cultural heritage, particularly in Sinhala and Buddhist traditions. However, SH continues to persist as a significant and unresolved issue within the society, with incidents of sexual assault and harassment on the rise. SH is a broad term that refers to the challenges employees encounter at work and the potential impact they may have on various aspects of both employees and organizations.

The current economic conditions in Sri Lanka have resulted in an increased number of women employees joining the workforce, along with an increase in the prevalence of various forms of SH. SH in the workplace has a detrimental impact on a worker's physical, emotional, sexual, and self-esteem, as well as on their family life and social environment. Moreover, a decline in the mental and physical health and well-being of labor providers can also have a direct effect on the employer.

Despite decades of intensive research, discussion, debate, legislation, and remedies, workplace SH remains an unresolved and widespread workplace and social problem in Sri Lanka (Adikaram, 2016). Additionally, given that the issue of SH is a serious and sensitive personal matter, it can cause a range of problems in employees' personal lives. Therefore, this discussion will focus on the influence of workplace SH on the disruption of an employee's personal life.

Literature **Review**

SH is a form of workplace aggression that involves unwelcome sexual behavior that is psychologically perceived as harmful and threatening to the well-being of the victim. Choo & Ping (2021) define SH in the workplace as including provocations and exclusions that are sex-based and can be degrading. SH may take the form of physical assault, criminal force, verbal abuse, or sexual antipathy, and can result in significant distress and harm to the victim. Despite the potential for a wide range of reactions to SH, it is deemed unacceptable, and the lack of agreement on this issue is a clear indication of its inherent wrongness

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines SH as unwelcome sexual advances or physical or verbal conduct of a sexual nature that affects an individual's job performance or creates a work environment that is hostile, intimidating, offensive, or abusive (EFC & ILO, 2013). SH is a multifaceted concept that incorporates both legal and psychological dimensions. As defined by Pathiraja (2018), SH is any action, including physical, gestural, verbal, visual, or written, that threatens the physical or mental well-being of another person and violates their human rights and dignity.

In the workplace, victims of SH are often reluctant to report or pursue legal action due to fears of social or professional retaliation. Over the past two decades, workplace SH incidents in Sri Lanka have steadily increased, with such incidents occurring regardless of an employee's social, educational, or economic status (Pathiraja, 2018). SH can take many forms, including glances, crude jokes, demeaning remarks based on gender stereotypes, sexual assault, and physical violence (Hersch, 2015). According to World Bank; International Finance Corporation (2013), SH is broadly defined as any unwanted sexual advance, request for sexual favors, verbal or physical conduct, or gesture of a sexual nature that could reasonably be expected to cause offense or humiliation to another. Such harassment may interfere with work, be made a condition of employment, or create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. SH takes three distinct forms: gender harassment, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual attention (Fasting, et al., 2010).

Gender harassment is the expression of abusive, hostile, and degrading behavior through crude sexual and non-verbal language, a person's attitude toward his or her gender or sexual orientation can change. According to (Hardies, 2022) the most frequent types of SH reported were forms of gender harassment. All of the following are considered harassment: obscene sexual gestures, lighting, and display of sexual images or objects at work, and emailing or sending sexually explicit messages. Sexual or heterosexual language, jokes, or concepts are included in this category (Burn, 2019).

Unwanted sexual attention can take the form of positive and negative thoughts about a person's body, leering and catcalling, spreading sexual rumors about a person, and electronic sharing of a person's sexual images. Unwanted sexual touches include grabbing, nailing, touching, and purposefully rubbing against someone in a sexual manner. This also applies to obstructing another person's path or following a person during sex; unwanted, hesitant, and opposite sex advances, such as repeated requests for a kiss, date, or sex; and attempted rape or rape (Burn, 2019).

Sexual coercion, also known as "quid pro quo SH," is a legal term that refers to the requirement of sexual intercourse or sexual favors as a condition for receiving rewards or benefits such as jobs, promotions, assistance, or favorable performance ratings or grades. Burn (2019) notes that sexual coercion is the most prevalent and severe form of SH in the workplace. This type of behavior disrupts

the peace and security of the organization, creates barriers to working cooperatively with women, and has numerous adverse effects on the lifestyle of the victims (Kumar & Sharma, 2022).

Recent research highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by victims of SH in the workplace. According to Zeighami et al. (2021), SH victims can experience a range of consequences, including psychological trauma, detrimental effects on work, psychological problems, and the disintegration of warm family relationships. The mental health of SH victims is severely affected, and their decision-making abilities may be influenced by inappropriate or inadequate attitudes. Women may experience mental health consequences such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, feelings of shame and guilt (Cesario, 2020; Schneider, Swan & Fitzgerald., 1997). SH is considered a negative experience that can impair a person's quality of life and psychological well-being, leading to stress, hypertension, anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts or attempts (Eapohunda, 2014; Zeighami et al., 2021).

The psychological difficulties associated with SH are diverse and include feelings of worthlessness and emptiness, resentment and anger, stress and anxiety, guilt and shame, hatred, fear, and insecurity. As Vauqueline (2019) suggests, the impact of SH may also have a considerable effect on a victim's personality, occupational and target life, and social behavior. It is clear that SH in the workplace not only affects the victim's physical and emotional well-being but also creates significant challenges for their personal and professional lives.

Exposure to SH in the workplace or highly aggressive SH can lead to severe health complications, such as cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal and digestive problems, migraines resulting in headaches, high blood pressure, and neurological disorders (Cesario, 2020). Victims who testify to their SH experiences suffer from negative psychological health, fatigue, alienation, negative emotions, difficulty sleeping, and eating (Maran, Varetto & Cristina., 2022; Eapohunda, 2014). Inappropriate behaviors, such as irregular eating and food restriction, are also common among victims (Menssink, 2018).

Victims of SH also face challenges in finding and maintaining employment. Decreased job satisfaction, prolonged sick leave, decreased productivity, increased turnover, absenteeism, professional losses, foregoing career opportunities, and leaving employment are some of the negative job-related outcomes (Friborg et al., 2017; EFC & ILO, 2013). Women who experience SH report feeling unmotivated and unsafe at work, leading to dissatisfied employment and increased workplace stress (Barker, 2017). Raj et al., (2020) identified stress, decreased productivity, and decreased employee performance as possible job-related issues associated with SH in the workplace. Exposure to SH can also lead to increased job stress, decreased job satisfaction, and higher rates of absenteeism (Hutagalung & Ishak, 2012).

Victims of SH often seek social support from friends and family, but may also experience loss of trust and decreased acceptance among others, particularly women (Eapohunda, 2014; Schneider et al., 1997). Emotional withdrawal from friends, family, and coworkers is also common among victims (EFC & ILO, 2013).

2. Relationship between independent variables and the dependent variables

2.1.1. Relationships between Workplace SH and Women's Personal Lives

SH can be defined as the occurrence of unwelcome sexual behavior towards a woman, either directly or indirectly. Examples of such behavior include sexual remarks, physical contact and advances, the display of obscene material, the demand for sexual gratification, and other forms of unsolicited vocal or nonverbal conduct (Sundaresh & Hemalatha, 2016). The occurrence of SH can lead to various negative consequences.

2.1.2. Relationship between Workplace Harassment and Psychological issues

SH is recognized as a major source of emotional distress, particularly in the workplace (Vauqueline, 2019). The negative impact of SH on an employee's mental state is well documented in the literature, as evidenced by a range of affective responses, including resentment, irritation, stress, depression, anxiety, and weariness (Sundaresh & Hemalatha, 2016) and (Zeighami et al., 2021). This not only results in poor psychological well-being, but can also lead to the development of mental disorders, which can negatively impact both the employee and the organization (Quyet & Long, 2021).

H1: There is a relationship between SH in the workplace and psychological problems.

2.1.3. Relationship between Workplace Harassment and Physical issues

According to the National Academies of Sciences (2018), women who experience SH in the workplace are at risk of suffering from various physical health problems. Chronic exposure to SH is associated with the development of psychogenic ally dependent disorders, cardiovascular problems, as well as sleep and eating problems. Physical manifestations of chronic harassment include decreased appetite, insomnia, headaches, illnesses, and stomach ulcers, as reported by Sundaresh and Hemalatha (2016) and Zeighami et al. (2021). These physical health issues can significantly affect a woman's overall well-being and quality of life.

H2: There is a relationship between SH in the workplace and physical problems.

2.1.4. Relationship between Workplace Harassment and Work –Related issues

The negative impact of SH on job performance is well-established in the literature. Manuel et al. (2017) and Quyet and Long (2021) have reported that victims of SH experience decreased efficiency, productivity, and teamwork exposure, all of which can lead to discouragement. In addition, Zeighami et al. (2021) have found that SH can result in a decreased quality of work, feelings of isolation, and even job loss. Moreover, Sundaresh and Hemalatha (2016) have highlighted that exposure to SH be associated with increased absenteeism, loss of motivation, decreased job satisfaction, and a fear of going to work. These findings emphasize the detrimental impact of SH on employees' job-related outcomes.

H3: There is a relationship between SH in the workplace and work-related issues.

2.1.5. Relationship between Workplace Harassment and Interpersonal issues

In contemporary society, it has been observed that working women who have been subjected to harassment tend to develop a general sense of mistrust towards men, and tend to rely excessively on their family members, spouse, and friends for support (Sundaresh & Hemalatha, 2016). Research conducted by Zeighami et al. (2021) indicated that victims of SH reported a range of negative consequences, including strained familial relationships, breakdown of family life, and admonishments from their spouses. The adverse effects of SH on women are numerous, with the most common being the need for social support (National Academies of Sciences, 2018).

H4: There is a significant relationship between workplace SH and interpersonal issues.

3. Methodology

This research study utilizes a quantitative methodology to examine the impact of workplace SH on the personal lives of working women. A descriptive survey design was employed to gather data, with a focus on quantitative analysis of the data obtained from participants through their responses.

The study population consisted of working women in the Gampaha District of Sri Lanka, though the population size was unknown. A sample size of 385 was estimated using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination formula, with 425 questionnaires distributed assuming a 15% non-response rate. However, only 351 responses were received, resulting in an 18% non-response rate. The researchers decided to continue with the study based on the 351 responses received, utilizing a convenience sampling method. The questionnaire employed in the study was divided into three parts (A, B, and C) and offered in both English and Sinhala versions. Part A presented the demographic profile of the participants. Standardized instruments were employed for measuring SH (Schneider, et al., 1997), with five responses available ranging from "never" to "very frequent." The psychological, physical, job-related, and interpersonal impact constructs were assessed using ten statements each (Osipow & Spokane, 1987), with five response options available ranging from "never" to "always." Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized to analyze the data collected, with the aid of statistical software such as SPSS and Microsoft Excel. The results will be used to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on the study findings. The questionnaire was designed to ensure its validity and reliability, and detailed descriptive statistics were presented in the form of pie charts to illustrate the demographic data of the participants.

4. Findings

The respondents are classified according to their age. The majority of respondents (34.8% of all respondents) are between the ages of 21 and 30. At least 50% of respondents must be over the age of 50. (4.7%). 32.2 percent of respondents are between the ages of 31 and 40, 19.5 percent are between the ages of 40 and 50, and 8.8 percent are under the age of 20. In terms of marital status distribution, it is clear that the majority of working women in the Gampaha District, at 65 percent, are married. 29% of the total sample is single, 3% is divorced, and the remaining 3% is widowed. When it comes to respondents' educational levels, it is clear that the majority of female workers in Gampaha District are at the advanced level, accounting for 39.7 percent. 17.7% and 16.4% of the total sample, respectively, are in the Bachelor's degree and diploma categories. The postgraduate level accounts for 13.5 percent of respondents, while the ordinary level accounts for only 12.7 percent of the total sample. When it comes to respondents' work experience, it can be seen that the majority of working women in the Gampaha District report having worked for between 5 and 10 years. It accounts for 36% of the total sample. 33% and 18% of the total sample, respectively, represent the categories of 1–5 years of service and more than 10 years of service. The smallest group of working women is those with less than one year of experience, accounting for only 13% of the total sample.

The presented table 01 shows the statistical significance of data points in a study conducted on working women in the Gampaha District. The study determined a Pearson correlation value for the subjective health (SH) of these women and found a perfect positive relationship between SH and psychological distress with a correlation coefficient of 0.836. The low P-value of 0.000 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, the study concludes that SH and psychological distress are linked. The study also found statistically significant positive correlations between SH and other variables, such as job-related issues, interpersonal issues, and workplace SH. These variables exhibited a perfect positive relationship with SH, with a Pearson correlation value ranging from 1 to 0.73. The P-values of these variables were also less than 0.01, indicating their statistical significance.

In summary, the study suggests that psychological issues, job-related issues, and interpersonal issues are positively related to the workplace SH of women in the Gampaha District. The findings highlight the need for interventions and support to address these issues in the workplace, which could improve the health and well-being of female workers in the region.

Table No 01: Means, Standard Deviations and Bivariate Correlations among the Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Workplace Sexual Harassment	Psychological Issues	Physical Issues	Job Related Issues	Interpersonal Issues
Workplace Sexual-Harassment	3.60325	.831258	1				
Psychological Issues	3.87273	.827118	.836** (0.000)	1			
Physical Issues	3.76779	.827711	.844** (0.000)	.868** (0.000)	1		
Job Related Issues	3.79818	.779872	.835** (0.000)	.888** (0.000)	.887** (0.000)	1	
Interpersonal Issues	3.84649	.747283	.739** (0.000)	.811** (0.000)	.845** (0.000)	.865** (0.000)	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: (Field Survey Data, 2022)

In this study, the relationship between workplace SH and various personal factors such as psychological, physical, job-related, and interpersonal issues in women’s lives were investigated through linear regression analysis. The independent variables used in this study include work-life balance factors, specifically time-balance factors, satisfaction-balance factors, and involvement-balance factors.

4.1. Identify the Relationship between Workplace Sexual-Harassment and Issues in Women’s Personal Lives

4.1.1. Identify the relationship between workplace SH and psychological issues.

The results of the regression analysis indicated that the model explained a substantial proportion of the variance (69.9%) and was a significant predictor of psychological issues, as evidenced by the significant F-value ($F(1,351) = 891.228, p = .000$). Specifically, workplace SH was found to make a significant contribution to the model ($B = .836, p = .05$). The final predictive model can be expressed as follows: Y (Psychological issues) = $0.874 + 0.836 X$ (workplace sexual-harassment). These findings highlight the strong positive association between workplace SH and psychological issues, underscoring the importance of addressing the issue of workplace SH to promote the mental health and well-being of women in the workforce.

Table No 02: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change F
.836 ^a	.699	.699		.454056	.699	891.228	1	383	.000

Source: (Field Survey Data, 2022)

4.1.2. Identify the relationship between the workplace SH and physical issues.

The study utilized regression analysis to examine the relationship between workplace SH and physical issues experienced by female workers. The results indicated that the model was a significant predictor of physical issues, accounting for 71.3% of the variance, $F(1, 351) = 951.563, p = .000$. The analysis demonstrated that workplace SH made a statistically significant contribution to the model ($B = .844, p < .05$), leading to the final predictive model:

$$Y \text{ Physical issues} = 0.738 + 0.844 X \text{ workplace sexual-harassment}$$

This model suggests that for every unit increase in workplace SH, there is an expected increase of 0.844 units in physical issues experienced by female workers. The high level of explained variance indicates that workplace SH is a significant factor in predicting physical issues in women’s personal lives, and highlights the need for organizations to address and prevent SH in the workplace.

Table N0 03: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change	F
.844 ^a	.713	.712		.443992	.713	951.563	1	383	.000	

Source: (Field Survey Data, 2022)

4.1.3. Identify the relationship between the workplace SH and job related issues.

The results of the regression analysis revealed that the model accounted for 69.7% of the variance and was a significant predictor of job-related issues, $F(1, 351) = 892,792, p = .000$. Although workplace SH made a significant contribution to the model ($B = .835, p < .05$), the final predictive model was represented as:

$$Y \text{ Job-related issues} = 0.975 + 0.835 X \text{ Workplace SH}$$

These results suggest that workplace SH is a statistically significant predictor of job-related issues among female employees in the Gampaha district. The model explained nearly 70% of the variance in job-related issues, highlighting the importance of addressing SH in the workplace. These findings may be useful in developing interventions and policies to promote safe and supportive working environments that are conducive to employee well-being and job satisfaction.

Table No 04: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change	F
.835 ^a	.697	.697		.429544	.697	882.792	1	383	.000	

Source: (Field Survey Data, 2022)

4.1.4. Identify the relationship between in between the workplace SH and interpersonal issues.

The regression analysis was employed to determine the relationship between workplace SH and interpersonal issues in women’s personal lives. The findings indicated that the model accounted for 54.6% of the variance and was a significant predictor of interpersonal issues, $F(1, 351) = 461.379,$

$p = .000$. Although the variable of workplace SH made a significant contribution to the model ($B = .739$, $p < .05$), the final predictive model was expressed as:

$$Y \text{ Interpersonal issues} = 1.452 + 0.739 X \text{ workplace sexual-harassment.}$$

Table No 05: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
.739 ^a	.546	.545		.503944	.546	461.379	1	383	.000

Source: (Field Survey Data, 2022)

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings presented in table 01 suggest that there is a significant relationship between subjective health (SH) and psychological distress among working women in the Gampaha District. The perfect positive correlation coefficient of 0.836 indicates that as psychological distress increases, SH also increases.

The low P-value of 0.000 suggests that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, meaning that there is less than a 1% chance that this relationship is due to chance alone. Therefore, the study concludes that SH and psychological distress are linked.

The study also found statistically significant positive correlations between SH and other variables, such as job-related issues, interpersonal issues, and workplace SH. These variables showed a perfect positive relationship with SH, with a Pearson correlation value ranging from 1 to 0.73. This suggests that as these variables increase, SH also increases.

The low P-values of these variables indicate their statistical significance and suggest that these variables are strongly associated with SH.

Overall, the findings of the study provide evidence of the importance of addressing psychological distress and various job-related and interpersonal issues for promoting the subjective health of working women in the Gampaha District.

The findings reported above demonstrate a clear relationship between workplace SH and a range of negative outcomes for female employees, including psychological issues, physical health problems, and job-related issues. The results of the regression analyses conducted in this study suggest that workplace SH is a significant predictor of these negative outcomes, highlighting the importance of addressing this issue in the workplace.

One of the most striking findings of this study is the strong positive association between workplace SH and psychological issues. The regression analysis indicated that workplace SH was a significant predictor of psychological issues, accounting for almost 70% of the variance in this outcome. This suggests that women who experience SH in the workplace are significantly more likely to experience negative psychological outcomes, such as anxiety and depression. The final predictive model presented in this study suggests that for every unit increase in workplace SH, there is an expected increase of 0.836 units in psychological issues. These findings underscore the importance of creating safe and supportive working environments that are free from SH, in order to promote the mental health and well-being of employees.

In addition to psychological issues, this study also found that workplace SH is a significant predictor of physical health problems. The regression analysis indicated that workplace SH accounted for over 70% of the variance in physical issues experienced by female workers. This suggests that women

who experience SH in the workplace are at increased risk of experiencing physical health problems, such as chronic pain and sleep disturbances. The final predictive model presented in this study suggests that for every unit increase in workplace SH, there is an expected increase of 0.844 units in physical issues. These findings highlight the need for organizations to take action to prevent SH in the workplace, in order to protect the physical health and well-being of their employees.

Finally, this study found that workplace SH is a significant predictor of job-related issues among female employees in the Gampaha district. The regression analysis indicated that workplace SH accounted for nearly 70% of the variance in job-related issues. This suggests that women who experience SH in the workplace are more likely to experience negative job-related outcomes, such as job dissatisfaction and reduced productivity. The final predictive model presented in this study suggests that for every unit increase in workplace SH, there is an expected increase of 0.835 units in job-related issues. These findings highlight the importance of creating safe and supportive working environments that are free from SH, in order to promote employee well-being and job satisfaction.

In conclusion, the findings reported in this study provide clear evidence of the negative impact of workplace SH on female employees. The regression analyses conducted in this study suggest that workplace SH is a significant predictor of a range of negative outcomes, including psychological issues, physical health problems, and job-related issues. These findings highlight the importance of creating safe and supportive working environments that are free from SH, in order to protect the health and well-being of employees and promote job satisfaction and productivity. Organizations must take proactive steps to address this issue, including implementing policies and training programs that promote a culture of respect and inclusion in the workplace.

5.1. Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for organizations and policymakers. The results suggest that SH in the workplace is a significant problem that can have serious negative consequences for female employees. Addressing workplace SH is crucial for promoting employee well-being, reducing job-related issues, and increasing productivity.

One important implication of this study is that organizations must take a proactive approach to addressing SH in the workplace. This can involve implementing policies and procedures that promote a culture of respect and inclusion, as well as providing training for managers and employees on how to recognize and prevent SH.

Another implication is that policymakers must take steps to ensure that laws and regulations are in place to protect employees from SH. This can include strengthening existing laws and regulations, as well as increasing resources for enforcement and education.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

Develop and implement policies and procedures that promote a culture of respect and inclusion in the workplace. This can include developing clear guidelines for appropriate workplace behavior, as well as providing training for managers and employees on how to recognize and prevent SH.

Increase resources for enforcement and education of laws and regulations that protect employees from SH. This can include providing training and resources for enforcement agencies, as well as increasing public awareness of the issue.

Create a supportive and safe work environment for employees who have experienced SH. This can include offering counseling and support services that protects employee privacy and confidentiality, as well as implementing a zero-tolerance policy for SH in the workplace.

Conduct regular surveys and assessments to monitor the prevalence of SH in the workplace. This can help organizations to identify areas where improvements are needed and to measure the effectiveness of interventions.

Foster a workplace culture that promotes gender equality and inclusivity. This can include promoting diversity in the workplace and ensuring that employees are treated with respect and dignity regardless of their gender, race, or sexual orientation.

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SMART TOURISM TRIGGERS TOURIST MINDS – DO YOU HAVE THE MIND TO MIND IT?

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the smart tourism business and the way this sector positively impacts rural communities through economic diversification from diverse commercial activities. The essential aspect of Smart tourism is that it is transforming as a result of the digital revolution. The advancement of new technology has resulted in remarkable digital transformations in the tourist industry. Tourism was one of the most affected sectors during the ongoing pandemic situation. The sector is in need of drastic strategic decisions focusing on Tourist locations, complexes, goods, business experiences, and ecosystems as these are continuously evolving. This involves establishing and growing new business partnerships, business models, and capabilities in the tourist industry. The research question is "What is the importance of Smart tourism, and how it has affected tourists' behaviour"? The research aim is to analyse the role of smart tourism in emerging countries with a special focus on Uzbekistan and its challenges and to use a conceptual approach and focus on the travel and tourism business. Our study aims to identify the relationship between trust and Smart tourism dissemination in digital marketing through the lens of the theory of mind (ToM). ToM plays a mediating role in enhancing the image of a smart destination and consequently improves tourists' behavioural intentions. The study findings have revealed that there exists a significant role in tourism innovations and their advantages and barriers in developing countries. The applicability of digital transformation is an essential tool to improve smart and sustainable tourism techniques, which is the concept of the proper paradigm for increasing the quality of life and social value of both visitors and local people. This impact of smart tourism is directly related to the overall tourism experience leading to creating value for the tourists.

Keywords: *Digital transformation, Smart tourism, tourism innovations, tourism experience, experiential value.*

1. Introduction or background

The term big data has gained widespread acceptance in academia and industry due to the constant advancement of technology. It is critical to enhance the tourist business by introducing big data and related technologies. It is essential to create a travel information-sharing platform based on big data to increase coordination in multiple locations and encourage passengers in making informed

decisions as cloud computing, which includes data storage and processing, is the primary technology utilised in the big data platform (Liu, 2020).

The origin of the tourist destination SMART model was found long back ago when Peter F. Drucker (1954) introduced the word “smart” in his book *Practice of Management*, and it was defined by the acronym “SMART,” which stands for Specific-Measurable-Achievable-Realistic-Time (Cited in Bakhtiyorovna, 2011, p80). There are two general approaches to the topic of “Smart” tourist destinations, which some researchers have argued. Some scientists emphasise building Smart cities, while others believe that the crucial element is the function of “Smart” technology in tourism demand and marketing. Based on that, there are various studies with theoretical and methodological angles that will be discussed further (Bakhtiyorovna, 2011).

According to Phillips (2000), there are two types of methods of smart tourism: 1) smart demand, including the use of management strategies determining demand and access; 2) smart marketing tactics capable of targeting the relevant client segments and delivering suitable messages (Cited in Li et al., 2017, p2). The extent to which digital technology has contributed to our awareness of the tourist system, particularly in how visitors choose where and when to visit and the nature of their experiences while on the trip, is one of the significant advances enabling tourism design.

Smart tourism has transformed into a vision and a general “blueprint” that allows many countries and cities to develop programs for creating new technological infrastructures, developing smart end-user applications, and focusing on innovation in terms of enhancing tourism experiences and improving the competitiveness and attractiveness of tourists’ destinations over the last few years (Xiang, Stienmetz and Fesenmaier, 2021; Vahid and Piri, 2023).

The application of Smart tourism has a huge value in terms of a well-known concept such as the Theory of Mind (ToM). The applicability of ToM in smart tourism allows for analysing tourists’ perceptions and attitudes and their perceived destination image and behavioural intention. As an outcome, this study combines ToM assessment, a psychological theory, with the perceived quality of smart tourism applications, destination image, and behavioural intent. Tourism marketers may better grasp the value of ToM on tourists’ perceptions of a location by investigating its mediating role. With the major idea connections of this study, this insight will give further evidence for a cross-disciplinary study between psychology and tourist management (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021).

The **main question** this paper is trying to answer is ‘What is the importance of Smart tourism and how has it affected tourists’ behaviour?’

The **objective** of this study is to analyse the role and the perception and the relationship between trust and tourists’ satisfaction in smart tourism. Additionally, this research aims to find a solution to the major research issue about the opportunities and obstacles of Smart tourism in Uzbekistan. Meanwhile, the research will look into the globalisation of the economy due to digital transformation and the impact of digitalisation on tourists’ attitudes in today’s dynamic and challenging international business environment.

2. Significance/contribution to the field

It has been claimed that people live in a constantly transforming world and are influenced by the advancement of information and communication technology (ICTs). As a result, technology is highly crucial in promoting tourist locations, distributing and marketing tourism, and assisting travellers before and during their visit. The tourist destination should evolve into an emotional and experiential destination as well as a smart destination. Tourists actively connect with service providers and cooperate in co-creating their own experiences as a result of this strategy, which adds to innovation on countless occasions (Liberato, Alen and Liberato, 2018). The development of smart tourism by the tourism industry is motivated by the desire to improve visitor experiences. To better understand

visitors' choices for STA, it is necessary to understand “new” tourists and their demands in the smart era. Based on a comprehensive review of published articles on e-tourism, it has been summarised key tourist demands in the information era, including time value and less willingness to wait or face delays, searching for travel-related information via the Internet, booking online tickets and making room reservations and making online purchases (Wang et al., 2016).

The pandemic situation brought severe obstacles to the travellers and tourism business, while many places across the world were locked down; however, at the same time, it led to strengthening the smart tourism approach, which was not well developed in emerging countries (Bulchand-gidumal, 2021). Due to this outbreak, the use of technology and innovation to “facilitate the tourist’s experience through a digital platform,” and all companies had to be connected to the digital infrastructure. Smart tourism adopted multiple layers of digital services functioning as drivers of smart destinations (Glasco Jon, 2020). Smart tourism is evolving quicker as communication and information technology continue to advance. Because of the rapid growth of smart tourism, the tourism sector is paying more attention to digital development, which may provide greater convenience for visitors and allow them to utilise the tourism resources of diverse destinations fully. All business sectors, including private and state organisations and local governments, will benefit from smart tourism. In addition, tourists may benefit from smart tourism’s improved service experience throughout the entire process of gathering travel information, making trip plans, paying for travel product bookings, enjoying travel, and reviewing and assessing travel (Wang et al., 2020).

Along with smartphones, social media has become a significant foundation in the development of a smarter experience that makes the excessive information available to all users, which may be grabbed down to the individual level, the combination of both facilitates more customised and truly context-aware experiences (Femenia-Serra and Neuhofer, 2018).

Some gradual improvements have been observed even in developing country Uzbekistan in terms of digitalisation, though modern Uzbekistan has not adapted to the Smart City’s standards. Management, taxes, infrastructure, marketing, education, medical, and other fields have all created eastern “smart” systems throughout history, particularly in Uzbekistan’s cities. On the state policy level, the development of smart cities in Uzbekistan is now attracting the most attention, and the government has established a strategy for implementing smart city technology (Shohistahon et al., 2020). To implement it accordingly, technology is highly crucial in promoting tourist locations, disseminating and marketing tourism, and assisting travellers before and during their visit. Smart tourism’s strategic orientation as targeted at leadership, entrepreneurship, human capital, innovation, and social capital development, focusing on the innovation and productivity elements.

The following are the basic concepts of SMART-TOURISM:

- Contribute to the development of tourism perceptions
- Providing micro and macro-level integration of tourists in the tourism industry to ensure efficient distribution of bonuses to the local community
- Supporting micro and macro level incorporation of tourists in the tourism industry to ensure efficient distribution of bonuses to the local community in tourism activities by gathering additional information within the frontiers of the tourist area. Regional tourism intends to integrate information technologies in the Smart Tourism network, attain account stability, develop tourist attitudes, serve tourist demands, and promote management resource productivity (Muhamadiyev, 2015).

This research aims to provide a systematic and comprehensive survey of the literature on smart tourism by identifying new advancements, subjects, areas, theories, methods, and industrial applications. As a result of the findings, further research areas are recommended. The study will primarily collect data utilising a quantitative strategy such as a Google survey questionnaire to examine the relevant literature. It is essential for the theoretical foundation to gain widespread acceptance of ST, since

digital transformation in ST is not a well-developed concept in Uzbekistan. Due to the fact that it has not been studied intensely, it is critical to conduct a current review of the literature in order to solid basis and direction for future study.

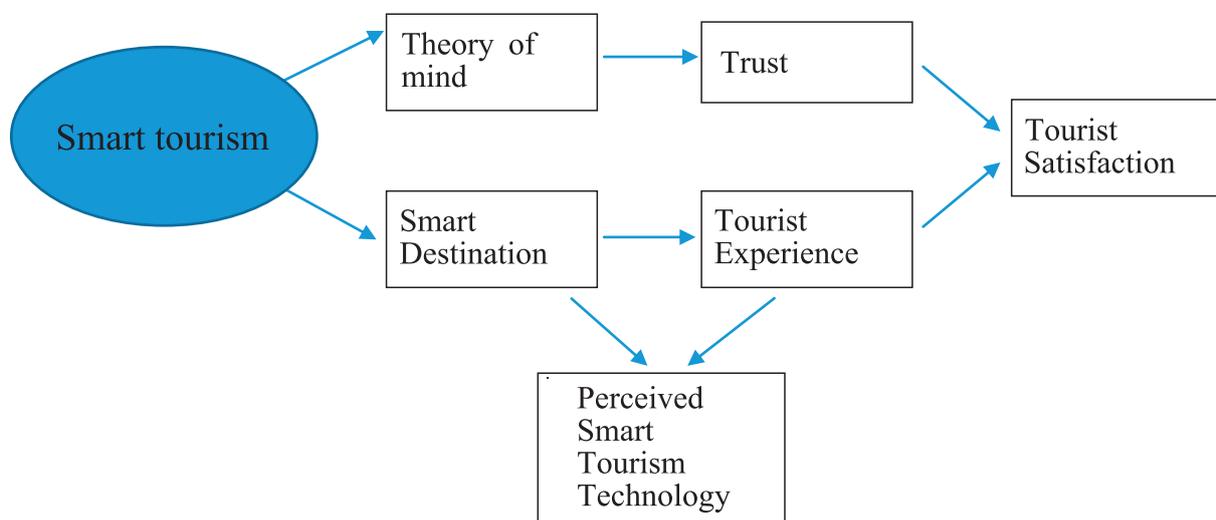
3. Literature Review

Smart tourism research is still extremely limited, which needs to be developed as solid foundations for striving for smart tourist business and these assumptions must be further explored and validated. The following discussion highlights some critical research topics that must be addressed to successfully achieve smart tourism aims. While location-based services are tremendously useful for travellers, they often put customers at risk since interactions with suppliers and, as a result, their apps/services are often short-lived, and trust-building is limited in the tourist industry (Gretzel et al., 2015). It's worth noting that booking vacations and other tourist-related services is quite popular on the Internet, which means that travellers have adapted to technological advances because they not only make information more accessible and usable, but they also serve as factors that explain tourists' requirements and goals (Liberato, Alen and Liberato, 2018).

A smart tourist's digital footprint is substantial, and the options for exploring the digital traces left behind, whether on vacation or business, are wide-ranging. Andrejevic and Burdon (2015) noted that Smart tourism is rapidly responding to and positively impacting, which is defined by ubiquitous, always-on data collection (Cited in Gretzel et al., 2015, p184). However, the heavy reliance on technology is another concern increasingly being explored in the context of smart tourism. According to Minghetti and Buhalis (2010), for individuals without smartphones and places that cannot afford to create smart tourist infostructures, this has significant repercussions in terms of a widening digital gap (Cited in Gretzel et al., 2015, p184).

Molz (2012) presented that building more intelligent, meaningful, and long-lasting interactions between visitors and destinations using mobile digital connectivity is the fundamental basis of creating Smart tourism (Cited in Li et al., 2017, p2).

Yao (2013) believes that tourism resources and education may be systematically established by correlating current information technology with tourism services, tourism management, and tourism marketing and by keeping tourists' interactive experience (Cited in Li et al, 2017, p3). These advancements may be used to benefit the general public, businesses, and government, assisting these entities in entering a new stage of "tourist informationisation, especially for emerging countries such as the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.



According to Leslie (2011), the term “theory of mind” (ToM) is extensively applied, which depicts mental states such as emotions, beliefs, knowledge, and intentions also, ToM aims to determine how individuals think in the context of interrelations and interactions within the situation (Cited in Tavitiyaman et al., 2021). Through ToM, tourist behaviour and satisfaction can be evaluated; as a result, travellers’ perceptions and attitudes regarding smart tourism apps and their perceived destination image and behavioural intention may be studied (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021). Tourists’ valuation of smart technology services, such as the Internet, public Wi-Fi, basic tourism service support, mobile device guidance, and service promptness, were studied by Lee et al. (2018) and noted that tourists’ perceptions of value, assessment, and enjoyment are improved by these smart technology offerings (Cited in Tavitiyaman et al., 2021, p907). People have started perceiving ST positively, and it has been observed that people more rely on Smart Tourism Technology which gives them reliable information about activities, lodging, and transportation which lets visitors spend less time and effort looking for information, and as a result, most the travellers are satisfied with their experience. According to empirical studies, tourism or travel obtains hedonic experience, and visitors’ satisfaction varies depending on their personality and destination categories. All elements of tourism, involving transportation, accommodation, and attractions, are included in smart tourism. Tourists’ experiences will be enhanced if they have positive feelings and attitudes regarding ST. As a consequence, tourist happiness is generated through travel satisfaction. (Pai et al., 2020). Carbonell and Escudero (2015), Ozturk and Hancer (2015), X.and Wang et al. (2016) explored how technology affects consumers’ memorable experiences, satisfaction, and intentions. According to Carbonell and Escudero (2015), when customers get unpleasant technical experiences, it automatically will impact their desire to use any smart devices again (Cited in Jeong and Shin, 2020, p1467).

Tourist destination trust is described by Amin (2016), Jacoby and Chestnut (1978), Jacoby and Kyner (1973), Tabrani et al. (2018), Zeithaml et al. (1996) as a base of tourist loyalty that people have already experienced and is defined in this approach through attitudinal and behavioural trust. As Chi and Qu (2008), Wang et al. (2019), Yoon and Uysal (2005) stated, in the tourism sector, attitudinal loyalty is most commonly used to understand and quantify visitors’ destination loyalty (Cited in Azis et al., 2020, p609).

Although many scholars have examined the concept of ST sites and co-creating visitor experiences, there is still a study gap because smart tourist applications and theoretical contributions are rarely discussed. Both conceptual and empirical approaches allow us to examine which sources of information, among the following, are favoured by individuals for reserving hotels: e-reviews, hotel rating systems, travel agency recommendations, and travel guides, in an experimental design and according to it the survey will be conducted. According to several researchers, Gretzel (2007), Hennig-Thurau (2005), consumers see e-reviews as trustworthy information because trust is seen as a crucial factor for maintaining equilibrium in asymmetric information settings (Cited in Sidali, Schulze and Spiller, 2009). Xiang and Fesenmaier (2016) noted that a huge amount of data analysis should be leveraged for ST projects and one of the current growth in the business tourism sector is the advancement of Internet technology, or modern tourism progress, which is taking presence in the digital market (Cited in Sabou and Mairescu, 2020, p72).

4. Proposition development

Digital tourism, according to Buharis D. and Jun S. (2011), is a paradigm change in tourism owing to the rise of digital technology. Smart tourism brings to the establishment of e-tourism activities, such as various offers from tour operators and travel companies. Consumer e-data, e-booking (hotels, transportation, etc.) and e-payments are all part of e-tourism. Digitisation is advancing in

many aspects of life today, leading ST to be adopted and implemented to improve the country's infrastructure (Cited in Kayumovich et al., 2020, p367).

Several studies in tourism research support the effects of smart tourism technology on memorable travel experiences. According to a bibliometric survey Johnson and Samakovlis (2019), smart tourism aims to explain the integration of diverse technological components that interact with humans to enhance visitor experiences. Furthermore, Johnson and Samakovlis (2019) noted that a smart city tourism destination must use innovative technologies to offer interconnected visitor experiences (Cited in Azis et al., 2020, p609). The application of ST signifies the exceptional importance of automated control and information systems in our everyday routines and leads artificial intelligence to emerge in the near future. Companies can provide such services through "Smart Zones" to attract more tourists and improve the comfort of their accommodations, and Internet capabilities will boost, which is considered a shortage, especially in emerging countries where Wi-Fi is not available everywhere. ST locations can readily acquire tourist information, connect and communicate with travellers on the spur of the moment, and personalise services to meet the demands of each tourist, thanks to STTs (Jeong and Shin, 2020). Zach F and Krizaj D (2007) noted in their recent research on ST that technology is the key to improving a destination's competitiveness and that the usage of smart technologies is critical throughout the tourist experience, from trip planning to travellers staying at a particular location. As a result, transforming tourist sites into "smarter" ones has been considered a means to improve, given that the design of tourism experiences and how they are provided and consumed has evolved dramatically (Cited in Vizuete et al., 2021, p2).

P1. The importance of Smart tourism is growing.

Buhalis and Amaranggana (2015) stated that the role of ST is to enhance visitor experiences through better customisation of services and goods and a dynamic, collaborative value co-creation is a primary goal of smart destinations, noted Boes et al., (2015). This goal is achieved by integrating big tourist data from many sources into a single central, real-time platform that enables better decision-making and enhanced experiences (Cited in Femenia-Serra and Neuhofer, 2018, p136). Perception of tourists toward E-tourism can be discussed broadly wide, but most of them are considered as a source of knowledge which pushes people to enlarge their horizons through finding out something new for them, such as conducting a search on destinations and selecting a vacation spot to visit (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021). Huang (2017), Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2007, 2009) stated that using ST has influenced on visitors' memorable experiences in smart tourism sites and future behavioural intentions. Bae (2017) stated that when tourists go or prepare to travel, smart tourism affects the way they engage with one another; they can use smart-tourism destination portals to choose the activity that best matches their planned vacation after purchasing a flight and lodging. Smart tourism, according to Gretzel (2015) study, ST is able to increase the perceived value of customers by emphasising efficiency and experience enrichment. This study defined efficiency as the value and time saved by using a smart-tourism destination platform (Li, Fang and Sukoco, 2021). All elements of tourism, including transportation, lodging, and attractions, are included in ST, which enhances tourists' experiences and has favourable feelings and attitudes.

P2. Smart Tourism has changed people's perception of tourism.

According to all experts, tourist trust is inextricably linked to a destination's image. The image of a tourism site is badly harmed if it is perceived as suspicious, making it feel hazardous and unsafe to visit. Chang (2009) Williams & Balá (2013) claimed that it is logical to assume that visitors

who are unfamiliar with the destinations they visit will use what they encounter and discover at the destination as references to build their trust system. As a result of trust crises, tourists may be concerned about safety and possible threats, and a poor image of the place may develop in their thoughts. According to Abubakar (2016), in forecasting visitors' attitudes and behaviour intentions, trust in a picturesque site is an important factor to consider. Tourists may be willing to pick a safe place in order to avoid potential travel dangers. As a result, creating visitor trust in a gorgeous place may have a favourable influence. Tourists' subjective perceptions of a picturesque site influence their trust in it (e.g., reliability, warranty, and guarantee). As Roodurmun & Juwaheer (2010) noted, by meeting visitors' emotional and fundamental requirements, mutual trust may be formed between the picturesque place and tourists (Cited in Liu et al., 2019, p387). Trust that leads to tourist satisfaction can be impacted by memorable tourism experiences and destination loyalty in various countries. For example, Tung and Ritchie (2011) argue that memorable tourism experiences would evolve into ineffable events that flood travellers' emotions with happy memories. Additional researchers asserted that other elements such as travel motivations and unique tourist experiences enhance destination loyalty. According to Jeong and Shin (2019), when visitors have a lovely recollection of their vacation that they consider worthwhile, they are more satisfied and likely to return. Furthermore, prior visitors' encounters with novelty and emotional sensations are the most remembered features that increase tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Cited in Azis et al., 2020, p610).

P3. The relationship between trust and tourists' satisfaction in smart tourism is interconnected.

5. Theory of Mind (ToM)

Since its original suggestion in Premack and Woodruff's (1978) work, the idea of Theory of Mind (ToM) has evolved significantly. The focus on humans, particularly human acquisition, has created methodological issues currently being debated. In a similar spirit, Apperly (2012) contends that ToM involves more than a conceptual understanding of mental states and it is also considered as a combination of cognitive processes and a social skill that attests to individual diversity; hence, no one activity can be regarded the appropriate "measure of ToM" throughout development. In psychology, one of the well-known theories is ToM, which refers to the capacity to assign mental states such as emotions, beliefs, understanding, and intentions. ToM focuses on determining individuals' behaviour from the perspective of interconnections and relationships within the situation. Leslie (2001) noted that the main purpose of ToM is to forecast other behaviours (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021, p905).

Numerous tourist experience research has entirely focused on describing the emotional state of tourists after their trip, and ToM helps to identify it. Servidio and Ruffolo (2016) stated that emotional connection boosts the recollection of memorable travel encounters (Scott et al., 2017). According to Decrop (1999), Del Bosque & San Martin (2008), Echtner & Ritchie (1993) Gallarza (2002), Mak (2017), in the travel and tourism literature, ToM's cognitive and emotive viewpoints are frequently utilised to explain visitor behaviour. Tourists evaluate their experiences and construct opinions and judgements based on these cognitive aspects, whilst the emotional element is formed through the assumption of feelings. The following qualities from Wang et al. (2016)'s study have been used in tourism to evaluate visitors' feelings while using smart sightseeing. Tourists generally use cell phones to find information while travelling, as said by Xia et al. (2018). Tourists assess the perceived quality of ST applications they use throughout their journey when they visit a place, affecting their cognitive beliefs and attitudes regarding the destination. Based on Kim & Yoon (2003) findings, the use of ToM may encourage potential visitors to promote the destination's

reputation, and the tourist behaviour is affected by brand equity, which is a broad phenomenon shaped by cognitive and emotive evaluation. ST destinations can increase people's and visitors' quality of life and improve tourists' experience. Moreover, this performance can strengthen travel experiences, establish a favourable perception of the location, and show the potential for loyalty (Cited in Tavitiyaman et al., 2021, p909).

6. Impact of Covid-19 on tourism.

Covid-19 has had a detrimental influence on the global economy in 2020. Due to industrial features, the tourist sector has been severely harmed, and the tourism profit margin has plunged substantially. People were unable to travel worldwide because of lockdown and restrictions, which made the level of implementation of intelligent tourism directly impact the safety and quality of tourism (Yang, Yan and Wen, 2021). According to UNWTO data cited by McKinsey, the pandemic caused "The travel and tourism sector is in the midst of a historic crisis. In 2020, international visitor arrivals were expected to drop by 60 to 80 per cent, and tourism expenditure is unlikely to recover until 2024." On the other hand, some industry analysts estimated that the global online travel market would reach around \$818 billion by 2020, led by demand for mobile travel applications and websites, leading up to the epidemic. Tourists will still be interested in new smartphone apps that offer value to the travel experience in the post-pandemic era (Glasco Jon, 2020).

COVID-19 has exacerbated the necessity of innovation in the tourist business. The most prominent innovations can be implemented in this industry to prevent the loss of tourists during the pandemic and escalate the number of visitors. E-Tourism has changed strategic and operational management, introducing a wide business process re-engineering across various sectors. Due to the total shutdown of international and domestic travel caused by obligatory quarantines, a vaccine program and worldwide travel restrictions, tourism is one of the most damaged industries by the COVID-19 pandemic (YÜZBAŞIOĞLU, 2021).

Covid-19 led an explosion of interest in automation and robotic systems in tourism and hospitality, such as automation technologies (IoT, Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, automated vehicles). Undoubtedly, automation technologies have helped tourist organisations reduce passengers' risk of infection and prevent the spread of the virus; however, emerging countries faced some difficulties due to the lack of artificial intelligence platforms (Zafri et al., 2021).

Considering tourism in crisis as a significant issue tourism industry managed to move up to recovery and reinvention by taking steps like:

- Working with the business sector and other cities to share innovative ideas and co-create unique tourism services
- Increasing the use of electronic marketing, augmented reality, and navigation systems to assist tourists in finding sites
- It enhances the experience and value of hybrid and online events by facilitating new digital and virtual solutions for event facilities and services (Glasco Jon, 2020).

It can be added that Covid-19 has changed the mode of travel and travellers' behaviour. Digital travellers' and the general public's behaviour has rapidly altered. New innovative technologies have significantly boosted people's willingness to engage in co-production, enhancing travel experience through virtual visits to natural and cultural places, planning, booking, etc. The digital transformation environment has also been noticed in businesses and destinations were promotional and marketing innovation boomed tourists' minds (Petrović et al., 2021).

It is predicted that people will choose the places near their houses after Covid-19, and the concept of smart cities to smart regions should be well developed, which offers a chance for tourism to be revitalised collaboratively (Calderon, 2020).

To summarise, the pandemic has had a severe influence on the tourist sector as a whole, particularly conventional tourism, but it has also boosted smart tourism to some extent. It has encouraged smart tourism modes and indices and influenced people's travel attitudes (Yang, Yan and Wen, 2021).

7. The Development of Smart Tourism in Uzbekistan

Tourism has always been a service sector, with staff that lack thorough knowledge of technical skills. We can say about tourist business, which requires a huge number of information technology, software engineering, and data analytic abilities as big data develops. ST cannot function without the assistance of skills in innovation; unfortunately, the tourist sector continues to employ standard training and recruitment practices that are unable to satisfy the ST demand (Liu, 2020). The Republic of Uzbekistan places a high priority on the growth of information and communication technology in order to implement it to enhance ST. Moreover, in executing tourist activities, local tourism firms actively exploit new technological advances and electronic applications to convert the tourist industry into a strategic sector of the economy. As the Internet is rapidly transforming the tourist industry throughout the world, and many businesses are trying to adapt to new technologies and The State Committee for Tourism created the www.uzbekistan.travel online platform in 2016. Travellers have access to all travel information, and potential visitors and organisations can learn about historical landmarks, tourism attractions, routes, history, geography, culture, and customs, among other things. The portal has been massively upgraded in response to market demands. New portions have been added, the technical condition is upgraded, and mobile traffic is streamlined. In the last few years, it has been observed that the number of Uzbek users of mobile applications and QR code technologies during their trip has been increased, and reviews and recommendations of travellers about routes, hotels, and restaurants in social media show maximum satisfaction (Kayumovich et al., 2020).



Figure 1. Uzbekistan promotes Smart tourism <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/42264>

Furthermore, The State Committee for Tourism Development has worked on a plan for smart technology in state museums and cultural heritage sites that allow Uzbekistan to attract more visitors. For instance, Verum QR launched a project to provide QR codes to 50 historic sites in Bukhara, offering tourists to access information about the locations using their smartphones. Besides, tourists are able to get information on nearby items such as hotels, restaurants, and other attractions. In addition, the government is also contemplating disseminating Bukhara's expertise throughout the country, which will lead to the growth of ST. ST's significant goal is to implement an e-ticket and electronic visitor registration system, virtual tours, deployment of audio guides, production of electronic catalogues of historical monuments in foreign languages and their 3D models, and creation of a mobile platform that enables the translation (UzDaily.com, 2018). The new technology can now be tested in the Poi

Kalan complex; the Gaukushon, Kukeldash, and Nodir Devonbegi madrasas; the Toqi Sarrofon, Toki Telpakfurushon, and Toki Zargaron domed bazaars; the Lyab-i Khauz square; the Nasreddin Afandi monument; the Arch Citadel; and the Jewish Synagogue (Aliyeva, 2018). These services at ST locations are one of the efficient strategies to fulfil tourists' demands and maximise touristic experiences. Advanced ST in Uzbekistan is being developed step by step, which aims to respond to tourists' needs, which necessitates offering unforgettable consumption experiences.

The biggest advancement in Uzbekistan is the first "smart" city Nurafshon. The Republic of Uzbekistan's Cabinet of Ministers issued a resolution on the "Concept of the Introduction of "Smart City" Technology in the Republic of Uzbekistan" on January 18, 2019. There have been "Smart City" innovations in Uzbekistan before, but this is the country's first legal framework for its growth. There are ten areas designated for implementing smart principles and three active initiatives to be included in the smart city framework: Nurafshon, Tashkent City, and Delta City. For instance, the Nurafshon smart city project is planned to attract \$2.5 billion in foreign investment and will be built by professionals from South Korea and Singapore. These initiatives have an impact on the economic growth and geographical shape of cities and the source of economic investment and technological contribution (Wolf, 2019).

8. Challenges in implementing ST

Most tourist destinations now have wireless network penetration; however, in order to meet the construction needs of smart tourism, tourist attractions must also extend their own information infrastructure and boost the capacity and speed of data transmission. Despite it, there are still limitations and obstacles, such as a poor innovation ecology and an inaccessible intelligent information and ICT ecosystem (Rotchanakitumnuai, 2017).

For instance, though the development of smart cities in Uzbekistan is now receiving the most attention, the Republic of Uzbekistan has devised a strategy for implementing smart city technology. However, Uzbekistan is still in the early stages of implementing new technologies such as "Smart City." A smart information and communication infrastructure is not well-developed on a high level to apply ST around all regions of Uzbekistan. The establishment of a system for providing favourable Internet access conditions is still falling behind. Though Internet penetration levels in Uzbekistan have consistently increased but users still have poor connection quality and frequent disconnection. According to Speedtest, Uzbekistan's average fixed broadband download speed was 26.48 Mbps in May 2020 (ranking 97th internationally), while the average mobile broadband download speed was 11.20 Mbps (128th place globally). In limited areas, Uztelecom and numerous mobile service providers provide public Wi-Fi hotspots. Another barrier that does not allow ST to be perceived fully is a costly Internet connection in relation to household income. In addition, the government began requiring users to pay a charge to register their mobile devices' international mobile equipment identity (IMEI) numbers (see C4) in November 2019, adding yet another barrier to getting online (Uzbekistan: Freedom on the Net 2020 Country Report | Freedom House, 2019).

There are some factors such as legal, political, and environmental culture as well as the implementation of sophisticated systems for power and large-scale operations to use water and other energy resources efficiently. All these measures should be updated communications networks and the identification of the primary sources of financing for urban infrastructure renovation (Shohistahon et al., 2020).

First of all, modern communications technology infrastructure must be developed to attract more tourists not only for historical sightseeing but also to build Smart cities to improve public and public life, enhancing governance by meeting their needs and requirements (Shohistahon et al., 2020).

The visitors' complete integration with current information and communication technologies and deficiencies in the supply of electronic systems and interactive services are the most significant tasks to be completed. The access to Wi-Fi and the speed of the Internet are the problematic factor, especially in some regions where the connection is not stable, which might be inconvenient for those travellers who have their own online pages where they are constantly sharing their travel experiences (Musaev, 2017).

Another fact that creates the main barrier to developing ST is being not aware enough of the importance of digitalisation and using innovation to build Smart economy, Smart environment, Smart government, Smart living, and Smart mobility. There are some other limitations and challenges poor innovation ecology, an inaccessible intelligent information and ICT ecosystem, and a poor knowledge management culture (Rotchanakitumnuai, 2017). Boes et al. (2016), Gretzel et al. (2015), Koo, Yoo, Lee, & Zanker (2016), Mistilis & Gretzel (2013), Rotchanakitumnuai & Speece (2003) claimed that smart destination implementation is hindered by the lack of IT skills, a lack of privacy, and security risks (Cited in Rotchanakitumnuai, 2017, p5).

Establishment of an adequate legislative, administrative, and institutional framework for the introduction of digital infrastructure in the development of smart city technologies, strengthening the economy for intellectual services, supporting the development and implementation of intellectual services, and the awareness of the population. Lack of information on the core roles of Smart City prevents solving the city's an engineering and communication problems and insufficient and outmoded urban infrastructure (Shohistahon et al., 2020).

8.1. Methodology

The technique that the author plans to conduct is referred to as research methodology. This involves areas such as data gathering methods, statistical analysis, and participant observations using statistical tools for data analysis (What is research methodology? - Paperpile, no date).

This study aims to determine the tourists' behaviour and the perception of ST through the lens of the theory of mind (ToM).

Q-methodology is an exploratory research method commonly used by researchers to explore people's attitudes about a topic, and the findings from Q are intended to provide a holistic perspective of people's subjective opinions on a topic. Researchers use exploratory research when they need to learn more about an existing phenomenon and obtain fresh insights into it to formulate a more precise problem (Geogre, 2021).

This report lays forth clear research directions for potential future inquiries. Existing literature on ST experiences is still in its initial phases; this topic should be appropriately viewed because few studies have been on Asia, particularly an emerging economy.

This study is intended to apply both quantitative and qualitative techniques, which allow for studying more deeply. It is vital to remember that qualitative and quantitative research provides better outcomes. The fundamental goal of quantitative research design is to identify some general patterns of behaviour in a statistically significant context across numerous situations. Quantitative research is concerned with numbers and statistics for data collecting and analysis, whereas qualitative research is concerned with words and meanings. Both are required for obtaining various forms of data. The approach was chosen in order to put a tested hypothesis to the test and see if it should be accepted or rejected. On the other hand, a qualitative research strategy describes phenomena that may be seen but cannot be measured or characterised owing to its structural shape (Farnsworth, 2019).

Numerous case study analysis has been used to examine the chosen theoretical background: a case study is "a research technique that focuses on understanding the dynamics occurring within single contexts". It incorporates various data collecting techniques, including archives, interviews, surveys,

and observations. The evidence might be qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both, which allows for getting much information (Corte et al., 2017).

This article presents a visual depiction of the procedures and methods used in doing research using grounded theory as an overview of the approach. Grounded theory is a well-known research approach that is used in various investigations. In a grounded theory research, both qualitative and quantitative data generating approaches might be applied. The goal of grounded theory is to uncover or develop theory from the evidence that has been collected consistently and analysed through comprehensive study (Tie, Birks and Francis, 2019). Using grounded theory helps identify tourists' experience, behaviour, and perception of ST, providing a variety of additional and exploratory perspectives and can be tested using a quantitative method.

Since only secondary data has been implemented, it should be noted that several studies have been examined in order to have a deep research on basic issues such as the influence of pre-COVID-19 on travel behaviour, tourist experience, and adoption of ST, which lead to satisfaction factors whether people trust smart application and how their travel habits have been changed through applying smart gadgets. Therefore, grounded theory is applicable for investigating a specific event or process and producing new ideas based on the collection and analysis of real-world data will be applied (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

8.2. Methodology limitations

The current study has certain limitations that future research can investigate further. It is needed to create a whole new research typology since there is little and not enough existing research on ST application, especially in the case of Uzbekistan. Because of the restricted access, reorganising or restructuring the study might be necessary. It requires explaining why there is limited access and ensuring that findings are still accurate and valid despite the restriction.

In this condition, identifying a constraint might be a valuable chance to uncover literature gaps and highlight the need for future research in the field. One of the main caveats of this paper is surveying all regions of Uzbekistan, which might give a clear snapshot of the level ST development. The outcomes may be compared more closely, and generalisations can be tested across several sample groups.

Furthermore, ToM analysis was constrained because it was focused solely on tourists' perceptions during their trip and did not include social interactions with tourism stakeholders. The investigation exploring the after ToM evaluation and post-travel imagery and these social interactions with stakeholders as an extension of ToM principles might be the topic of future research. In addition, ToM theory has not been widely analysed in Uzbekistan, which does not allow for the evaluation of tourists' perception of ST. In order to identify it more deeply, primary data collection should be conducted. However, due to the time constraints, practical data collection such as surveys, tracking and interviews are problematic to conduct since there is a limit the amount of time available to explore.

This research combines ToM assessment with the perceived quality of Smart Tourism apps, destination image, and behavioural intention in order to analyse all these aspects, quantitative and qualitative research methods should be applied, which will give some solid statistical findings and concepts, opinions, and experiences.

8.3. Findings

Technology is drastically altering the travel experience. Using technology to enhance the experience is not a new concept. Innovation is found here in an attempt to comprehend its mechanics from an empirical standpoint. As a result, this study aims to better understand the link between information needs, information tools, and the destination's tourist experience.

From a theoretical standpoint, the key contribution is to improve understanding of the effects of technology on tourist behaviour and experiences and the trip preparation phases (Liberato, Alen and Liberato, 2018). Considering that travellers generally utilise mobile devices and laptops while travelling, the findings underline the importance of internet connection at the destination. Despite a relationship between internet availability and the reason for the travel, the biggest effect was discovered as a factor for choosing a trip and as a determinant of pleasure during the stay in the location (Cited in Liberato, Alen and Liberato, 2018, p19). It is revealed that Covid-19 pushed ST to be implemented, and the essence of ST plays a big role in the tourism industry. A significant change was made due to the Pandemic situation, which made people rely on smart gadgets; people may vary their frequency of travel by different means under the new normal circumstance relative to the one before the epidemic. During the pandemic, many people had to postpone their vacation plans and remain at home; therefore a smart tourism city may consider developing timely personalised, which was initially intended for environmental preservation and boosting tourists' experiences. As a result, smart tourist city development necessitates the informed engagement of all stakeholders in order to effectively create the city and gain long-term competitiveness in this dynamic tourism market.

ST benefits include increasing local tourism, interacting with a worldwide audience by giving customised experiences, and upgrading the global touristic viewpoint. Smart Tourism helps establish an atmosphere in which a vacationer can thrive, and it has been proven to result in favourable tourist experiences.

Findings show that emerging countries need to ensure that they are ready to apply ST to meet customer satisfaction. A fresh, innovative approach to smart cities is emerging in Uzbekistan today. Conception takes into account savings, comfort, convenience, architectural and aesthetic solutions, and the construction of favourable circumstances for people. Even though Uzbekistan has made substantial modifications to city development since independence, it will not be able to meet current demands, which means Uzbekistan is not fully ready to adopt ST. Several limitations, such as not all regions having access to the Internet and the high cost of Internet connection, were discovered, which prevent ST from being adopted and developed.

The statistical findings show the causal links between smart tourism apps and ToM, depicting travellers' feelings and attitudes. The results show that tourists have faith in ST applications and rely on them. Their total sense of destination can be favourably influenced by a summary of cognitive ideas and attitudes. In addition, ToM has a huge role in promoting the destination's image and customer loyalty. This important concept is psychologically linked and impacts one another. ToM must be developed and studied in Uzbekistan while evaluating visitors' feelings and emotions in order to enhance their needs and demands. This study demonstrates how well-designed ST applications might alter travellers' cognitive and emotive perceptions. Based on ToM study, the result emphasises the critical mediating function of ToM during the vacation experience. In particular, some visitors construct their ToM assessments prior to their trip experience by a variety of methods, including searching for information on relevant websites and hearing from others. The creation of relationships between smart tourism apps, destination image, and behavioural intention can be empowered by ToM mediating assessment. In terms of cognitive and affective assessment, the results demonstrate that visitors' impressions of ST apps in a place can promote ToM concepts.

Smart destinations, enhanced by information technology, are a dynamic group of interconnected characters, each of whom allows visitors to co-create unique and meaningful experiences within the context of their surroundings. Many studies in the tourism sector have found that traveller trust substantially impacts a destination's image. Consumer trust is a context-related notion, and tourism researchers are becoming increasingly concerned and interested in it, necessitating a fresh look at its conceptual and statistical aspects (Liu et al., 2019). As shown in the findings of this study, there

is evidence that the visitor experience and perceived value of smart tourism products/services have a direct beneficial impact on destination satisfaction. Besides the relationship between perceived ST and tourist satisfaction has captivated researchers' interest, few empirical studies have discovered that overall revisiting behaviour and overall satisfaction influence tourists' willingness to return and recommend a specific destination to other potential tourists. Undoubtedly, this study demonstrates that tourist trust in a destination helps shape a positive image of the destination. Therefore, to destination managers, establishing a positive destination image could be achieved through reinforcing tourist trust in the destination. The findings of the study indicate a plausible path for managers to improve destination images with significant and direct effects. Therefore, to establish a positive image, the destination should first establish a trusted image.

Several findings of this study are revealed that give a deeper understanding of the relationship between concepts of ST and ToM and developed a research model for the relationship among perceived ST experience, travel experience satisfaction, tourist happiness, revisit intention and trust. Moreover, it is seen that Covid-19 made a huge impact that pushed ST to the demanded level and increased the reliability of tourists towards ST.

While there has been significant development in ST destination research in recent years, there remains a research gap that should be analysed in Uzbekistan to focus more on its citizens.

8.4. Future Scope

The research focus will be addressed in the future study limitation to the extent ST concept to investigate travellers' perceptions, emotions, attitudes, interests, opinions, and behaviours with the help of conducting quantitative and qualitative research methods that will give a clear snapshot of applicability ToM. It is essential to have up-to-date knowledge and skills that can be leveraged to engage in the tourism market with a strategic perspective. Future development will concentrate on upgrading the current policy system in order to give the most efficient system possible by promoting this concept in cooperation with such sectors as government agencies, business, and society overall. The government has an essential role in the tourist business, and government authorities must offer legislation, rules, and oversight which will guarantee that the tourism business can maintain its level and compete with other tourist destinations.

The main aim of tourist policy is to invest in the study and production of information and ideas, as well as the development of technologies that enable the dissemination of innovation and improvement. Since the government's support is crucial, entrepreneurs and company owners should be approached to build smart city or smart destination ideas.

- Smart Economy: Innovative and entrepreneurial smart economy gives opportunities to grasp the nuances of a smart economy and to coordinate strategically targeted measures to reinforce and promote the smart economy's emergence and growth in the city.
- Smart Mobility: Access on a local and trans-local level and the existence of sustainable and secure ICT-based transportation systems which will give long-term smart mobility solutions.
- Smart Governance: Smart governance may promote successful city governing towards a Smart City by interacting with technology, policies, best practices, resources, social norms, and information. As a result, smart governance is at the heart of each Smart City program.

Travel is an experiencing product, which means that determining its perceived value by customers is essential. Social media has successfully established itself as the primary source of information creation and brand positioning. It is important to analyse the role of Social media, which is also known as a social networking site that will lead as the main instruments in today's internet age, with the potential to play a significant role in the expansion of the tourist sector. The impact of word of mouth would be enhanced for the advantage of both customers and tourism businesses. Moreover,

social media are vital instruments for destination branding, particularly in the promotion of a place's identity and brand to inhabitants and tourists by local governments and DMOs. With the help of social media, the image of cities and destinations, as well as their tourism attractiveness, smartness, sustainability, and technology growth can be built. However, some challenges should be taken into consideration while engaging social media in terms of satisfying travellers' expectations. To give an insight into the situation and look into how smart tourist destinations may be potentially improved the tourism experience, further study with qualitative and quantitative research methods will provide in-depth multimodal observation.

9. Conclusion and Recommendation

To sum up, the pandemic has negatively impacted the overall tourism industry, especially the traditional tourism industry, but promoted ST to some extent, which pushed people to perceive ST. It has promoted the modes and evaluation indices of smart tourism; people's travel choices, preferences and overviews have been changed too. The development of ST has greatly reduced the negative impact of the pandemic and improved reliance on Smart applications, which build tourists' trust. Since it demands the integration of information from many relevant domains, the digital transformation of tourism destinations in the post-Covid age is still a topic in tourism research about which there is relatively little academic study. Furthermore, this study's research is restricted, with only a few instances based on digital transformation and smart solution implementation; that is why it is also worth noting that a tourism destination's digital transformation should never be the end aim. In the meantime, technology should guide tourist attractions to achieve their objectives, such as better destination management, sustainability, competitive pressures, improved tourism experience, and promotion of local well-being, creating new research areas for the promotion of new innovation. Though, ST evolved in tandem with societal technology advancements. It makes a significant contribution to today's tourist experience, with dedicated mobile applications being one of the most popular types.

According to our research in the literature review, the following are highly significant factors to consider while creating an application. Several concepts have been analysed, such as how the adoption and applicability of ST are crucial, especially for emerging countries measured through ToM and tourists' behaviour. To summarise, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of ST applications on the links between ToM, destination image, and behavioural intention. The efficiency of ST applications and ToM evaluation throughout the journey period influence tourist perceptions of destination image and behavioural intention. Furthermore, by recognising the responsibilities of ST cities, this research offers a long-term solution for designing a sustainable city that considers both inhabitants' and visitors' quality of life and experience.

The focus of this study shows the state of the ST literature by critically assessing its topics and knowledge areas. It has made a contribution to the field by presenting a current picture of the existing knowns and uncovering unknowns in ST. First of all, the fundamental key to sustainable ST is creating a big data platform that allows visitors to get information about destinations and make suitable decisions quickly. The conveyance of information: enough travel information and relevant content and data correct, up-to-date, and trustworthy should be responsive to visitors' requirements and demands at the appropriate moment.

However, there are some weaknesses, such as not having a stable Internet connection, which was mentioned as a big challenge that does not allow to enhance customers' satisfaction through virtual tours or ST applications.

Such limitations should be eliminated by improving the quality of the Internet connection and providing access, which prevents tourist products' intangibility, inseparability, fluctuation, and

uncertainty. The cost of Internet connection which was observed in the case of Uzbekistan, should be decreased in order to give a chance of availability. To implement smart digital applications in tourism destinations, internet infrastructure, device costs, a lack of development of all tourism activities and businesses, and a lack of awareness among tourists and the community should be taken into consideration before creating Smart cities. ST infrastructure is necessary to develop in Uzbekistan properly though it can be observed that some initial steps have been already applied in the case of Nuraafshon city; however, it has not been used and recognised by the population due to a lack of awareness of ST. The systematic and broad organisation, exchange, and use of tourism data for value generation which is still in its early stages. While smart technology serves a mediating role in nurturing tourist well-being, developers must envision smart technologies that can encourage tourist well-being and consider how tourists' feelings about these technologies would impact their adoption. As the globe, and particularly the tourist sector, moves toward a digital environment, the role and perception of ST have been extensively researched and examined, though due to the fact that there are not enough data on ST in Uzbekistan, survey, tracking and other data collection procedures can be used in future research. The quantitative research will show the authentic picture of people's experiences and behaviour while using ST. As a result, future study may use these features to measure visitor behaviour and preferences for smart experiences. Furthermore, future research might look at whether there are any other aspects that influence visitors' behaviour while using ST through ToM concept to have better knowledge.

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RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GUJARAT: VIEWS OF THE STAKEHOLDERS

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Abstract:

Purpose: Sustainable Tourism development in the rural region has become must which includes the interests of all stakeholders, along with tourism promotion and tourism growth. This study aims to identify the opinion of stakeholders to achieve sustainable rural tourism development.

Design: Exploratory Research and descriptive research.

Methodology & Approach: Qualitative and Quantitative. Primary data was collected through in depth interview and survey. Structured questionnaire was used as an instrument. Non-probability sampling procedure is used. Sample size of Community is 262 and of Tour operator is 167.

Findings: It has been found that, there should be development of regional tourism workforce and infrastructure, introduction of home stay policy, promotion of tourism friendly atmosphere, showcasing Gujarat beyond God and spirituality and creation of multiple activities in rural areas.

Originality of the research: This research paper is original and has not been published nor under any publishing procedure.

Keywords: Community, tour operators, government, sustainable rural tourism development, Gujarat

1. Introduction

India is a country, where 70% of the population resides in rural area and thus it has a huge potential for rural tourism development. It has been found that, due to the less earning opportunities and for better development of life, the people from rural areas are shifting towards the urban life. Therefore, it is very important to focus on this social transformation and develop the employment opportunities within the rural areas. Tourism is identified as an effective way for improvising the rural areas (Pradhan, 2019). Rural tourism helps to have the employment and alternative income generation opportunities, infrastructure development, stimulation of external investment, appreciation of local culture, preservation of environment and heritage and repopulation in the rural areas (Tosun, 1999), community empowerment, sustainable local economic development (Wijijayanti et al, 2020).

1.1 Objectives of the paper:

The research paper aims:

- To study the opinion of the community, government officials and tour operators to achieve sustainable rural tourism development.
- To study the opinions of government officials and tour operators for rural tourism promotion to achieve the sustainable rural tourism growth.

1.2 The nature of the problem:

In India, rural tourism has very great potential, but due to some drawbacks, it has not flourished like other forms of tourism. Many a times, people find it difficult to get information about such places and they are being explored to some limited destinations only. Apart from this, they may also face some problems related to payment, booking and quality (Team , 2010). Rural tourism is also imposing some challenges for the local area such as: distortion of local environment and culture due to commodification, economic leakages, seasonal demands and inflation in local prices (Tosun , 1999), marketing, uniformed structure at central level, legislations at regional levels, cooperation with local people (Khartishvili et al, 2019).

It has been found that, the participation of local people in sustainable rural tourism development helps to gain comparative advantage, but not the competitive advantage. Whereas, the participation of government, private sector and non-governmental organizations contributes to gain the competitive advantage but not he comparative advantage for sustainable rural tourism (Wardana et al, 2021). Further, the farmers are also inclined to diversify their earning sources. They would like to be involved in rural tourism providing the support of stakeholders (Peira et al, 2021). Rural tourism does not require only the consideration of the place and enhancing the experiences of the tourists, but also of the sustainable development based on community characteristics (Rosalina et al, 2021). Further, there should be sustainable tourism which focuses on the conservation of the environment and culture of the region for which both tourists and local people are liable for their constructive participation (Davardoust & Karahan, 2021).

Holistic Tourism development in the region has become must which includes the interests of all stakeholders associated with it. At the same time, tourism promotion and growth is also essential to attract more number of tourists to the destination. Thus, sustainable tourism development and sustainable rural tourism growth, both will lead to the overall development of the region. Further, it also requires having appropriate marketing approaches, unified structure at central level and legislations at regional level in coordination with all the respective stakeholders at the local level (Khartishvili et al, 2019).

It has been found that during Covid-19, rural tourism has been proved to be a great alternative for the urban tourism (Vaishar & Št'astná, 2022). It is also considered one of the best alternatives for employment generation in agriculture and mountain area (Khartishvili et al, 2019). Further, the tourists are giving preference to the rural tourism with risk aversion attitude during Covid-19 (Zhu & Deng , 2020). Rural tourism can be seen as one of the best alternative to solve the problems of rural and agricultural areas and it can be used as a persistent tool to have the social development of the rural people where people do care for the clean, stable and valuable natural surroundings (Kataya, 2021).

1.3 Current state of knowledge:

Rural tourism has been introduced by Government of India in National Tourism Policy, 2002. Up till now, Ministry of tourism has identified 51 such potential sites for rural tourism in India, out of which 36 have been developed. The MoU between the World Bank and AirBnB is such kind of initiative so to provide the alternative accommodation-home sharing to the tourists and also to generate the

employment opportunity for the local people of India and Sri Lanka (Kumar, 2018). AirBnB is also working in coordination with local organizations for the upliftment of the rural women and young people through tourism in rural areas of South Africa's Western Cape, China's greater Guilin region, and India. AirBnB along with Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has made it possible to empower the rural women of Gujarat state by providing training through Airbnb's platform (Rifai & Lehane, 2017). Ministry of Tourism has taken many initiatives to promote and develop rural tourism in India such as: Swadesh Darshan, Dekho Apna Desh, identification of Rural Tourism Circuit in India. It has also introduced a National Tourism Award to inspire all the people who have executed tourism projects in the field of rural or Agri tourism projects (PBNS, 2022). Apart from these schemes, other essential aspects related to rural tourism development is in need to be taken care of, such as: improved accessibility, infrastructure, connectivity, tourists' safety, healthcare facilities, training of local people and assessment of tourists' activities impact on rural environment (Forum, 2019).

Tourism industry is one of the most important industries in terms of development of Gujarat. It is an engine of growth for the economy in the state. Tourism is a bright revenue generation industry that put Gujarat on the map of world. Further tourism is a major sector contributing to employment generation. One can find list of events, fairs and festivals throughout the year so as to attract tourists in peak, lean and off seasons. It equally concentrates on all types of tourism which are possible in state. The new tourism policy of the state 2021-2025 aims for sustainable development in line with 'wildlife tourism', 'coastal tourism', 'cruise tourism', 'wellness tourism' and 'rural tourism' (Kaushik, 2021). Further, to motivate the rural tourism, there is a provision of Rs. 5 Lakh for organizing fairs in rural areas of Gujarat which promotes the culture, handlooms and handicrafts (PTI, 2021).

2. Theoretical and conceptual background/framework:

Earlier tourism destination was considered for maximization of visitors. But the meaning of destination is changed from traditional to contemporary, i.e. from visitors' perspective to management perspective. Destination management also moves towards an integrated approach. The destination needs to be maintained and grow with sustainability, so as not to harm its present nature as well as keep it protected for future use (Fabricius & Carter, 2007). As Tourism destination management is not the responsibility of any one entity, it becomes imperative to look beyond visitor maximization at the destination and change the perspective from unconvincing accountability and responsibility towards an influential or convincing accountability and responsibility of all stakeholders. Rather than looking from only tourists and tourism industry point of view, the support of integration approach will result in sustainable development of the destination. Tourists' activities and tourism development in the area may cause destruction of nature, conflicts in society and culture and negatively affect the host community of tourism destination. And hence it is necessary to know the views of all relevant destination stakeholders, including community, tour operators and government for better development of the area.

The literature review includes the information about rural tourism, sustainable rural tourism development and Gujarat Government efforts for rural tourism development.

2.1 Rural Tourism

Rural tourism is defined as the tourism activity that displays art, culture, heritage and rural life in rural area. Further, it should include the movement of people towards the rural area from their regular place of residence for a period of twenty-four hours to six months so as to have pleasure or leisure. There are various forms of tourism which are connected with the rural tourism, such as: Agri-tourism, eco-tourism, farm tourism, forest tourism and green tourism (Tosun, 1999). Rural tourism involves

multiple stakeholders, such as: government, panchayats, community, tour operators, travel agents and tourists. Without appropriate integration of all these may lead to the unappropriated planning and uneven development in the rural area (Pradhan, 2019). There are four areas of rural tourism, namely (Ayazlar & Ayazalar, 2015): 1) Rural Life –crafts, local events, food, music, agri tourism, 2) Rural Activities- birding, cycling, fishing, walking, water sports, 3) Rural Heritage- traditional, architectural, and industrial and 4) Country side- mountain, lakes, rivers and forests.

Due to rural tourism there can be an improvement in standard of living in local people, less likelihood towards migration to urban areas, recognition of cultural heritage, boost in environmental and traditional local practices and overall sustainable development (Falak et al, 2016).

2.2 Sustainable rural tourism development

Without proper planning or management tourism can damage the destination's environment; cause social and cultural conflict and alienate the communities that host tourism. Sustainable tourism development manages the impacts of tourism on the destination's environment, economy and community and maintains and enhances the destination's resources for the present and future needs of both tourists and the communities that host them. Sustainable rural tourism development considers three aspects: 1) Environmental conservation which is resource based, 2) Planning and a control concern which is power based and 3) Economic concerns in the area (Tosun , 1999). Rural tourism can be managed by incorporating several methods, such as: limiting the number of tourists visits, local people's training, rural tourism which is based on community, encouraging the local arts and culture, managing the traffic flow, conservation projects (Stainton, 2021).

There are other approaches with which the sustainable development can be achieved. According to VICE model, there should be a framework which presents destination management as the interactions between the visitors, the industry that serves them, the community that hosts them and the environment where this interaction takes place. According to UNWTO, three pillars of sustainable development should (Stange, Brown, & International, 2013) : make optimal use of environmental resources, maintaining essential ecosystems and helping conserve biodiversity, respect socio-cultural authenticity, conserve built and living cultural heritage, and contribute to cross-cultural understanding and tolerance and ensure long-term socio-economic benefits, fairly distributed to all community stakeholders, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities, social services, and poverty alleviation.

The sustainable development should focus on conservation of resources and environment, betterment of local people in terms of employment, working conditions and purchasing power, reducing the effect of economic spin-offs for the local people and customers (Tixier, 2009). There are different types of community participation for the development activities of the region, such as (Tosun , 1999): when the purpose and content of community participation clearly originate with people themselves, it is known as *active participation*. *Passive participation* occurs where people are merely involved in the implementation of decision about which they were not consulted. When the community has the opportunity to directly convey its message regarding developmental issues to the decisions makers, it is known as *direct participation*. In *Indirect participation* people's opinions are conveyed to those individuals in whom the community vests responsibility for making decisions through institutionalized and episodic channels of communication. In *formal participation*, rules and content of participation are determined by government. During *Informal participation*, community development staff and members of local communities or between local leaders and community development staff have unofficial or unsanctioned interaction. When community participates voluntary, base-up without external support, it is known as spontaneous participation. The sustainable tourism development should help in conservation and protection of natural and cultural resources and residents of tourism

areas should not suffer from a deteriorated environment and social problems (Taneja , 2006). Community based sustainable tourism should focus on empowerment of local people, generation of income and improvement in standard of living (Pongponrat, 2011). He also suggests involving local people in decision making procedure. There should be small capital investments by the local people themselves, so as to make them able for undertaking the development, monitoring the undesirable consequences and exercising the control over the pace of social changes (Sakata & Prideaux, 2013).

2.3 Gujarat Government efforts for rural tourism development

Located on the west coast of India, Gujarat has a long coast-line of about 1600 km, i.e. the longest among all the states of the country. It is covering an area of 1,96,024 sq km (5.96 % of India's total area). Bounded by Arabian Sea on the west, by Rajasthan on the north-east, by Madhya Pradesh on the south-east, and by Maharashtra on the south, Gujarat shares a common international border with the Pakistan at the north-western fringe. Gujarat is comprised of an inclusive kind of attractions with breath taking locations and scenic landscapes. Land of Krishna and Mahatma Gandhi, pilgrim centres, Gujarat is a melting point of several civilizations of rich culture and heritage. It is home to the unique archaeological sites. The State has increase the number of tourists to Gujarat with the help of effective development in infrastructure undertaken by the Corporation. To attract more tourists, a number of tourist hubs have been developed, such as Ahmedabad Metro, Ahmedabad Rural (north Gujarat), Surat (south Gujarat), Vadodara (central Gujarat), Rajkot, Junagadh and Jamnagar (Saurashtra) and Bhuj (Kutch) (Gujarat Tourism , 2022). Diversity with safety and warm hospitality is the USP of Gujarat Tourism and thus a perfect destination for the entire family. Picturesque landscapes, historical sites and long stretches of Coastlines make a visit to Gujarat reviving, relaxing and inspiring (Gujarat, 2020).

The state government is actively working on effective use of tourism resources so as to attract more tourists. The effective efforts of the Gujarat government have resulted in increase in tourists into the state. The State's Tourism Policy (2003-2010) under "Gujarat Infrastructure Agenda - Vision 2010" prepared by Gujarat Infrastructure Development Board (GIDB) highlights diversifications of tourism products in order to attract more tourists. The main objective of the state's Tourism Policy (2003-2010) was to undertake intensive development of tourism in the State and thereby increase employment opportunities (Vansiya & Ragothaman, 2012). While During 2015-20 tourism policy, the government of Gujarat has vision to position Gujarat as a vibrant tourist destination, with an emphasis on improving visitor experience, livelihood linkages, environmental concerns and enhancing investment opportunities, thus catapulting tourism as one of the most important economic drivers, leading to sustainable development and inclusive growth in the State (Industries and Mines Department Government of Gujarat , 2015).

The state tourism department is actively involved in promoting the destinations of the state by implementing different strategies such as ad campaigns, road shows, events, international kite festivals, Rann utsav (DNA, 2012). One of the challenges, that state faced was accommodation after the successful campaign featuring Amitabh Bachhan. Homestay was one of the solutions having a dual purpose of livelihood or extra income for the rural people and for the tourists to have an experience of rural life. To attract more potential tourists, the destination is in need to have the holistic and swift infrastructural development, including the basic amenities in the form of rest houses, electricity & water supply, sanitation, and sewerage facilities. The accessibility of these areas also need improvement.

The government of Gujarat is concerned about sustainable tourism as the state has considered tourism as one of the significant agent of economy development that leads to sustainable and a comprehensive development. The state government is focusing on infrastructure development,

promotion and policies so as to enhance tourism in the state (Maitreyee, 2013). The state is actively working on effective use of tourism resources so as to attract more tourists and get more benefits by it. It becomes essential for the state to be developed as a tourism destination as it has abundant natural resources of rural areas. The state has announced the New Tourism Policy, 2021; that focuses on 'Vocal for Local' in the direction of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' mission, so as to increase the level of local employment. The policy also focuses on promotion of caravans and rural experience-based tourism in the state (ET Government, 2021). The tourism policy also includes the assistance of Rs.5 lakhs per year per Rural Tourism Fair Organizer for conducting all- inclusive fairs and festivals that displays culture, dance, handloom, handicraft within Gujarat (IGBC, 2021). Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Ltd. is planning to promote local handicrafts to international tourists in association with Gujarat State Handloom and Handicraft Development Corporation Limited. According the new tourism policy, the hotels and resorts will be remunerated with Rs. 4000 per month per person upto 6 months, if they recruit local tour guides (Kaushik , 2021).

The state government has begun to focus on attracting more tourists and development of tourism infrastructure along with benefits to the environment, society and the economy. The state has collaboration with other service providers of tourism so as to promote the state tourism (Press Trust of India, 2013). Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Ltd. has simplified the procedure for tour operators and hoteliers to get registered (India Infoline News Service, 2014). The state government is also giving incentives to film producers of Bollywood for shooting at different locations of Gujarat, so as to promote state tourism. For promotion of tourism destinations of the state, Gujarat tourism has implemented strategy that focuses on development of infrastructure including hygiene, public convenience, security of tourists, and involvement of private sector investment for development of hotels and resorts, development of eco-tourism centres (Industrial Extension Bureau Gujarat, 2013). Blueprint for infrastructure in Gujarat (BIG) 2020 developed with objectives to develop tourist circuits, tourism destinations and to execute tourism projects (Gujarat Infrastructure Development Board, 2022).

The government is involving community for the conservation of the environment. We can see the efforts of state government to involve community for the planning and implementation of tourism projects in the state as well as their concern for betterment of the society by providing more employment opportunities. Various strategies have been formulated by the state to develop tourism, are related to (Industries and Mines Department Government of Gujarat, 2015): Government has planned 1) to develop new airports, 2) to involve of local community for development of rural tourism in Rann of Kutch, 3) to encourage participation of private sector for development of tourism projects, 4) put emphasis on cultural aspects, 5) to get response of tourists and other stakeholders on regular basis, 6) to generate self-employment opportunities for local people, 7) to encourage green projects with financial support, 8) to construct and maintain public convenience facilities. The major concern is to have sustainable tourism practices in the state.

The state government is appreciating units that focus on environment protection with special recognition. The state tourism board is also putting emphasis on the innovative tourism projects, participation in different schemes laid down by Government of India, association with Central Government, development of State-Level Empowered Committee (SLEC) that facilitates to less impairments and consolidation of Single-Window Clearance Cell.

Gujarat is first to establish the Global Warming Department in Asia, that concerns for greening of tourism in cities of Gujarat. Further, it also gives an alternative to urban tourism and helps to manage the biodiversity through rural tourism. It includes numerous activities which do not prevail in urban areas of Gujarat, such as: purchasing handicraft products, visit to fairs, festivals, museums, parks, hiking and exploring the rural life, cuisine, traditions and culture etc... (Gujarat, 2020). As of Hodka

village in Kutch district, the central government has given the approval for the development of three rural tourist destinations of Gujarat, namely: Nageshwar, Malegaon and Dandi, under the scheme of Rural Tourism Infrastructure Development. Under this scheme, each of this rural tourism destination is liable to receive the support of rs. 50 lakh for infrastructure development and Rs. 20 lakh for promotion, training and employment generation. While the rural tourism, the state government has given the due consideration to the tourists' by developing the parks, water adventure sports, eco-friendly tourism activities, and local people by providing an opportunity to be a part of the tourism industry, earning money and to sustain their skills, traditions, culture, art and environment. This ultimately will result in to the achievement of sustainability of the place, people and the visitors (Discover India , 2021).

3. Methodology:

For this study, both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been adopted. For gaining awareness and better understanding of the topic, exploratory research design was used in the study, where the views of knowledgeable people of Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Ltd. were collected through in-depth interviews. For describing responses of community and tour operators regarding destination management, descriptive research design is used and survey was used as the research method. Both primary and secondary data sources were used for collecting the required information for the study. For secondary data government reports, journals, newspapers and websites, publications of Indian and foreign government, books, reports of association and researchers, and statistics were used. For primary data, responses of government officials, tour operators and community were used.

Table: 1 Sampling Plan and Data Collection

No.	Sample Unit	Sample Size		Sampling Procedure	Methods (Primary)	Instruments
		Population	Total			
1.	Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Ltd.	12 officials*	5	Non-Probability Convenience	In- depth interview (in person 100%)	Semi structured questionnaire
2.	Registered tour operators of Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Ltd.	167**	167	Non-Probability Convenience	Survey (Mail questionnaire 100%)	Structured questionnaire
3.	Community	1325833***	262	Non-Probability (Convenience and snowball)	Survey (in person 33.59% Mail questionnaire 18.32% Snowball 48.09%)	Structured questionnaire

*Offices. <http://www.gujarattourism.com/general/view/3>

**Registered Tour Operators. <http://www.gujarattourism.com/tour-operator/registered-tour-operators>

***Districts of Gujarat <https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/districtlist/gujarat.html>

Table:2 Data Analysis Techniques

Sr. No.	Data Analysis Techniques	Sample units	Data Analysis Techniques
1	Quantitative Data Analysis	Government officials and registered tour operators of TCGL	Subjective interpretation
2	Qualitative Data Analysis	Community	Chi square Analysis and Cross tab analysis

Source: Primary

For exploratory research design, qualitative analysis was done. It includes the subjective interpretation of government officials' and tour operators' response for tourism destination management. For descriptive research design quantitative data analysis was used. Various techniques used for quantitative data analysis were: Chi- Square analysis, Cross tab analysis.

4. Results and Discussion:

4.1 Community's response:

There are total 262 respondents. Out of them 143 are male and 119 are female. Majority of the respondents (42.4%) believe that the government is concentrating on tourists followed by tourism industry (22.5%) than of the local people (21.4%) and environment (13.7%).

Table 3 local people's view on government's focus while developing tourism in the area

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Government in your area is concentrating on facilities and comfort of:	Tourists	51.0%	31.9%	42.4%
	Community	16.1%	27.7%	21.4%
	Tourism industry	25.9%	18.5%	22.5%
	Environment	7.0%	21.8%	13.7%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(Source: primary data)

34.7% respondents believe that, the tourism development in the area is neutral. Only 26.3% respondents believe that the region has appropriate development of tourism.

Table 4 Local people's view on tourism development in the area

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
What do you think about level of development in tourism in your area?	Appropriate development of tourism	34.3%	16.8%	26.3%
	Neutral	30.8%	39.5%	34.7%
	Inappropriate development of tourism	18.9%	19.3%	19.1%
	Not at all developed for tourism	16.1%	24.4%	19.8%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(source: primary data)

77.1% respondents (74.8% male and 79.8% female) believe that tourists' accommodation in residents' house will provide first-hand experience to tourists.

Table 5 local people's view for homestay concept

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Do you believe that tourists' accommodation in your house will provide first- hand experience to the tourists?	Yes	74.8%	79.8%	77.1%
	No	25.2%	20.2%	22.9%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

(source: primary data)

Out of 77.1% respondents who agree that tourists' accommodation with residents will provide first-hand experience to tourists- 58.8 % respondents (58.0% male and 59.7% female) show their readiness to accommodate tourists.

Table 6 local people's readiness for homestay concept

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
If yes, are you ready to accommodate tourists in your house?	Not applicable	25.2%	20.2%	22.9%
	Yes	58.0%	59.7%	58.8%
	No	16.8%	20.2%	18.3%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

4.2 Local people's response various tourism aspects with respect to tourists and their activities in the area:

81.7% respondents (61.2% male and 38.8% female) believe that tourism is encouraging local employment. 86.3% respondents (83.2% male and 89.9% female) believe that more local people should be involved as full time employee in tourism business. 68.3% respondents (74.8% male and 64.5% female) believe that tourism and visitors are beneficial to area. 72.9 % respondents (74.8% male and 70.6% female) believe that tourists and their activities are affecting daily life of local people. 86.6% respondents (83.9% male and 89.9% female) believe that local people must be involved in tourism destination planning. 54.6% respondents (50.3% male and 59.7% female) believe that there should be a difference in entry fees for places of tourists' attractions for residents and foreigners.

Table: 7 Chi- Square statistics for local people's response regarding tourism development and their activities in the area

	Chi-Square	Df	Asymp. Sig.
Government concentration on development	46.916c	3	.000
Level of tourism development	16.565c	4	.001
Tourists' stay with locals	76.962a	3	.000
Local people's readiness to stay with tourists	77.160b	1	.000
Tourism is encouraging local employment	105.176a	2	.000
More local people should be involved in tourism	137.786a	1	.000
Tourism is beneficial for the area	35.176a	1	.000
Tourists and their activities are affecting daily life of local people	54.962a	1	.000
Local people involvement in tourism destination planning	140.702a	1	.000
Different entry fees for foreigners and residents	2.198a	1	.138

(source: primary data)

There is a significant difference in the response of local people about Government concentration on development ($p=.000$), Level of tourism development ($p=.001$), Tourists' stay with locals ($p=.000$), Local people's readiness to stay with tourists ($p=.000$), Tourism is encouraging local employment ($p=.000$), More local people should be involved in tourism ($p=.000$), Tourism is beneficial for the area ($p=.000$), Tourists and their activities are affecting daily life of local people ($p=.000$), Local

people involvement in tourism destination planning ($p=.000$). There is no significant difference in the response of local people about different entry fees for foreigners and residents ($p=.138$).

4.3 Government officials' response:

Government official suggests developing infrastructure, safety and security, hygiene and sanitation, building tourism workforce within the region, involvement of local people and introducing Home stay policy to meet the demand of tourists, increasing average visitors' length of stay and expenditure, using media, organizing events, collaboration and cobranding with institutes, organizations and other states. Other suggestions are: 1) Promote or advertise on regular basis so that tourists are always updated with latest information about destinations; 2) Projection of new forms of tourism such as: Agri-tourism, medical tourism, business tourism, industrial tourism so as to build a strong and vibrant identity of Gujarat as a tourism destination; 3) Take support of film tourism which is helpful for attracting more tourists, destination publicity in film and employment generation at shooting location; 4) Focus on event based tourism to gain competitive advantage over rivals; 5) Training and skill development- guide and hospitality (learning behaviour to deal with tourists) so as to sensitize the industry players and business to contribute more towards the development of workforce in tourism; 6) Awareness creation in people to pursue this profession through advertisement; 7) Tourism institutions should provide courses such as: ticketing, food and beverage, housekeeping, etiquettes, tours and travels and civil aviation; 8) Collaboration at community level with forest department to preserve value of nature; 9) Coordinate with all local authorities to protect tourism resources; 10) Home stay policy to interrelate demand of tourists and residents. It will augment the accommodation facilities and provide a pip into the rich cultural heritage; 11) Do have the presence of community and stakeholders in terms of participation in the events ad festivals so as to spread benefits of tourism; 12) TCGL collaboration with ASI to preserve world heritage sites is yet to be made; 13) Develop adequate resting, parking facilities at the congested tourist locations so as to manage tourist flow at peak hours; 14) Promotion and creating tourist centric infrastructure in Gujarat so as to maximize tourists visit in Gujarat; 15) Development of crafts of artisans of Gujarat through promotions at exhibitions during festivals and mahotsavs- stalls for specific artisans; 16) Build activities and invite investors to engage potential tourists at places which are not having multiple tourism attractions or activities; 17) Try to create more and more activities and things to do in an event or in a destination so as to increase average visitors' length of stay and expenditure.

Tour operators' response

Tour operators suggests involving local people in planning, developing tourist destinations with special focus on infrastructure, sanitation and hygiene and providing training to the tribes of the area. For tourism promotion, they suggest having tourism friendly atmosphere, showcasing Gujarat beyond God and spirituality and creating multiple activities at the destination. Other suggestions are: 1) Involvement of community in different activities will lead to comprehensive development efforts at the destination; 2) Government should ensure all tourists' places have world class toilets; 3) Ban use of plastics in tourists' places; 4) Spitting should be punishable offense; 5) Showcase Gujarat beyond God and spirituality; 6) Find out places, its importance and make interesting story of it for publicity; 7) More use of social media for promotion and advertising; 8) Promote Gujarat all around the world by doing road shows; 9) Pre- planning with fixed price of packages; 10) Low costs of logistics for tours within Gujarat; 11) Try to serve tourism product at a value for money; 12) All entrance fees and monument charges are brought under affordable prices; 13) Tribes should be trained and can be used as guides for village tours; 14) Special training to police, rickshaw and taxi drivers, hotel staff and general public; 15) Develop quality guides; 16) Basic infrastructure such as

on way restaurants, toilets, monument guides are made arranged; 17) Develop road transport to make journey comfortable; 18) More international airports with direct flight connectivity to Gujarat.

5. Conclusion:

There is a need to have the holistic approach with the integrated efforts of the concerned stakeholders for rural tourism development. The state government tourism officials put emphasis on promotional activities, infrastructure development, incorporating sustainable development in state tourism policy, motivating stakeholders through various schemes and involvement of community participation. Tour operators suggested having more focus on infrastructure development, multiple tourism activities, legislation for tourists' activities, improved accessibility to the places, training and development of local people for being included in tourism industry and creation of employment generation opportunities and spreading awareness at national and international level. According to the local people, the major focus of the government is on attracting more tourists and developing the tourism industry. Further, they believe that, the local people and the environment are given less consideration and the development of tourism is not in appropriate level in the area. They also believe that the homestay will enhance the tourists' experience to the area and are ready to accommodate the visitors in their houses. They consider that the tourism helps them to have employment generation, but at the same time, tourism activities also affect in their daily life and therefore, they insist to be included in destination planning. By recognizing the importance of rural tourism to the area and the local people, implementation of sound strategies should be done. To reduce the distortion of local environment and culture, to enhance the social transformation, to generate the employment opportunities within the local area and to attract more tourists, sustainable tourism development and sustainable tourism growth should be at prime concern.

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FEAR PSYCHOSIS: MARKETING STRATEGY FOR NEXT GEN BUYERS

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Abstract

Marketing has reached the holistic concept era where a business is acting as a single entity not to ignore any potential segment. Hence, companies look for profitable segments and strategies holistically for sustainable business performance. The Millennials are considered the largest buyers & influencers of new and proven commodities worldwide. This generation has taken over the workforce and is the strongest economic force segment to recognize. This generation is vulnerable to choices with rational/less emotional buying approaches, evaluative on advantages, benefits and disadvantages, with great buying power and sources of information. So making them remain associated with the brand, making them do repeat buys, and controlling their rationality and evaluative approach is not an easy task. Marketers need to do something strategically to “hold” them to buy their products and remain engaged. Companies believe that the only thing this rational, non-emotional, evaluative, money-minded customer could be handled is to make him “fearful about his health, safety & security. Create threats to these sensitive aspects and then offer solutions for those, he will believe that you care for him the most. In recent years this strategy has come up as Fear Psychosis, an extension of emotional Psychosis in a marketing context. It is the only thing that seems to be working in this generation. Fear-based marketing influences the audiences’ psychology and urges them to take action to minimize that fear. This strategy has helped businesses to keep the customers engaged with the brand and believes that the company cares for them better than others.

Keywords: *Millennial, rational customers, fear-based marketing, customer engagement*

1. Introduction

The holistic approach in marketing is about considering all the different parts of a business as one single entity with a shared aim and purpose for all the activities related to a business. Aligning and integrating activities under a common objective for all stakeholders is the key element of this approach. It creates cohesiveness in all the related areas of a brand effectively ‘under one roof,’ to display and provide greater consistency and cohesiveness for customers to perceive the brand value. It is the approach where profitability through sustainability is the key. Martin **Luenendonk (2019)** in his blog on Holistic marketing explained this in length by quoting that the holistic marketing approach is based on the premise that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It helps in strong, sustainable brand building, consistency in performance, effectiveness & efficiency in task accomplishments on objectives. As this approach helps in exploring new and existing opportunities

for value creation and value delivery, it has changed the traditional strategic approaches of targeting, positioning and marketing. Under this approach, big companies play in multiple market segments catering to different customer types with different offerings at different markets with an integrated approach to maintain uniform standards of quality and customer handling. **Manoj Sharma (nd)** in his article “Overview of holistic marketing” has stated that now in this holistic approach competition is not between companies but between the marketing networks and strategies. To attain profitable growth it requires catching the large spenders and snatching a larger share of each customer’s spending by building high customer association and focusing on customer lifetime value. That means it needs to associate more buyers with more spending capacities and make them buy your brand over other competitors for sustainable business performance. In potential Indian markets and even in global markets, the Millennials are considered the largest buyers & influencers of new and proven commodities. **Buljubašić, Iva** (2021), in the article published in International Journal Vallis Aurea, explained the Millennial generation and its unique characteristics. The generation born from the early eighties (around 1983) to mid-nineties (around 1996), is known as “the Millennials”. This generation, also known as Generation Y thinks and learns differently from the preceding generations. This generation is different from others in behaviours and responses towards rapidly changing & highly technological environments of businesses, as they have been raised in such environments than previous generations. Also, this generation is the most educated, well travelled, well-informed, rational and technologically sophisticated generation in general.

Marry Lister (2009) in her blog on Generational marketing explained this by quoting that the millennials are the generation that has taken over the workforce globally now and they are an economic force to recognize. With \$200B in annual buying power, smart marketers of the holistic era are turning to new channels to hook this generation. This generation is most widely talked to about its social media and pop culture which has reshaped the way that goods and services are being marketed by staying unresponsive to traditional marketing tactics. This generation is vulnerable to choices, rational/ less emotional on buying approach, and evaluative on advantages and disadvantages but with great buying power and sources of information. So making them remain associated with the brand, making them do repeat buys, and controlling their rationality and an evaluative approach is not an easy task. Marketers need to do something strategically to “hold” them to buy their products. In recent years this strategy has come up as **Fear Psychosis** which is an extension of emotional Psychosis in a marketing context. It is the only thing that seems to be working in this generation and it needs to be understood well through the elements of EQ by the marketers to create that fear and offer solutions accordingly.

In this article, the fear strategy, its psychology and its implications are discussed.

2. Literature review

Danielle Yannotti(2017) in his write up emphasized that fear is the most powerful emotion which could be used in effective selling even above the most preferred factor of ‘sex’ she wrote in the article “Fear Factor In Advertising” which stated that there are many commercials that use scare tactics like this because fear is one of the most persuasive emotions, and it’s one of the best ways to get viewers to take action (e.g. visit a website, dial a phone number, visit a store, or make a purchase). Fear also stimulates a high level of brand attachment, and according to a recent study, people have better recall for ads that evoke fear than for ads that evoke joy and happiness.

The author also quoted Todd Van Slyke (nd), an advertising instructor at The Illinois Institute of Art-Schaumburg, who states: “Fear appeals strike a nerve with people who have doubts about things. They play on our inherent fears of the unknown or that something is going to kill us. That is why scare tactics are stunningly effective.” The old saying that sex sells may be true, but fear is better at it. In

his book *Buyology Truth Lies About Why We Buy*, Mike Lindstrom (2008) discusses how fear taps into our primal concerns for survival, making us more apt to take action, whereas sex-based ads often just distract us from the focus of the ad, decreasing our desire to take action, and our attachment to the brand. It raises questions like how much do we know about why we buy? What truly influences our decisions in today's message-cluttered world? An eye-grabbing advertisement, a catchy slogan, an infectious jingle? Or do our buying decisions take place below the surface, so deep within our subconscious minds that we're barely aware of them, maybe fear or deep emotions?

Vi Mai (nd) a PR & Communications Manager at EloQ Communications explained in the article titled "Fear-based marketing" influences the audiences' psychology and urges them to take action to minimize that fear. This is a traditional communication method that has been used by organizations for years to push the community into changing perceptions, abandoning old habits, or converting into new consumer behaviours. The "fear-based communications" method consists of three elements: information on the potential threat that evokes a feeling of anxiety, information on how the target group can be affected by these threats, and finally, solutions to safeguard or reduce the negative effects

Work the Funnel: A marketing newsletter (nd)[8] defined the concept of fear in marketing stating that the definition of fear-based marketing is noted as: "Communication designed to stimulate anxiety in an audience with the expectation that the audience will attempt to reduce this anxiety by adopting, continuing, discontinuing, or avoiding a specified course of thought or action. consumers take this action in the form of buying the product which reduces the fear in their perception. But at the same time it has a risk too as it comes across as manipulative and detrimental to the audience's health and if the audiences detect marketing messaging is purposely trying to induce specific feelings then it could go reverse for the marketer.

In the blog "the fear factor of Advertising" by **adHOME (nd)**, it is suggested that Fear appeal advertising is based on a persuasive message that emphasizes the potential dangers and harm that will befall individuals (in this case, the audience) if they do not adopt the messages' [or adverts] recommendations. There are very few circumstances where Fear Appeal ads are not effective and according to a study done at the University of Illinois, there are no identifiable circumstances where fear-based advertisements backfire and lead to undesirable outcomes.

Amanda Ray(2015) in her write-up "The Four-Letter Word in Advertising: Fear" also quoted **Todd Van Slyke**; an advertising instructor at The Illinois Institute of Art-Schaumburg; saying that the reason fear appeals are used in advertising is simple, just as sex sells, fear sells too. "Fear appeals strike a nerve with people who have doubts about things or do not know about things. Marketing communicators play on our inherent fears of the unknown like something is going to kill us. This is why scare tactics are stunningly effective." She also quoted **Harjot Singh**, the Senior Vice President of Planning at Marketing communications firm Grey Canada, explaining that advertising is so persuasive that it can change how people think and behave. Fear is effective in advertising because it is a familiar sensation that causes people to respond quickly. On the other hand, she quoted Jennifer Perkins, director of ethnography/consumer insights at Smith Brothers Agency, a marketing agency in Pittsburgh saying that fear may cause people to stop and think momentarily, but in the long run, it may just cause frustration and have the opposite effect of what you had hoped for. For marketers, it could be very effective but may create difficulties in long run. It may be very effective in one segment until it gets matured on fear-inducing aspects.

Mahesh Kulkarni (2019), in his blog on LinkedIn titled Importance of Emotional Quotient in Business Success, emphasized that emotions play a vital role in one's perception towards objects. **Emotion Recognition Technology** –ERT developed by Social media players which is represented in the form of emojis. They created emojis for people to express their thoughts about that post or to express how they feel about that post. Emotional Intelligence or EI is referred to as the ability to recognize,

evaluate and regulate your own emotions, emotions of those around you and groups of people. It is the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflict. Business needs a high level of EQ / EI. as the success of the strategy depends upon our ability to read other people's signals/emotions and react appropriately to them. So, as a business or as an individual, we need to develop mature emotional intelligence skills to understand and negotiate with other people to win the business deal. Fear is the extension of emotional elements in different forms.

Helpage (nd) in their blog on emotional quotient explained that emotional intelligence is the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflict. Emotional intelligence helps you build stronger relationships, succeed at work, and achieve your career and personal goals. It can also help you to connect with your feelings, turn intention into action, and make informed decisions about what matters most to you. Marketers are very keen to utilize their own EQ to sell things to you.

3. Analysis

Most of the MNCs and global companies have attained a holistic approach in marketing practices in this global business world. Their SBUs, channels, stakeholders all are working on strategies with common objectives and purpose i.e. objective of sustainability in business and purpose of gaining more profits and market shares. Despite being successful, such businesses are always under threat of losing customers to competitors who are also equally competent in all comparable attributes. So, they are always interested to come out with some or the other strategy to keep customers "engaged" to them with convincing positive inclinations about the brand and feel of having WIN situation on benefits and advantageous situation over other competitors when they buy that brand. This customer engagement has become so vital to the companies in view of sustaining competitive pressures and to hold the customers in their favor. It can only be done by communicating that "we care for you better than others". This feeling of a customer that "company cares for me" has become the prime element of concern for any business today to formulate competitive business strategies accordingly. In holistic approach of marketing, companies need to formulate many strategies to spread the feeling of "we care" through many ways of marketing, advertising and branding activities while working on bigger horizon of sustainability concept of triple bottom line (caring for people, planet and profits). These different strategies need to be so designed that it must work better than others for you from customer's point of view to create feeling of "company cares better than others". In this context, companies used to try and still try working on establishing clear USPs though providing better than others facts, Offering advantageous value propositions, offer more benefits than competitors and provide believable evidences of being a more valuable product on CPV perspective. In marketing, such strategies fall under the term as FABE strategies – Facts, Advantages, Benefits and Evidence. Till marketing concept approach, such FABE strategies were considered as quite effective and companies which worked effectively & efficiently gained better customer engagement too by communicating that the "company cares its customers". Telling better facts & figure against customer expectations, informing advantages over other competitors customers could attain, emphasizing the brand as more beneficial than anyone in the market and putting across the live evidences were the means of gaining competitive edge and showing "we care" tag. "Better you do it, much better will be the gains", this has been the slogan and still it is for those companies working on marketing or societal marketing era. But in holistic approach of marketing such strategies need some more specific elements to be included which could provided a thrust in the minds of target customers that this brand really cares more, simply saying is not enough now.

As in this era we have more sources of information than any other time in history, so most customers have linked the word “care” not only to materialistic advantages or benefits but to their emotions on wellness & safety as well. They believe that a product must provide protection for their wellness & safety too apart from providing advantages and benefits. This phenomenon has dominated during last decade with new generation customers having better education, more sources of information, enhanced earnings to spend on buying and family orientation to a nucleus family. This generation is better known as the Millennial or generation M is very rational & evaluative even when they drink coca-cola as they are conscious about how much calories are getting in? Most of the FMCG goods, foods, white goods, house hold goods are being looked from health point of view by this “well informed-rational” customer, for him and his loved ones in his nuclear family. This generation M has all the information and have access to get more information at any time on anything. So, despite having “extra spendable income” they have become more rational and evaluative in their buying approach on claimed USPs of product, offered advantages, communicated value propositions, offered benefits etc. This well informed, well to do customer is also very unpredictable. He sometimes buys things which are of hardly any use to him, sometimes becomes too rational for pennies. He is very vulnerable to switch brand loyalties with no reason to justify his own act and has his own logics for every buying and discarding products.

This has further added to the challenges of holistic marketing approach, how to make him buy, repeat buy, remain loyal to the brand, believe that this brand is better for him and finally, how to make him believe that company cares for him. This how to...? has opened avenue for new strategy to make customers believe and trust brand’s offerings as solution to their issues in the markets, where competitors are equally goods on attributes. Scenario has become very tough for companies to sustain in the market with competitive edge. This how to? lead to brainstorm a workable strategy formulation over and above FABE which could help in “handling and engaging” this well informed, rational, vulnerable, evaluative new gen customer with the brand with feeling of “company cares better”. Big companies started working on the aspect of emotional element (in association with FABE) where target customers were provoked on their softer-emotional sides to make them consider the product/brand to take it as “brand is caring one – so best one for me”. Mother-kid, daughter-father, grandmother-grandparents, husband –wife, friendship, relationships, love-care and many more ways came in to provoke emotional feelings of customers and these aspects were adopted in advertising to communicate that “we care better”. For many years, many times this rational customer was made to think on emotional ground while taking buying decisions but slowly the rationality overcame the emotional barrier again with changing family structures and values during last decade. Such emotions again started getting dominated by materialistic mind sets. One can understand it well when kids of nuclear families do not know their grandparents, not seeing any family oriented relationships, not having real friends, not seeing their own parents with emotional attachments to anyone, how come one can sell on emotions and how long? so emotional strategy started losing impact which was expected to convey “we care”. So what next? Companies thought that the only thing this rational, non emotional, evaluative, money minded customer could be handled is make him “fearful about his wellness, health, safety & security. The strategy formulated was better known as Care On Fear - Create threats to these sensitive aspects and then offer solution for those. This strategy came strongly during last decade where companies knew that though the well informed customer is capable of handling complex life & work satiations but he can be made fearful on aforesaid aspects very easily and if some emotions of care are added in this fear psychosis, he will lose his rationality and buy product on account of best caring product for the mentioned threats. (e.g. kid’s immune system- he may/ is getting sick due to weak immune system-offer taking Horlics- so he is not getting sick due to better/improved immunity)

One can observe, this fear psychosis journey starts with newly born kids and covers up to aged citizens. But new gen is more fearful than older gen. Mosquitoes, invisible germs, cockroaches, teeth cavities have been made matter of great concerns for “caring” young parents of gen M and further making those fearful parents to opt for buying products from those companies which are successful in generating this fear “better” and offering solution through their “better product”. The fear spreads and makes parents to react in fearful manner and look for best solution of those fears. Such fearful acts include confining kids in house, not allowing them to play outside due to germs, dirt, cold, sweating and what not, sending kids to costly private schools fearing their kids may not be getting a bright future, insuring themselves & their kid’s life with high premium policies fearing death, buying costly houses in the name of safe places to live, buying high end cars for safety features, going to costly gyms to prevent old age diseases, annual health checks fearing something might have gone wrong in their bodies, buying high priced products in the name of safe products.. the list is endless (examples where companies create threats and offer solution, like some tooth paste claiming charcoal as more protection for teeth..) Most customers hardly know the scientific/logical reasons about the projected fear but in the light of bombardment of online information on it, paid blog, advertisements, publicity in support of the claim makes them to believe that fear exists and company offers the best remedy, again out of fear of losing his or his loved one’s health. Let us take example of Black alkaline water in this context which has crossed all limits of creating fear of bad health and selling at prices ranging from Rs.500 to 10000 per liter. Customers are made strategically through various sources of information to believe that this product is the best care for a good health. Paid blogs, paid advertisements, paid celebrity endorsements, paid publicity and fake evidences on facts & figures have grown to new heights in this era. Most well informed, well to do customers are left clueless on their rationality or evaluation with fear element provoked to dominate especially in new gen segment which is lacking in immune & physical strength and always feel fears for unknown things.

In fact, all such fears are relative things, for someone it could be fear but for someone else it may not be. These are very contrasting things for different customers. One cannot generalize it for all segments but in this era big companies have done it and continually doing it. Being the biggest buyers and influencers the new generation customers are the focus of big corporate on selling in volumes and effective strategic marketing. For this generation, benefits & advantages have become supportive or obvious aspects from any offering and fear of unknown which has become primary concern. So marketers, through a well planned and excellently executed fear psychosis strategy, try to engage them with the brand. This is the dominant strategy of this era where customers happily paying more prices under feeling of fear, in the name of safer products, companies making full advantage of customer’s fears and charging higher prices through a well planned branding process of generating feel of threat and then offering product which is claimed to be capable of handling that fear (in fact that fear is created by the product manufacturer itself). Brands also use emotions to support creation of fear and then offer solution for that fear to make customers believe on offering and start trusting those claims of caring brand. (mosquito repellent, then power packed repellent and then extra power repellent is one example to relate the scenario – they are offer to caring mothers for their kids to prevent from powerful mosquitoes roaming everywhere). Some play with facts & figures/ so called researches which are hardly known to normal customers but help companies to create fear (researches on diabetic / BP/ cancer/ AIDS/bacterial –fungal diseases, figures of cancerous deaths, through unproven facts/researches / data on damage of skin, falling hair, chronic diseases, proclaimed claims of new researches on areas of concerns of customers like on eatable items/oils/fats/ minerals etc.). Some companies play on jargons and terminologies unknown to most customer to generate fear (like “ph value” of body lotions, alkaline black water, sodium-potassium –calcium

minerals, brain attacks, blockage of arteries, low density-high density cholesterol, type I&II diabetes etc). Some use new product ingredients to propagate high claims of providing safety & care to health (like added minerals, aloe-vera, fruits & vegetables mostly not known to common people or from other countries etc.)

In brief, everywhere, everyone is trying to generate fear in customer's mind with more offered guarantee (from the sellers) to handle that fear better than others.

We as marketers know that attaining the holistic marketing concept takes rigorous efforts to reach. Also, today we have different buyers from different generations. They have varying perspectives, choices, understandings, information level and not the least buying experiences. Companies know, whom to target and how to target? "Targeting" has changed its character in the light of changing marketing propositions of advantage & benefits, generated new needs in buyers and strategic competitions created by the quality competitors. With fear or fear with emotional touch has become the most desired marketing strategy of the holistic marketing approach to gain sustainable growth & profitability, there is a dire need to target on Millennial generation which is the major buyer cum influencer today. Though this generation is most challenging to target & handle but requires to be handled on priority as it has more buying capacity, desire to buy and referrals to influence buying. This generation has most sources of information, availability of more alternatives in the market suits its vulnerability, it is also with more facts & figures to match its rationality and innovativeness. But at the same time they are most fearful to their own health, security, risks and hazards. They are status oriented also and the fear of losing status is making them to buy anything for that. In such case of uniqueness, generation M is rightly handled with fear strategy by the marketers. This is very clear to the big brands so they align every product, customer communication and branding process with fears or fears with emotions of this generation to en-cash on it and get success on business objectives. If we see an example how it is being done smartly then the advertisement of Close up toothpaste will tell the whole story. Bad breath and fear of losing boyfriend or girlfriend being en-cashed by Close Up toothpaste and willfully charging more for the product from this generation despite having the same paste like any other toothpaste. (branding is done as if it is the only remedy of bad breath that too offered by this brand only). Another brand Lizol claims 99% germs getting killed from house floors (new mothers educated or uneducated getting carried away with the unproven puffery statement to buy it on higher price than other floor cleaners). One brand claims about sugar free sugar for diabetic persons. (no one knows how it is going to help insulin to use sugar available in body but buy it believing the fear created and its remedy offered). Calorie intakes, skin care, health care, oral care, life care, germs, insects, dirt, travelling safety, driving safety, eateries etc. the list is endless that marketers use to capitalize on fear.

4. Conclusion

Over the years as the market orientation has passed through various approaches and reached to holistic concept, the market challenges have taken different shapes than earlier. The market challenges have taken different shapes and dimension mainly due to explosion in technology and management approaches where youngsters have taken the front seat with their better capabilities to gather information and buying. Also the traditional categories of customers (targeting) has also changed. Now with the availability of the cheapest online buying options, no such classifications are left practically. Even demographic categorization has also lost its sense with stuff being used by unisex buyers. The major issue which has surfaced as the challenge is about handling generation gaps and strong likings and dislikes of different generation customers, especially of the new generation M, the Millennial which is so vulnerable towards choices and buying that companies find it tough to

handle them. But companies are with no choice but to handle this generation in their favor as they are not only the most spenders but influencers too. So, companies have found the way through fear psychosis to handle and mould them in favour. But this strategy will also be losing track soon when the new generation will start taking projected fears of today as obvious things of life like benefits and advantages. What next?

Beyond doubts, the new generation buyers have every information, not only about product but, competitor products, substitute products and almost everything about benefits & advantages, pros & cons before taking a decision to buy. In this condition marketers are left with no other choice but to take the marketing with new perspective which must add to buyer perception beyond standard value propositions. Making customers to feel fear and then provide solution with big claims may not work always and for all. Marketers need to think sustainable strategies beyond fear or emotions. Companies need to work on CPV and value propositions under sustainability concept of TBL-Triple bottom line. Today marketers have the power to influence the customer perceptions, generate artificial needs and trigger the buying motives. Customers have also become soft targets to marketing communications with a number of media interacting with them. The race should be guided to healthy, fact based, rational and truly caring approach. The Peter Parker Principle, named after the action movie hero Spider Man, states that “with great powers come great responsibilities.” Big companies need to understand their responsibilities rather than en-cashing just on strategies like fear or emotions. Our new generation population also need to understand that not all preventive measures need to be driven by fear but should be driven by hope as well.

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