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Exploring the Sacred Landscape of Pathivara Temple: Integrating Cultural, Religious, and Socioeconomic Dimensions Using a Mixed-Methods Approach

Pitri Raj Adhikari
Asst. Professor
Faculty of Management, Tribhuvan University
mailtoadhikarisir@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3501-430X

Shambhu Lamichhane *
Research Scholar
shlamichhane334@gmail.com

Srijana Gautam
Research Scholar
connectwithmefreely@gmail.com

Corresponding Author*
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Abstract

This study investigates the sacred landscape of Pathivara Temple in Eastern Nepal, which is the subject of cultural, religious, environmental and socioeconomic study with a mixed methods research approach. Pathivara Temple is a major Hindu pilgrimage site in Nepal, with thousands of pilgrims visiting each year and playing a crucial role in the preservation of the local culture and traditions, as well as the development of tourism in the region. The study tries to analyze the present status of religious tourism, assess its socio-economic and environmental impacts, and suggest some possible ways for sustainably managing tourism. The quantitative data was gathered by using structured questionnaires and qualitative data was gathered by using semi-structured questionnaires with key informants. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, regression analysis and thematic analysis. The results indicate that TD and good governance have strong positive associations with both local economic development and cultural and environmental sustainability. The results of regression analysis show that the influence of infrastructure and governance towards tourism outcomes is not insignificant. Qualitative results also suggest that the development of transportation and accommodation services, as well as the collaboration between stakeholders, has created a better experience for visitors and local income generation, but issues surrounding environmental

degradation, waste management, seasonality and policy implementation still exist. The synergy between quantitative and qualitative evidence supports the idea of a balanced investment in infrastructure, participatory governance, environmental monitoring and conservation, and community engagement in order to promote sustainable religious tourism. The study fills a gap in Nepalese studies on religious tourism by providing empirical evidence for the relatively under-researched Pathivara Temple region, and makes recommendations for sustainable religious pilgrimage tourism to local stakeholders, tourism planners and policy-makers.
Keywords: Tourism, Pathivara Temple, Sacred Landscape, Cultural Heritage, Environmental Sustainability

Introduction

In several locations around the world, the fast growth of tourism in the past few decades has caused serious issues about sustainability in the environment and preserving the value of cultural heritage. Unplanned expansion of tourism has resulted in problems which include depletion of resources, environmental degradation, and the gradual breakdown of indigenous tradition and social culture, especially in the places which are ecologically and culturally sensitive. All of these difficulties have inspired researchers and decision-makers to point out the importance of sustainable tourism approaches that create balance between financial gains, and environmental preservation, and cultural preservation. Efficient governing, community involvement, and ethical tourism rules and regulations are vital in this scenario in order to ensure that development of tourism creates a beneficial impact without harming the value of regional ecosystems and cultural identities (Gössling et al., 2020; Nepal, 2022).

Being a unique and swiftly growing sector of the travel business, religious tourism is necessary for promoting economic progress along with safeguarding cultural and spiritual heritage. It comprises visiting to sacred sites for pilgrimage, prayer, and spiritual happiness. By offering facilities like accommodation, transportation, and the exchange of ritual objects, it often results in a significant amount money for local communities. Nepal, famed all over the world for its wide range of religious and cultural diversity, has laways been a popular destination for pilgrimage believers of both Hinduism and Buddhism. Pathivara temple is one of the several sacred places in the eastern Nepal which is an immense religious structure having high spiritual value and considerable tourism potential. Every year, thousands of worshipers are attracted by the temple which boost local economy and preserve tradition and cultural identities.

Nevertheless, despite its significance, increasing tourist population of Pathivara has also caused difficulties including transportation limitation, ecological challenges, and a need of effective management methods. It has become increasingly crucial to analyze the existing tourism development of the region, taking consideration of its socioeconomic and environmental effect. In accordance with recent research, religious tourism can significantly boost rural economy and local growth, but it should be properly planned for as well as managed sustainably to avoid negative results (Adhikari et al., 2023; Sharma & Tiwari, 2021). Hence, the objective of this research is to examine the possibilities and challenges associated with the Pathivara temple holy structure and to propose a sustainable framework for its growth. The study intend to deliver a comprehensive insight into how religious tourism can be successfully managed in the

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Nepalese context and preserve its cultural and natural purity by investigating infrastructure availability, religious value, socioeconomic implications.

Literature review

Theoretical review

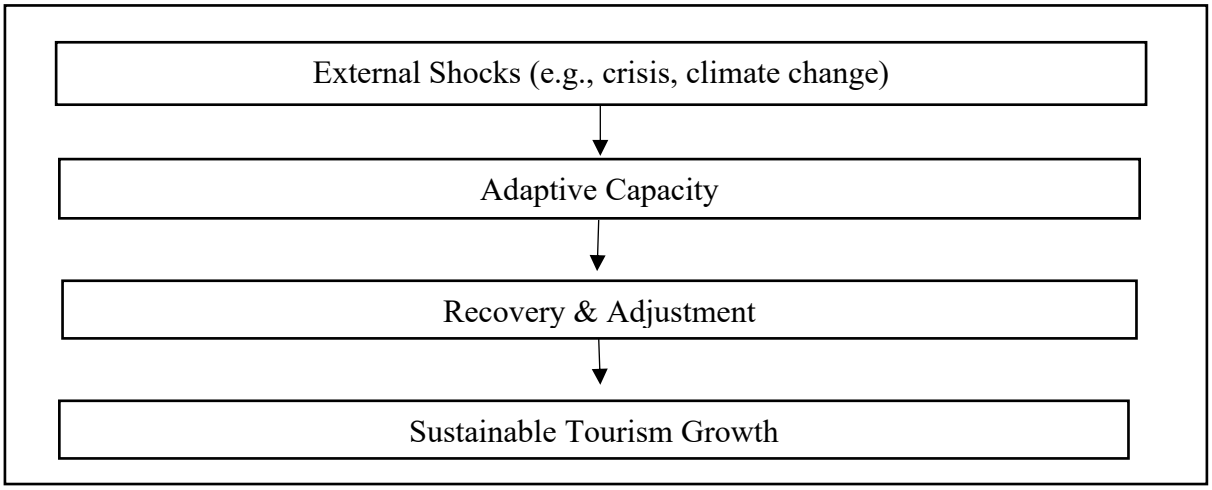
It is important to understand why certain tourism activities take place in specific region and why it motivates their progress over time while studying tourism development and its influencing factors. Economic conditions, sociocultural situations, environmental factors, and institutional structures all affect the dynamic and complex process of tourism. So, to explain how locations change and how sustainable options can be applied in reality, a systematic and theoretical method is required. To get better insights into tourism process, particularly in underdeveloped and culturally sensitive countries, researchers have recently put a high value on using modern international theories. While studying expansion of religious tourism in location like Pathivara temple, in which spiritual beliefs, local economy, and sustainability of the environment come together, these structures are extremely important (Gössling et al., 2020; Nepal, 2022).

The importance of regulation, creativity, sustainability, and local participation in affecting tourist growth is made clear by modern tourism theories. In contrast to traditional frameworks, modern concepts promote broad development, durability, and leadership management. The following three modern international theories are relevant to this research.

Tourism Resilience Theory

In the past few years, tourism resilience theory has drawn plenty of focus particularly in the context of global crises like COVD-19 pandemic. Scholars such as Stefan Gössling, Daniel Scott, and C. Michael Hall (2020) The emphasis that the tourist destination have to develop a capacity to cope with unexpected events, adopt to modifications, and come back efficiently. This theory focus on flexibility, crisis management, and long-term sustainability.

Resilience is necessary in the context of Pathivara temple due to its remote location, sensitive to the surroundings, and dependence on seasonal pilgrimage pattern. The location's resilience may be improved and development of sustainable tourism maintained by boosting basic structures, improving disaster preparation, and promoting adaptive management method.

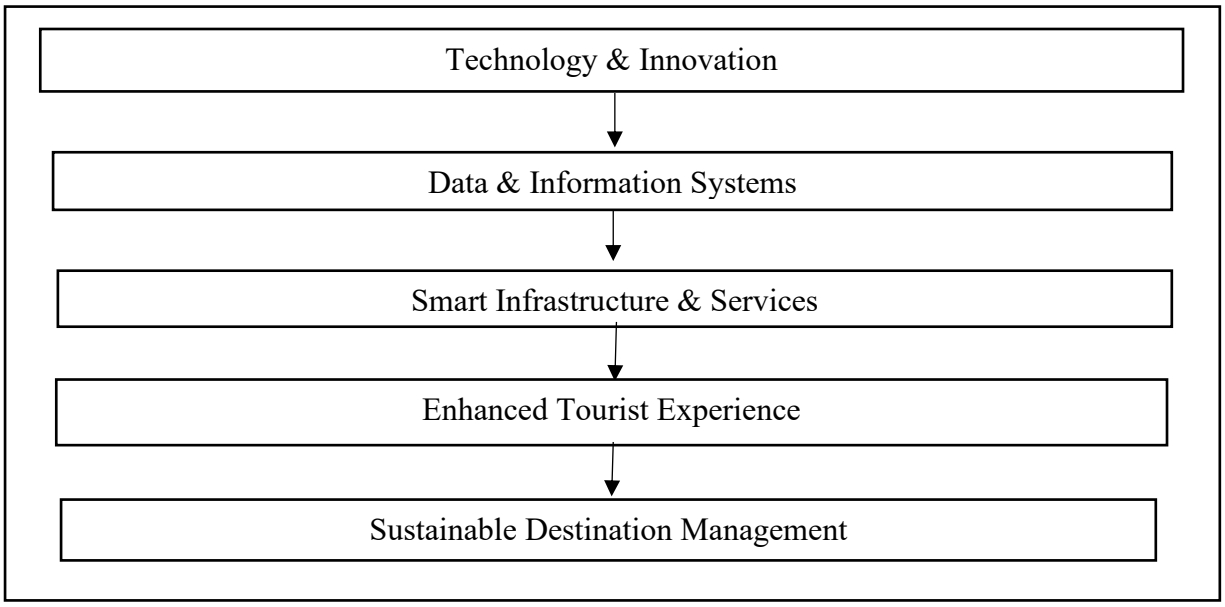


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Smart Tourism Destination Theory

A fresh concept called "smart tourism destination theory" combines creativity, technology, and management based on data into expansion of tourism industry. Researchers such as Umut Gretzel and Marianna Sigala (2021) point out how real time data systems, intelligent infrastructure, as well as digital technology may boost visitors experience and location effectiveness.

The Pathivara temple can significantly boost connectivity and tourist management by employing smart tourism methods, such as digital promotion, online pilgrimage databases, and smart fascilities. By maximizing use of resources and minimizing environmental impacts, this approach can promote sustainable tourism.

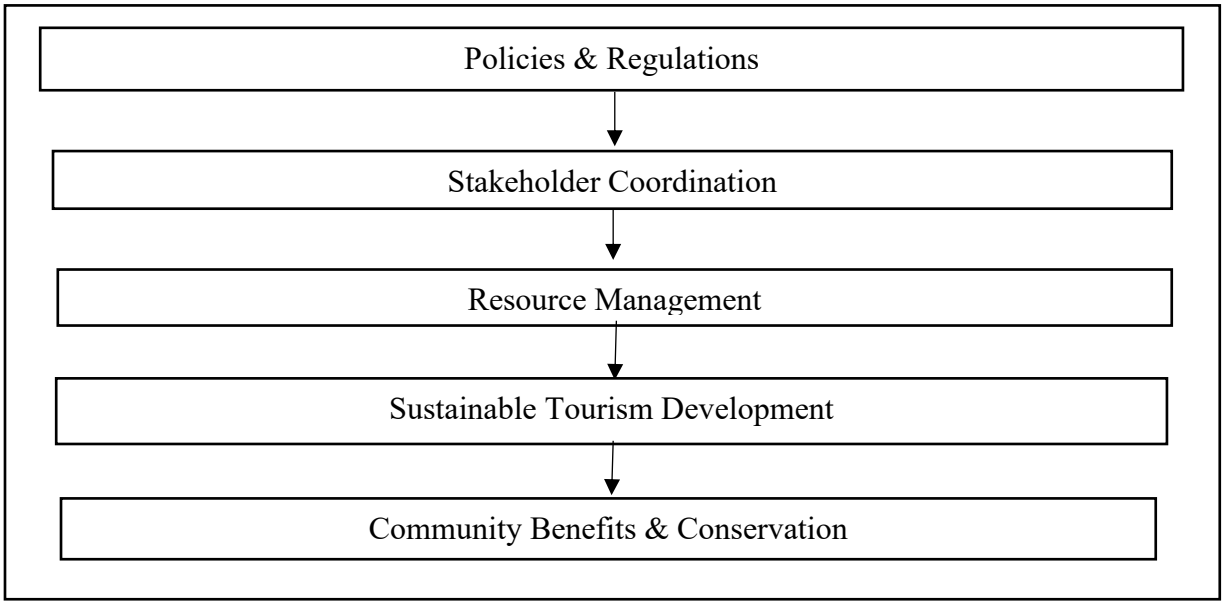


Sustainable Tourism Governance Theory

The objective of sustainable tourism governance theory is to regulate the development of the tourism. Efficient management structure are essential for ensuring tourism growth is inclusive, environment friendly, and beneficial for the local residents, based on recent research by Horald Goodwin (2021).

Within Pathivara temple territory, management is necessary for regulating tourism, restricting the building of infrastructure, and assuring the conservation of the environment. To integrate economic growth with cultural and ecological safeguarding, local government, community group, and stakeholder of tourism should collaborate with each other.

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Religious Tourism in Nepal

Historic civilization and strong spiritual beliefs of Nepal, where pilgrimage has become a vital ritual for both Buddhist and Hindu devotees for spiritual happiness, are the backbone of nation's religious tourism industry. This tradition has its origin in ancient history and was significantly affected by Emperor Ashoka, who helped to spread Buddhism and constructed sacred places like Lumbini. Nepal has grown into a center for religious and cultural exchange over the years, attracting pilgrim from all over the world, particularly with the increase in foreign tourism (Timothy & Olsen, 2020; Sharma, 2021). Tourism and preservation of culture are greatly helped by popular attractions like Swayambhunath and Pashupatinath temple (Rinschede, 2021; Adhikari & Bhattarai, 2022). Festivals and traditions are closely linked with spiritual tourism, which encourages interaction between different cultures (Timothy & Olsen, 2020; Sharma, 2021). Yet, the problem like commercialization and degradation of environment still remain (Nyaupane et al., 2020; Adhikari & Bhattarai, 2022). However it offers substantial socioeconomic benefits especially in the countryside, boosting growth and employment (Sharma, 2021; Nyaupane et al., 2020).

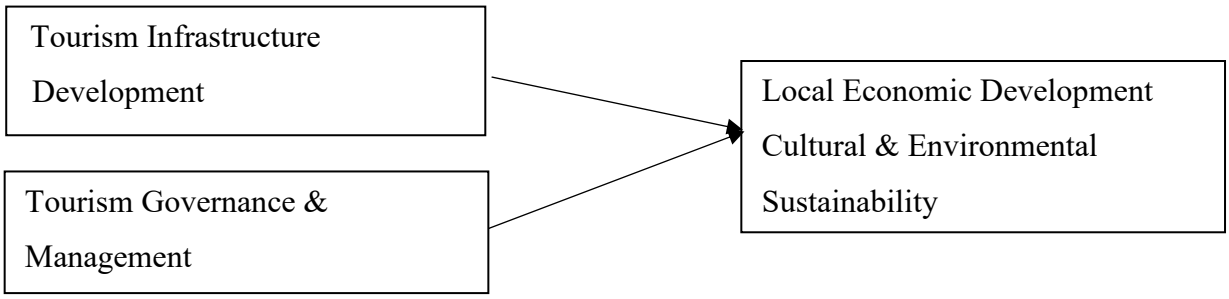
Research gaps

Although religious tourism is growing increasingly significant in Nepal, there are still quit number of gap in the literature. First, although large number of research studies have focused on popular holy places like Pashupatinath temple and Lumbini, yet new pilgrimage locations Pathivara temple were given less focus. Second, there is absence of research studies which combine environmental, socioeconomic, and cultural factors into an integrated analytical framework, particularly when using a mixed-method approach. Third, present studies often focus on financial advantages while neglecting issues like community participation, proper management, and sustainability of environment in remote Himalayan regions. Finally, there lack many beneficial, case-specific guidelines for handeling sustainable tourism which take consideration into particular features of sacred places such as Pathivara. By providing thorough and comprehensive analysis, this research attempt to fill these gaps.

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Conceptual framework

Tourism Infrastructure Development and Tourism Governance & Management improve Local Economic Development and Cultural & Environmental Sustainability.



Independent Variables

- Tourism Infrastructure Development
- Tourism Governance & Management

Dependent Variables

- Local Economic Development
- Cultural & Environmental Sustainability

Research methodology

The research applied mixed-methods research approach consisting of quantitative and qualitative methods to provide complete picture of structure of religious tourism in Pathivara temple region. Although the qualitative part looks extensively into opinions, experiences, and contextual ideas related to tourism development, the quantitative part focuses on measuring correlations between key variables.

The descriptive correlational research design is employed for quantitative portion. It intends to measure the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Using measurable indications, this approach helps in figuring out the direction magnitude of correlations between different factors.

The descriptive qualitative portion seeks to understand the real-life experiences, points of view, and problems faced by community members, such as local pilgrims and hospitality businesses. Such dual-methods approach enhances results' reliability and accuracy by providing both statistical evidence and contextual detail.

Residents, tourism entrepreneurs, pilgrims, and stakeholders involved in tourism-related activities in Pathivara temple area constitute the research population. Respondents with personal experience or participated in religious tourism were selected applying purposeful sample method. This comprises local entrepreneurs, tourist's guides, hotel owners, and leaders of the community.

To ensure appropriate statistical representation, the research aims to collect information from between 200-300 respondents for the quantitative survey. For the purpose to get a greater understanding of tourism development issues, 15-20 key respondents are also selected for qualitative interviews.

Two primary sources were used to collect data:

i. Structured Questionnaire (Quantitative Data): Respondents are provided a standardized questionnaire to evaluate their opinions on sustainable methods, financial advantages, governmental effectiveness, and development of infrastructures. A 5-point likert scale which ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree are used to develop the questionnaires.

ii. Semi-Structured Interviews (Qualitative Data):Choosen stakeholders are interviewed comprehensibly regarding issues such as policy, effectiveness, cultural impacts, tourism challenges, and the concerns regarding the environment. This approach provides greater depth of knowledge by providing freedom and detailed responses.

The research study with 20 respondents are carried out before the collection of primary data to evaluate the questionnaire's validity and clarity. Cronbach's Alpha (threshold>0.70) is used to assess reliability and tool is improved as needed. Statistical tools which include descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis are used to analyse quantitative data. Thematic analysis is used for examining qualitative data to find important trends and insights on the development and sustainability of the tourism. By combining contextual understanding with quantitative data, mixed-method approach ensures a detailed and complete analysis of religious tourism in Pathivara temple region.

Results

The data collected from the respondents is analyzed and interpreted in this section with a focus on how Pathivara temple area's tourism infrastructure development, governance, and management affect the local economic development and cultural and environmental sustainability. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis are combined into to the analysis. The research questions and research questions are taken into consideration while evaluating the results.

Demographic Analysis

Table1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 212)

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent (%)
Qualification	PhD	3	1.4
	M.Phil.	7	3.3
	Masters	101	47.6
	Bachelors	73	34.4
	PCL/+2	28	13.2
Age Group	Below 25 years	36	17
	25–35 years	52	24.5
	36–45 years	63	29.7
	Above 45 years	61	28.8
Occupation/Role	Tourism Entrepreneur	44	20.8
	Local Resident	94	44.3

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	Service Provider (Guide/Hotel Staff)	49	23.1
	Government officials	25	11.8
Experience	Less than 5 years	32	15.1
	5–10 years	37	17.5
	10–15 years	58	27.4
	More than 15 years	85	40.1

The demographic analysis shows that the majority of respondents (47.6%) hold a Master's degree, followed by M.Phil. (18.4%), Bachelor's (34.4%), PCL/Plus Two (13.2%), M. Phil (3.3%), and PhD (1.4%). In terms of age, most respondents fall within the 36–45 years category (29.7%), followed by above 45 years (28.8%), 25–35 years (24.5%), and below 25 years (17%). Regarding occupation, the largest group consists of local residents (44.3%), followed by tourism entrepreneurs (20.8%), service providers (23.1%), and government officials (11.8%). In terms of experience, most respondents (40.1%) have more than 15 years of experience. Overall, the sample represents experienced and knowledgeable individuals actively involved in tourism and community activities in the Pathivara region.

Reliability Test

Table 2: Reliability Test of Study Variables (n = 212)

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Tourism Infrastructure Development	0.918	5
Tourism Governance & Management	0.903	5
Local Economic Development	0.919	5
Cultural & Environmental Sustainability	0.922	5

The reliability analysis indicates high internal consistency across all variables, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.70. Cultural & environmental sustainability shows the highest reliability (α = 0.922), followed by local economic development (α = 0.919). This confirms that the measurement scales used in the study are reliable and suitable for analysis.

Descriptive Analysis

Table3: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (n = 212)

Variables	Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tourism Infrastructure Development	Availability of transportation facilities	212	1	5	4.3915	0.98929
	Adequate accommodation services	212	1	5	4.0094	0.91325

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	Quality of basic facilities (water, sanitation)	212	1	5	4.1792	0.92154
	Accessibility to the temple area	212	1	5	4.0519	0.91442
	Support for tourism growth	212	1	5	4.1038	0.94321
Tourism Governance & Management	Effective tourism policies	212	1	5	4.316	0.96828
	Coordination among stakeholders	212	1	5	4.0094	0.91843
	Environmental management practices	212	1	5	4.1132	0.98154
	Regulation of tourism activities	212	1	5	4.1557	0.85947
	Community participation in decision-making	212	1	5	4.0566	0.92701
Local Economic Development	Increase in local income	212	1	5	4.3962	0.99933
	Employment opportunities	212	1	5	4.1226	0.95593
	Growth of local businesses	212	1	5	4.066	0.90568
	Improvement in living standards	212	1	5	4.0425	0.97022
	Economic stability in the region	212	1	5	4.1132	0.92691
Cultural & Environmental Sustainability	Preservation of cultural practices	212	1	5	4.4151	0.9426
	Protection of natural environment	212	1	5	3.9906	0.91325

	Promotion of local traditions	212	1	5	4.1132	0.94714
	Sustainable use of resources	212	1	5	4.1132	1.01944
	Balance between tourism and culture	212	1	5	4.0613	0.92414

The descriptive statistics show that respondents have a strong positive perception of tourism development factors, with all mean values above 4.0. Tourism infrastructure development is perceived positively, especially in terms of transportation availability (Mean = 4.39). Tourism governance & management also shows strong agreement, particularly regarding policy effectiveness and stakeholder coordination. Among dependent variables, local economic development shows high agreement, indicating that tourism significantly contributes to income generation and employment. Similarly, cultural and environmental sustainability is rated positively, reflecting the importance of preserving traditions and natural resources. The relatively low standard deviations indicate consistency in responses.

Regression Analysis

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Study Variables (n = 212)

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	R	R^2	F-value	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Tourism Infrastructure Development	Local Economic Development	0.884	0.781	750.663	0.884	27.398	0
Tourism Infrastructure Development	Cultural & Environmental Sustainability	0.908	0.824	981.645	0.908	31.331	0
Tourism Governance & Management	Local Economic Development	0.858	0.737	587.6	0.858	24.24	0
Tourism Governance & Management	Cultural & Environmental Sustainability	0.911	0.83	1026.343	0.911	32.037	0

The regression analysis shows that both tourism infrastructure development and tourism governance & management have a strong and statistically significant impact on local economic development and cultural & environmental sustainability. Infrastructure development explains 78.1% of the variance in economic development and 82.4% in sustainability, while governance explains 73.7% and 83.0% respectively. High beta values indicate strong positive influence. These findings confirm that effective infrastructure and governance are critical drivers of sustainable tourism development in the Pathivara Temple area.

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Result of qualitative analysis

According to the qualitative outcomes, respondents agreed that the establishment of tourism infrastructure a key component in Pathivara temple region's access, tourist flow, and local economic development. Although feedback about increased population seasonal restriction still remain, better roads, quality housing, and basic needs are broadly appreciated. Governing and management of tourism are regarded as vital, but they require more public participation, improved coordination, and further concrete policy. Participant highlight that tourism has significantly boosted local earnings and employment opportunities. Although environmental concerns such as waste management and demand for research remain problems which must be effectively managed, preservation of culture has been strengthened by increased awareness practices.

Integration of results of quantitative and qualitative analysis

The integration of quantitative and qualitative results demonstrates a strong convergence in findings. Quantitative analysis confirms that tourism infrastructure development and governance significantly influence local economic development and cultural and environmental sustainability. These statistical relationships are supported by qualitative insights, where respondents emphasized practical improvements in income, employment, and cultural preservation. However, qualitative data also adds depth by identifying challenges such as uneven infrastructure, weak governance coordination, and environmental pressure. While quantitative results reflect overall positive perceptions, qualitative findings highlight areas needing improvement. Together, both approaches provide a comprehensive understanding of tourism dynamics, strengthening the validity and practical relevance of the study.

Conclusion and implications

The findings of this study indicate that the religious tourism in the Pathivara Temple area has a positive impact on the economic development of the area and for the sustainable development of the cultural and environmental context of the region. The results support the importance of the development of tourism infrastructure and good governance as factors that affect sustainable tourism outcomes. Better access, services and management practices also have positive impacts on income generation and cultural preservation, however, environmental pressure, unequal infrastructure, governance deficits remain. The quantitative and qualitative results themselves are amalgamated, providing a strong indication that balanced and planned tourism development is needed. In general, the study highlights the importance of destination management strategies that have a positive impact on the destination's sacred character and sustainability. The study offers significant policy recommendations to the relevant authorities at national and local levels, tour operators and planners. It recommends that the development of infrastructure, such as transport, accommodation and basic services, should be given high priority to improve the accessibility and user's experience. To achieve sustainable management, it is important to build up the governance of tourism by implementing effective policies, coordinating stakeholders and involving local communities. The results also underscore the importance of protecting the sacred landscape with environmental protection measures, including waste management and resource conservation. Furthermore, fostering participation in the economic opportunities can guarantee equity of benefits to local communities. Overall

the study is positive for developing sustainable and integrated tourism model for emerging religious tourist destinations in Nepal.

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Consent for publication: Not applicable.
Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests.
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