



Nature tourism in Garhwal Himalaya: Analyzing the local stakeholders' perception of the benefits of the tourism Industry

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to study the perception of the local stakeholders (members from the local community and the tourism service providers) towards the benefits of nature tourism development in the study area. For this purpose, the paper analyses the perceptions of the local stakeholders' with the help of primary data collection in the 10 selected mountain villages of Bhilangana valley in Garhwal Himalayas. In order to achieve the research specific objectives, the data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires consisting of questions based on 5-point Likert's scale for each group of respondents. The process of sampling was convenient sampling as per the availability of respondents in the sampled villages of the study area. Cluster analysis, Independent sample t-test and one way ANOVA tests were used to study the perception of local stakeholders'. The research paper found that the local stakeholders' had a positive perception of the benefits of tourism development in their region. The findings of the study would be helpful for the region's policy planners to design a plan to involve the local stakeholders' in sustainable nature tourism development and promotion. The paper presents the first study of the local stakeholders' perception about the nature tourism development in the selected mountain villages of Bhilangana Valley in Garhwal Himalayas.

Keywords: Bhilangana Valley, India, nature tourism, local stakeholders', perception.

Introduction

Nature-based tourism is defined as tourism "primarily concerned with the direct enjoyment of some relatively undisturbed phenomenon of nature" (Valentine, 1992:108). It is a form of tourism that depends on nature and natural settings (Hall & Boyd, 2005) and includes activities such as bird watching or avitourism which is important in general economic development in especially rural areas in countries. Avitourism is an economic activity that will contribute to the sustainable economic and social development of the country and also contribute to both environmental and cultural heritage preservation, while concurrently safeguarding the involvement of the local communities and other stakeholders in the process (Nicolaidis, 2013). Then there is kayaking, and hiking, with the intent of getting in touch with nature, escaping the stresses of daily life, and seeing landscapes and wildlife (Blamey, 2001). Participation in such recreation has become a major component of domestic and international tourism (TIA 2002; TIES 2003). Over the past two decades, both nature and adventure tourism have developed to be part of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry. With an annual growth rate of 10-30%, nature tourism seems to be the fastest growing sector. Its share in the world travel market is currently about 20% (Christ et al, 2003; UNWTO, 2005).



Mountains have been the home for various species of flora and fauna. The source of the major perennial rivers, mountains are known as the lifeline for the countries or regions where these rivers flow (Whiteman, 1988). The Himalayan mountain system, which is the highest, youngest and ecologically more fragile, is one of the most prominent among the other mountain systems of the world. Mountains cover one-fifth of the globe and are home to 1.2 billion or 20% of the human population. Mechanisms for extracting and distributing benefits from ecosystem services are a widespread concern. The population in the mountain areas is comparatively more backward and underdeveloped. Recently, the sustainability issues in these areas have gotten more attention because of poor development in the mountain areas (Sati, 2005).

Uttarakhand, the 27th state of India, also known as “*DevBhoomi*” or the “Land of Gods” was carved out of Uttar Pradesh in November 2000. It is the land of opportunities, advantageously located at the foothills of the Himalayan ranges and has a mountainous geography. Uttarakhand has a total area of 53,483 sq. km, of which around 86% area is mountainous and 70% is covered under forest. It forms part of the northern boundary of the country, sharing its border with Nepal and Tibet. It touches Tibet in the north, Himachal Pradesh in the west and north-west, Gangetic plains of Uttar Pradesh in the south and Nepal in the east. Starting from the foothills in the south, it extends to the snow-clad mountains in the north. The state is rich in natural resources, especially water and forests reserves with many glaciers, rivers and dense forests boasting a peaceful and pollution free favorable environment. The economic agenda of the state clearly focuses on tourism development, as the state is endowed with vast prospects for leisure, nature, and religious/spiritual tourism, with unlimited opportunities in the tourism related services. Char-dhams, the four most sacred and revered Hindu temples of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri are nestled in the mighty mountains.

The presence of several hill stations, wildlife parks, pilgrimage places and trekking routes make Uttarakhand an attractive tourist destination. The flow of tourist arrivals in the state increased from 101,970 in 2014-15 to 105,880 in 2015-16. The Himalayan state of Uttarakhand hosts millions of tourists during the tourist season and due to scarce industrial opportunities in the region, a major portion of the money spent by them plays a significant role in ensuring the economic prosperity of the region along with creating avenues for establishing various enterprises aimed at fulfilling the diverse needs of tourists. The geographic location and topography of the state provide an opportunity to the nature tourists to indulge in diverse nature tourism-centric activities.

Literature Review

Liu, Sheldon, and Var (1987) focused on the resident perception of tourism’s impact and indicated that residents of the tourism destination equally shared the impacts of tourism regardless of their geographical locations and maturity levels of tourism. Their results suggested that the people living in the area where the tourism industry is more matured are very well aware of positive and negative environmental impacts of tourism. Johnson, David, and Akis (1994) noticed high expectations in the resident’s attitude towards socio-economic expansion from tourism development. Wan Ko and Stewart (2002) in their study concluded that, residents satisfaction was influenced by the perception of tourism impacts, and may be useful in planning for additional tourism development. Nicolaidis (2008) stressed the importance of quality service in order to make tourism sustainable. Ernoul (2009) noticed the integration in the local residents’ concerns and fear about the new form of tourism development in their region. Sdrali, Rizou and Kiouritidou (2014) supported the role of local community or residents in the tourism promotion and they also highlighted local resident’s participatory opportunities in the development. Nicolaidis and Sumbana (2011) argue that in any venture, good leadership is required or any project is doomed to fail. Nicolaidis (2015) stated that all stakeholders must be carefully considered and as far as possible serviced in terms of their involvement needs. Garcia, Fernandez, Vazquez, and Macias (2015) and Nicolaidis (2015), highlighted that attitudes of residents influence the hospitality, development



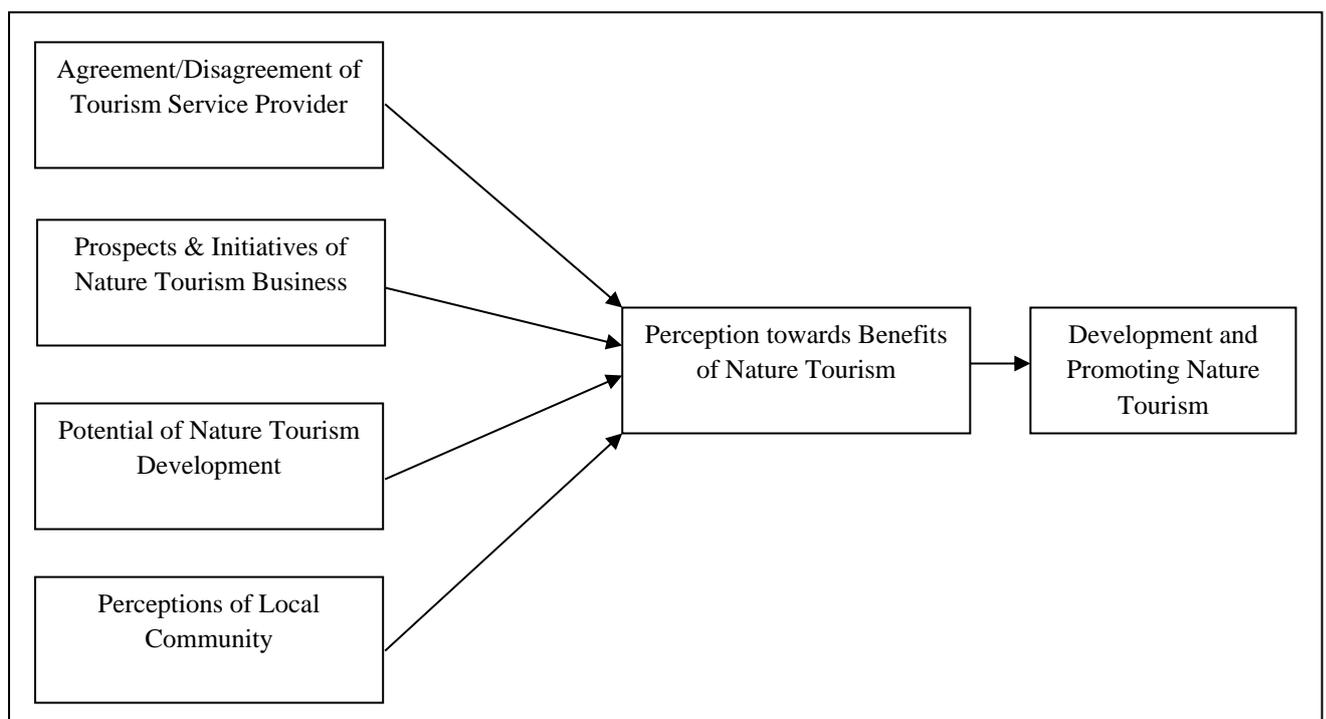
and sustainability of tourism. Garcia et al (2015) also suggest to involve residents in decisions related to tourism, while Nicolaidis (2012) accentuates the need for quality service in local restaurants so as to attract clients.

Bagri and Kala (2016) examined the attitude of residents towards tourism impacts and the influence of demographic attributes on their attitudes in Koti -Kanasar, Indroli, Pattayur circuit of Uttarakhand and found that the residents understood the extent of tourism impacts in their mountainous region with respect to economic, social and environmental dimensions. Singh, Mal and Kala (2009) studied the community responses to mountain tourism in the Bhyundar Valley of Uttarakhand. The study found that to deal with the negative effects of tourism, the local community was introduced to ecotourism and involved to ensure sustainability in the region agreeing with Grobler and Nicolaidis (2016), in the form of Eco Development Committees. In the same vein, it is important to consider codes of conduct in tourism operations through which stakeholders can be kept in line (Nicolaidis & Tassiopoulos, 2017). Gupta and Rout (2016) applied a value chain approach in the promotion of community based ecotourism in the Jaunsar Bawar region of Uttarakhand and highlighted the potential of community and the need to involve them in the development process. The studies done by the researchers have pressed the importance of stakeholders involvement and the need to study their perception to ensure righteous tourism development in the mountainous natural environment.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Tourism planners are increasingly considering tourism as a viable socio-economic development strategy, as many communities experience industrial restructuring (Harill, 2004; Nicolaidis, 2015). Consequently, most of the communities of Bhilangana Valley of Garhwal Himalayas are exposed to tourism for first time, whereas traditional destinations experience increasing volumes of tourists. Tourism planners of Uttarakhand are now analyzing by understanding the local communities perception of the nature tourism in the region in order to gain community support for tourism projects and similar initiatives. By exploring the literature on residents' perception towards nature tourism development, the conceptual framework of this article is to analyze the perceptions of residents on (1) Agreement/Disagreement of Tourism Service Provider (TSP), (2) Prospects and Initiatives of Nature Tourism Business (3) Potential of Nature Tourism Development and (4) Assessment of the Perceptions of Local Community. These parameters will be helpful for tourism development planners with a basis for initiating residents' participation in the development program which is essential to consider (Nicolaidis, 2015).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study





Study Area

The Garhwal Himalaya situated between the latitude of 29° 26' to 31° 28' N and longitudes 77° 49' to 86° 06' E is blessed with a large number of river systems. The river Bhilangna is a major tributary of the river Ganga (Ganges) in Garhwal Himalaya. It originates from the Khatling glacier approximately 50 km south of the ice cave at Gaumukh at an elevation of 3717 masl. Earlier, the river Bhilangana flowed to a length of 95 km from its origin to join river Bhagirathi at Old Tehri.

Bhilangana valley falls under the TehriGarhwal district of Utrakhand. The entrance to the valley is from Gadolia to Khatling Glacier. The Bhilangana valley, draining the river of the same name, is a beautiful and relatively virgin valley. There is a well-trodden trekking route adjoining to the Bhilangana valley. In two stages of 10 km each the trek reaches Gangi (via Reeh). This friendly village has spectacular views. Moving on, the trek proceeds via Kalyani to Bhelbagi and finally to Bhumka, the last camping ground before the Khatling glacier. One of the early visitors here was Dr. J.B. Auden. During his exploratory visit to the Gangotriarea, he had finally crossed a pass between Gangotri III (6577 m) and Jogin (6465 m) peaks from Rudugaira Bamak. He descended to the Bhilangana valley. This col is now called 'Auden's Col' and the route was repeated twice in 1983, from both directions. On the north-west of Bhilangana valley lays a group of peaks: Kairi (5435 m), Draupadi-ka-Danda (5724 m) and even an approach to Janoli (6632 m) are possible. On the north-east, via the Dudhganga Bamak, one can join the route of Vasukital and descend to Kedarnath. Towards Gangi, the old pilgrim route traversed valleys: from Gangotri to Booda Kedar, down to Gangi, across Bhilangana valley to climb the eastern ridge, locally called PanwaliKantha. The route proceeds on north on this flattish ridge awarding some of the finest views of peaks – Janoli, Thalay Sagar, and others. Towards east to descend Mugu Chatti and Triyugi Narayan near the Kedarnath route (Kapadia, 1998).

Methodology

The aim of the research is to study the perception of the local stakeholders that includes both the local residents and the tourism service providers towards the benefits of nature tourism development in the study area. In the research work, the primary data was collected from the local community of the 10 sampled villages and the tourism service providers operating in the Bhilangana Valley of Garhwal Himalaya in Uttarakhand.

The respondents of the study comprised of 400 members from the local community and 100 tourism service providers respectively. The samples were collected from the 10 sampled villages of Bhilangana Valley i.e., Bhatti, Koti, Megadhar, Akhori, Gangi, Gangeri urf Paneri, Dewat, Jyundana, Pokhar, Rani Dang May Ghutai Palla. In order to achieve the research specific objectives, the data was collected through semi-structured questionnaires including questions based on a 5-point Likert scale for each group of respondents. The process of sampling was convenience sampling as per the availability of respondents in the sampled villages of the study area. The villages were selected on the basis of their tourism potential vis-à-vis available tourist attractions and tourism infrastructure along with the tourists' visitation. The conduct of this study entails the detailed account of the demographic profiles of the respondents. It is assumed that the attributes of the respondents influenced their behavior and answers on the survey questions and the particular significance to the achievement of the stated objectives of the study (Shivam, 2017).

Table 1: Sample size of local people and tourism service providers

S.N	Village	Local People sample size	Tourism Service Providers sample size
1.	Bhatti	40	10
2.	Koti	40	10



3.	Megadhar	40	10
4.	Akhori	40	10
5.	Gangi	40	10
6.	Rani Dang May GhutaiPalla	40	10
7.	GangeriUrfPaneri	40	10
8.	Jyundana	40	10
9.	Pokhar	40	10
10.	Dewat	40	10
Total		400	100

Following are the objectives and the hypothesis formulated for this study:

Objective 1: To assess the perception of the local stakeholders' towards the benefits of nature tourism development.

Hypothesis (H1): There is no significant difference between the perception of local community and tourism service providers towards the benefits of nature tourism development in the region.

Table 2: Final Cluster Centres

S. No.	Final Cluster Centres		
	Parameters	Cluster	
		1	2
1	Development of Employment Opportunities	1.58	4.06
2	Strong Economic contributor to the local community	1.72	4.15
3	Potential to attract tourist	1.58	4.02
4	Nature Tourist should be allowed to visit the village	2.12	4.03
5	Promote a local indigenous culture of the region	2.18	4.05
6	Improve the quality of local community	2.02	4.06
7	The localcommunity should be hospitable towards tourists	2.10	4.09
8	Nature Tourism would be a source of revenue for the local community	1.94	4.15
9	Nature Tourist would assist the local community in the development	1.58	3.90
10	The localcommunity should get involved in Nature Tourism-related business	2.68	3.90
11	Skill development programme should be organized for local community	2.13	4.11
12	The localcommunity should be involved in the Nature Tourism planning process	2.68	3.92
13	PPP should be allowed to develop and promote Nature Tourism in the Region	3.79	2.47
14	The localcommunity should support promotion and development of Nature Tourism	1.58	3.94
15	Nature Tourism would lead to the holistic development	2.17	4.08

The table 2 shows the final cluster centres to the mean value of each parameter for each of the 2 clusters. Cluster 1 consisted of the respondents who in their recorded responses disagreed with all the stated parameters (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,11,14,15) and on 2 parameters (10 and 12) the respondents registered a neutral response. Cluster 2 consisted of respondents who thought positively or recorded their agreement when asked about the above-mentioned parameters except parameter number 13 i.e., PPP should be allowed to develop and promote Nature Tourism in the region where respondents disagreed with the statement. This indicated that the local community was not in much favor of the involvement of private firms in the development of nature tourism in the region. On further analysis, it was found that the host community not only had a positive attitude towards the tourists visiting the region but they were also well aware of the benefits of nature tourism and wanted that the local community is fully involved in the decision making and planning process with the financial assistance from the Government.



Table 3: Agreement and disagreement levels of the tourism service providers' Independent Sample t-test

Variables	Gender	N	Mean±S.D.	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Nature Tourism is a profitable business in the region	Male	96	2.71±1.08	.377	.707*
	Female	4	2.50±1.00		
Performance of business is satisfactory	Male	96	2.66±1.10	1.041	.300*
	Female	4	3.25±1.50		
The region has potential to start a nature tourism-related business	Male	96	3.70±.99	.102	.919*
	Female	4	3.75±1.26		
Govt. run schemes to encourage nature tourism entrepreneurship in the region	Male	96	2.45±1.01	1.052	.296*
	Female	4	3.00±1.41		
Govt. encourages the local community to get involved in nature tourism business	Male	94	3.37±1.09	.684	.496*
	Female	4	3.75±.50		
Easy to start and operate nature tourism business in the region	Male	96	2.47±.98	.432	.667*
	Female	4	2.25±1.26		
Development of nature tourism would solve the problem of unemployment in the region	Male	96	3.33±1.11	1.194	.235*
	Female	4	4.00±.00		
Development of nature tourism would reduce outmigration from the region	Male	96	3.34±1.10	1.184	.239*
	Female	4	4.00±.00		
Soft skill and training programs should be organized for the service providers	Male	96	3.89±.88	.800	.425*
	Female	4	4.25±.50		
Nature Tourism would lead to the holistic development of the region	Male	96	4.00±.68	.725	.470*
	Female	4	4.25±.50		

*df=98 (*p>.05 shows no significant difference) hypothesis accepted*

(Source: Own computed data)



Table 3 depicts the agreement and disagreement levels of the tourism service providers with reference to the present status of nature tourism and its further possibilities in solving the problems in the region related variables in the 5 point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Uncertain, 4= Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) according to the gender of the respondents (1=Male, 2=Female). An independent sample t-test was applied for analysing the agreement levels of the respondents and the data showed that the variable related to the nature tourism is the profitable business in the region (P=0.707), performance of business is satisfactory (P=0.300), the region has potential to start nature tourism related business (P=0.919), Govt. run schemes can encourage nature tourism entrepreneurship in the region (P=0.296), Govt. encourages local community to get involved in nature tourism business (P=0.496), easy to start and operate nature tourism business in the region (P=0.667), Development of nature tourism would solve the problem of unemployment in the region (P=0.235), development of nature tourism would reduce outmigration from the region (0.239). Soft skill and training programs should be organized for the service providers (P=0.425) and Nature Tourism would lead to the holistic development of the region (P=0.470) respectively indicates that there was no significant difference in the responses of the respondent. In simple terms, the analyzed data reflects that the tourism service providers of both genders agreed with the potential of nature tourism and the opportunities it provides to improve the existing conditions of the region.

Table 4: Nature Tourism business related analysis of sampled Tourism Service Providers (One-Way ANOVA)

Variables	Education status	N	Mean± S.D.	F	Sig.
Nature Tourism is a profitable business in the region	Primary Education	11	2.91±.83	1.050	.374*
	Secondary Education	61	1.09±.14		
	Graduate	27	1.12±.21		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
Performance of business is satisfactory	Primary Education	11	3.00±1.09	1.568	.202*
	Secondary Education	61	2.75±1.12		
	Graduate	27	2.44±1.08		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
The region has potential to start a nature tourism-related business	Primary Education	11	3.63±.81	1.049	.374*
	Secondary Education	61	3.75±1.06		
	Graduate	27	3.67±.92		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
Govt. runs schemes to encourage nature tourism entrepreneurship in the region	Primary Education	11	2.73±1.27	.381	.767*
	Secondary Education	61	2.41±1.04		
	Graduate	27	2.52±.93		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
	Primary Education	11	4.09±.83		



Govt. encourages the local community to get involved in nature tourism business	Secondary Education	61	3.31±1.02	1.975	.123*
	Graduate	27	3.26±1.19		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
Easy to start and operate nature tourism business in the region	Primary Education	11	3.00±1.18	3.435	.020**
	Secondary Education	6	2.23±.92		
	Graduate	27	2.78±.93		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
Govt. is providing financial assistance	Primary Education	11	2.54±.93	.155	.926*
	Secondary Education	6	2.39±1.05		
	Graduate	27	2.48±.97		
	Post Graduate	1	-		

* $p > .05$ shows no significant difference ** $p < .05$ shows a significant difference (Source: Own computed data)

Table 4 depicts the agreement and disagreement levels of the tourism service providers with reference to the present status of nature tourism and its further possibilities in solving the problems in the region related variables in the 5 point Likert's scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Uncertain, 4= Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) as per the educational qualification of the respondents (1=Primary Education, 2=Secondary Education, 3=Graduate, 4=Post Graduate). One-Way ANOVA analysis was applied in the above tabular analysis. In the analysis, the dependent variable was an educational qualification of the tourism service providers and the independent variables were several factors which showed the agreement levels of the respondents.

In the above analysis, on being asked about the agreement level with respect to Nature Tourism as the profitable business in the region, respondents of all educational qualifications tended to disagree with the statement with the factor ($P=0.374$). Whether performance of their business is satisfactory in the region, the respondents of all educational backgrounds except for a primary education group disagreed, while the primary educational group was uncertain about the statement ($P=0.202$). On being asked about their agreement levels regarding the regions potential to start a nature tourism-related business, all the respondents tended to agree with the potential of nature tourism in the study area ($P=0.374$). All the respondents were also found to disagree when asked whether government runs schemes to encourage nature tourism entrepreneurship in the region ($P=0.767$).

All the respondents agreed with the statement that government encourages the local community to get involved in nature tourism business ($P=0.123$). When asked whether it was easy to start and operate nature tourism businesses in the region, all the respondents except for the primary education group disagreed with the statement while the primary education holders were uncertain about the statement ($P=0.020$). All the respondents also disagreed with the statement that government is providing financial assistance (0.926). There was no significant difference found in the various factors except the factor about whether it was easy to start and operate nature tourism business in the region which showed a significant difference.



Table 5: Nature Tourism development related analysis of sampled Tourism Service Providers (One-Way ANOVA)

Variables	Education status	N	Mean±S.D.	F	Sig.
Development of nature tourism would solve the problem of unemployment in the region	Primary Education	11	3.91±1.04	1.696	.173*
	Secondary Education	61	3.36±1.08		
	Graduate	27	3.18±1.11		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
Development of nature tourism would reduce outmigration from the region	Primary Education	11	3.82±.981	1.197	.315*
	Secondary Education	61	3.33±1.11		
	Graduate	27	3.33±1.07		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
Nature Tourism would lead to the holistic development of the region	Primary Education	11	4.18±.404	.373	.773*
	Secondary Education	61	4.02±.670		
	Graduate	27	3.92±.780		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
The region has a lot of nature tourist attractions	Primary Education	11	3.64±.809	.209	.890*
	Secondary Education	61	3.85±.945		
	Graduate	27	3.74±1.09		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
A lot of activities for nature tourists to engage in the region	Primary Education	11	3.73±.904	1.470	.227*
	Secondary Education	61	3.75±.960		
	Graduate	27	3.30±1.03		
	Post Graduate	1	-		

**p>.05 shows no significant difference* (Source: Own computed data)

The table 5 depicts the agreement and disagreement levels of the tourism service providers with reference to the nature tourism development and its implications related variables in the region in the 5 point Likert's scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Uncertain, 4= Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) as per the educational qualification of the respondents (1=Primary Education, 2=Secondary Education, 3=Graduate, 4=Post Graduate). One-Way ANOVA analysis was applied in the above tabular analysis. In the analysis, the dependent variable was an educational qualification of the tourism service providers and the independent variables were nature tourism development related variables which showed the agreement levels of the respondents.

In the analysis, on being asked about the agreement level whether the development of nature tourism would solve the problem of unemployment in the region, respondents of all educational qualifications agreed with the statement with the factor (P=0.173). On being asked whether the development of nature tourism would reduce outmigration from the region, the respondents of all educational backgrounds agreed with the statement (P=0.315). On being asked about their agreement levels regarding whether nature tourism would lead to the holistic development of the region, all the respondents agreed that nature tourism would act as a catalyst for the development of study area (P=0.773). All the respondents also agreed when



asked whether the region has a lot of natural tourist attractions ($P=0.890$). All the respondents agreed with the statement that there were a lot of activities for tourists to engage in the region ($P=0.227$). There was no significant difference found in the various nature tourism development related variables ($p>.05$ shows no significant difference).

Table 6: Local Community-related analysis of the sampled tourism service providers (One-Way ANOVA)

Variables	Education status	N	Mean±S.D.	F	Sig.
The local community of the region understand the importance of the development of nature tourism	Primary Education	11	4.00±.45	1.827	.147*
	Secondary Education	61	3.34±1.08		
	Graduate	27	3.70±.99		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
The local community have friendly relation with the service providers and assist in development and promotion of nature tourism	Primary Education	11	3.82±.75	.509	.677*
	Secondary Education	61	3.56±1.03		
	Graduate	27	3.41±1.05		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
The local community along with the service providers should be involved in nature tourism related planning and decision making	Primary Education	11	3.91±1.04	2.454	.068*
	Secondary Education	61	3.92±.90		
	Graduate	27	3.48±1.09		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
Local community support development and promotion of nature tourism in the region	Primary Education	11	3.64±.81	2.030	.115*
	Secondary Education	61	3.84±.95		
	Graduate	27	3.26±1.23		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
Soft skills and training programmes should be organized for the service providers	Primary Education	11	4.45±.52	2.035	.114*
	Secondary Education	61	3.84±.84		
	Graduate	27	3.89±.97		
	Post Graduate	1	-		
The local community of the region are hospitable and assist in attracting more tourist in the region	Primary Education	11	3.55±1.13	.200	.896*
	Secondary Education	6	3.52±1.06		
	Graduate	27	3.37±1.24		
	Post Graduate	1	-		

* $p>.05$ shows no significant difference (Source: Own computed data)



Table 6 depicts the agreement and disagreement levels of the tourism service providers with reference to the variables related to the host population of the region in the 5 point Likert's scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Uncertain, 4= Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) as per the educational qualification of the respondents (1=Primary Education, 2=Secondary Education, 3=Graduate, 4=Post Graduate). One-Way ANOVA analysis was applied in the above tabular analysis. In the analysis, the dependent variable was an educational qualification of the tourism service providers and the independent variables were several variables related to the local community of the region.

In the above analysis, on being asked whether the local community of the region understand the importance of the development of nature tourism, respondents of all educational qualifications agreed with the statement with the factor ($P=0.147$). Whether local community has friendly relations with the service providers and assists in development and promotion of nature tourism, the respondents of all educational backgrounds tended to agree with the statement ($P=0.677$). On being asked whether local community along with the service providers should be involved in nature tourism related planning and decision making, all the respondents agreed with the statement ($P=0.068$) in line with Nicolaidis (2015). All the respondents also agreed with the statement whether local community support development and promotion of nature tourism in the region is effective ($P=0.115$). All the respondents agreed with the statement that soft skills and training programmes should be organized for the service providers ($P=0.114$). When asked whether the local community of the region are hospitable and assist in attracting more tourist in the region, all the respondents agreed with the statement ($P=0.896$). There was no significant difference found in the various local community-related variables ($p>.05$ shows no significant difference).

Discussion

The study was undertaken to assess the level of acceptance with respect to the initiation of nature tourism in the region by studying the perception of local stakeholders' regarding nature tourism and its benefits, if any. The hypothesis designed for the objective was that there was no significant difference between the perception of local community and tourism service providers towards the benefits of nature tourism development in the region.

In this study to assess the agreement and disagreement levels of the respondents on several parameters for the development of nature tourism in the region, 15 variables were included in the questionnaire and among the 15 variables, 6 were related to development aspects. The variables used to check the perception of local community were, Nature tourism would lead to development of employment opportunities, Nature Tourism would be a strong socio-economic equity contributor to the local community, Nature Tourism would promote the local indigenous culture of the region, Nature Tourism would also improve the quality of life of local community, Nature Tourism would be a source of revenue for local community, Nature Tourism would lead to holistic development. All these aspects concur with Nicolaidis (2015) article.

In order to analyse the perception of local community with respect to their responses towards benefits of nature tourism in the region, the statistical analysis (Table 2) described that the responses received were classified into 2 clusters which further elucidated that out of the two classified clusters, Cluster 1 revealed the disagreement levels and Cluster 2 highlighted the agreement levels. On further analysis, the resultant table agreed with the proposed objectives and hypothesis as the local community were highly enthusiastic and agreed with the nature tourism potential of the valley and they agreed to be a part of the development and promotion of nature tourism in the study area.

In addition to the analysis of the perception levels of local community towards benefits of nature tourism in the area, similar variables were used to assess the perception levels of tourism service providers. The analysis was done with the help of independent sample t-test



(Table 3) with the gender of the respondents and the results showed that both the genders agreed with the opportunities related with the development of nature tourism in the region.

To analyze the benefits incurred from the development of nature tourism in the study area, 18 parameters were applied on the classification of benefits of nature tourism on three aspects. The three aspects were the development of nature tourism as a business activity (7 parameters, Table 4), as an option for economic development (5 parameters, Table 5) and the relationship between tourism service providers and local community (6 parameters, Table 6). The analysis revealed that tourism service providers agreed that nature tourism business is a profitable entrepreneurial venture in the region. The tourism service providers also indicated their agreement towards nature tourism as a beneficial economic activity provided the Government opens up avenues for the development and proliferation of the alternative form of tourism in the study area. As far as their relationship with the local community of the region, the tourism service providers were hopeful of their positivity towards the development of nature tourism and wanted their active involvement and participation in the cause.

Conclusion

Bhilingana Valley in the Garhwal Himalaya is blessed with nature's bounty. The region is a gold mine of natural attractions with a home to some of the magnificent natural tourist resources available in the country. A large part of this region is a biodiversity hotspot with the presence of rare indigenous flora and fauna which further exemplifies the natural significance of the region. Although the region is endowed with tourism attractions, the state and the tourism stakeholders were not able to fully harness the benefits of tourism. This was due to improper planning and development strategies implemented by the policy and decision makers leading to a growth of resentment in the host population. The mountainous region was also dealing with the problems of illiteracy, outmigration, unemployment and deforestation further adding to their woes.

In order to find sustainable solutions for the problems of the region, the present study was undertaken. The study with the help of data analysis concluded that the local stakeholders' of the region have positive perceptions about the benefits of nature tourism in the valley. They were aware of the immense nature tourism potential of the region in the form of available lush green meadows, waterfalls, oak tree forests etc. and expected the tourism policy and planners to actively develop and promote the region as a desired and sustainable nature tourism destination.

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