

## **Impact of COVID-19 on Travelling Behaviour of Nepalese Domestic Tourists**

**SUNITA DABADI<sup>1</sup> and ANISHA NAGARKOTI<sup>2</sup>**

PhD scholar. Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Nepal<sup>1</sup>  
Freelancer, Nepal<sup>2</sup>

dabadisunita@hotmail.com<sup>1</sup>  
nagarkoti.anisha@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

The purpose of the current research was to obtain a comprehensive insight about impact of COVID-19 on travelling behaviour of Nepalese domestic tourists. The paper examines perspectives of domestic tourists and experiences of tourism industry experts to cover all the aspects that is important while obtaining the travelling behaviour trends of tourists. Furthermore, the study aims to analyse how operators are advancing in response to these consumer behaviours. The report primarily based on a qualitative approach considering that it aims at understanding the underlying factors influencing the domestic tourist's behaviour to travel during the pandemic. An unstructured questionnaire was used for primary data collection from both interview and focus group discussions. The research revealed that the domestic tourists although are concerned about safety and security, they have realized the need for relaxation and break. Accessibility, unique destinations and strictness in following protocols are equally important requirement for all tourists. The decisions of domestic tourists according to the research demonstrates to be influenced tremendously by family factors, economic factors, personal preferences and situational factors especially brought out of the crisis. Social media and online presence play integral role in prompting individuals in every way of travelling. Although exceptional tourism service providers are offering discounts and promoting new type of packages, they seem to be lacking value added propositions, information marketing and operational competencies. Thus, resourceful recommendations based on worldwide practices and provisions for furthering the effort of all concerned authorities and service providers are developed which includes: marketing research to discover change in involvements brought by pandemic, appropriate operational practices and proactive promoting approaches.

**Keywords:** Domestic tourism, COVID-19, decision making, and tourist behaviour

### **INTRODUCTION**

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates plunging international tourism by 80% and predicts trillions of dollars in revenue losses. It is also noted that COVID-19 has a domino effect on the entire global economy which can threaten the lives of millions where 300 jobs are related to the tourism and hospitality industry alone (Grech et al., 2020). Countries are now endeavouring to adjust into a "new normal" by stepping out of lockdowns so as to restart their economies (Carr, 2020).

Amidst this situation, the tourism organizations faced uncertainty and struggled to operate with an indecisive epidemic state of affairs. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) projected the decline in international tourist arrivals by 1 to 3% in its press release on March starting, which later at the end of the same month was estimated as 20 to 30 % loss (Hussin and Siddappa, 2020). This depicted the dynamic nature of the pandemic. The number of international flights dropped by more than half and passenger numbers sank significantly as a result of social distancing seating policies. For instance: New Zealand airway disclosed that they are flying at less than half the total capacity even when "full" due to the restrictions and government requirement (Air New Zealand, 2020). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shared that COVID-19 has sparked an unparalleled crisis in the tourism economy estimating 60% decline in international tourism that can probability worsen, if the situation prolongs till December. However, the silver lining is that domestic tourism is anticipated to quickly escalate, improving the economy slightly better (Tourism Policy Responses to the Coronavirus (COVID-19, 2020).

Nepal being an underdeveloped landlocked country is highly vulnerable to pandemics and it has an incomparable multiplier effect on the economy. The economy of Nepal is significantly depending upon remittances, i.e. 25% of GDP, agriculture being 26% and tourism being 8% and due to the pandemic, loss of income sources from tourism and remittance has placed Nepal in worse situation (COVID-19 pandemic | UNDP in Nepal, 2020) (World Bank, 2020a). World Travel and Tourism Council research claim that the most affected sector of the economy in Nepal is tourism, as it was responsible to generate Rs. 240.7 billion in revenue and supported more than 1.05 million jobs in 2018 (The Kathmandu Post, 2019). When the pandemic hit the world, Nepal was about to start Visit Nepal 2020 which unfortunately had to be cancelled. There were thousands of job losses which overall accounted for 20,000 treks, tour, guides and porters (The Kathmandu Post, 2020f).

Research showed that domestic travellers are greatly affected by COVID-19 pandemic in financial, health and social level. More than half of the respondents were unaware of the promotional actions of the Government locally and internationally. Among the respondents there are 56.3% who are willing to travel for vacation and holiday trips once the Government of Nepal relaxes travel and mobility restrictions (Dahal, 2020).

### **Statement of problem**

While taking into consideration the global impact of pandemics throughout the history and the current situation of economic decline caused due to COVID-19, the aptitude of how domestic tourists can subsidize the adverse effect is distinctly recognized. Investigating the pattern of domestic tourists adjusting to the 'new normal' and altering their travelling behaviour is essential at the present scenario for planning the next big move to generate the outcomes that the Government is anticipating. The study of this nature is not conducted in Nepal and it is necessary to understand the perception of domestic tourists. Moreover, the experience of hospitality business operators who have been actively involved in serving domestic travellers at the moment can have significant knowledge of the new trend of travel.

### **Research Objectives**

- a) To gather thorough insights about domestic tourist's decision-making processes while choosing to travel during the pandemic.
- b) To illustrate the preferences of tourists through the viewpoint of both domestic travellers and experts catering them at the current point of time to fill in the gap of information.
- c) To critically analyse marketing responses of the operators and service providers to promote domestic tourism in Nepal.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Consumer behaviour and decision making in tourism industry:**

Consumer behaviour is a process that includes activities, ideas, or experiences to make certain decisions that derive consumer needs and want (Solomon, 1996). In the special case of the travel and tourism industry, travel behaviour and tourist behaviour are typically used as an area of inquiry. It has a scope that applies the concept and models reviewing the social and psychological influences on individual travel behaviour (Moutinho, 1993) and four in-depth notions including ego-involvement, loyalty, and commitment, family decision-making, and novelty seeking (Dimanche and Havitz, 1995). A concept of bounded rationality in tourist's decision making is introduced for addressing the travel stimuli, psycho-social determinants, and "given" environment (Schmoll, 1977). Individuals tend to use a variety of problem-solving tactics depending upon their personality, nature, social contexts, economic as well as the problem itself (Decrop, 2006). Additionally, the research on travel behaviour is observed highly fragmented since it uses replicated concepts from marketing and general management fields for application in tourism.

The consumer behaviour studies and models are criticized due to the inability to capture the "complexity" factor of decision-making process among tourists, such as elements of itinerary changes before and while on the destination (Hyde and Lawson, 2003; Choi et al., 2012), group decisions (Bronner and Hoog, 2008) and influences by situational factors (March & Woodside, 2005). Likewise, another important aspect of consumer behaviour is concerned with perceived and expected value also known as an experiential value among tourists. The tourism literature mainly focuses on two types of value, instrumental (external) and terminal (internal). Instrumental values are directed towards experience or situation while terminal value classes of objects (Gnoth, 1997). The push and pull approach is most widely applied in regards to explaining motivation and segmenting markets aiming to profile visitors. As a result, different types of tourism have been introduced in the industry. Meanwhile, the consumer behavior related to self-concept is suggested to be opposing in tourism as they tend to display expressions of multiple selves (Boksberger, et al., 2011). It is calculated as a discrepancy between the perceived outcomes and expected outcomes (Andereck, et al., 2012).

### **Concept of "new normal"**

Pre- COVID-19 widespread, promotion normalized over visitation and excursion via social media. The ideas promoted environmentally fragile practices accompanied by inauthentic and culturally hazardous traveling patterns. Alongside the introduction of restrictions and health concerns all around the globe, travelling is now forced to be limited or not even possible. Engaging in social-distancing practices, pattern following slowing down the frequency of travels plus escaping to

nature is considered a safer way, which now favours domestic tourism. The notion has brought back the trend of enjoying the journey rather than the destination. With this pandemic, the reset of the tourism industry is mandatory. Slow and local tourism is preferred more. Lesser-known destinations that have natural beauty, unexplored closer destinations existing locally are in demand (Zenker and Kock, 2020).

Based on the anticipation shared by doctors at the University of Kansas Health System, the coronavirus pandemic will bring alteration in the daily lives of people. Direct contact with people and gestures like handshakes and hugs will be controlled. Social distancing will likely be practised in the future as well. The working routines can follow the current pattern of remote operation and jobs requiring compulsory contact with others shall impose strict health and safety protocols (Griffith, 2020). Companies globally acquired a profound lesson from this outbreak. Digitalization, automation, virtual practices while interacting with both customers and for an internal operation have accelerated at an astounding rate. Agility is valued the most in business and ventures and companies are adapting to new operating ways to turn threats into an opportunity (Saenz, Anderson, Supko and Ledingham, 2020). Industry leaders are expected to shift their operation from the old outdated idea of 'normal'.

In a research conducted by Trip.com Group with Google, it was discovered that the lead-time has remarkably decreased for booking, accounting for 80% of bookings within 15 days of departure which beforehand used to be 36 days. Asian tourists reported that due to the uncertainty factor during this pandemic, they prefer flexible trips with free cancellation and insurance coverages. United Nations World Tourism Organization, UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: "Sustainability must no longer be a niche part of tourism but must be the new norm for every part of our sector. This is one of the central elements of our Global Guidelines to Restart Tourism. It is in our hands to transform tourism and that emerging from COVID-19 becomes a turning point for sustainability." (sustainability as the new normal; a Vision for the Future of Tourism, UNWTO, 2020). The World Travel and Tourism Council has developed extensive protocols covering the new normal for service operators such as cleaning, sanitization, protective masks and face shields, thermal scanners, and reduced touchpoint and queuing. Under the economic pressure, smaller operators are adversely affected compared to larger ventures. Most boutique hotels may prosper due to their characteristics of catering individuals and small groups and are less crowded yet pleasant experiences. Innovation and virtualization to draw more sales and to facilitate safe travel are both equally explored by the business. These aspects of a pandemic may last even after the pandemic and thus, it is called a new normal (BBC storyworks, 2020).

### **Overview of contemporary studies on pandemic**

Latest surveys have shown that after the COVID-19 spring confinement, there is still a desire to travel (EY, 2020b; DNA, 2020 as cited in Santos, Gonzalez, Haegeman, and Rainoldi (2020). However, low tourist density and sanitary conditions are the key qualities that a destination needs to have when selecting a holiday destination. Tourist demonstrates their preferences for destinations with outdoor sports and interacts with nature to avoid overcrowded places (DNA, 2020; Interface Tourism, 2020c; Gursoy et al., 2020), Price seems not to be the main criterion affecting the selection of destination place at least for French citizens Santos, Gonzalez, Haegeman, and Rainoldi (2020). While there is still a desire to fly outside the home country for holidays, Preference would go to national destinations (EY, 2020b; DNA, 2020, cited in Gonzalez,

Haegeman, and Rainoldi (2020)). There is a greater inclination outside the home country for destinations less impacted by COVID-19 (Interface Tourism, 2020c).

According to research done by Balkhi, Nasir, Zehra, and Riaz (2020), in the topic psycho-behavioural response to the pandemic based on Pakistan found that people were anxious about leaving their homes because of the corona virus and comparatively more felt fearful if a family member went outside. A large fraction of the participants feared visiting crowded places such as markets and departmental stores. Furthermore, people shared under-confidence towards the government and their control measures. Not only that social media and fake news are taken as a reason for panic. People tend to cancel their plans such as family reunions, social gatherings, traveling, or meetings.

Similarly, De Vos, (2020) research indicated that the spread of the COVID-19 virus has resulted in unprecedented measures limiting participation in travel and activity in many countries and social distancing, i.e., reducing interactions between people to slow down the spread of the virus, has become the new norm. The most recent study by Zheng, Luo, and Ritchie (2021), integrated theories from health psychology (i.e., protection motivation, and coping and resilience theory) that examined the relationships in the context of public health crisis between fear, coping, protective motivation, resilience and travel behaviors in a public health crisis context. The study found that individuals who evoked high 'travel fear' could travel at least 4–6 months after the removal of travel restrictions while an individual with low 'travel fear' was more likely to travel immediately or within 1–3 months. The study argued that people's travel behaviors in the post-pandemic period may be more fear-induced. Rather than avoid travel to deal with risks, the study also revealed that people who have protection motivation are more willing to choose cautious travel rather than travel avoidance against the pandemic threat.

An exploratory study by Jittrapirom and Tanaksaranond (2020) provided an early report into how COVID-19 may affect traveling and some insights into the underlying reasons behind how our respondents altered their trips in the face of the pandemic. It showed that 21-25% of the respondents did not cancel or postpone their non-commuting domestic and overseas trips. The top three reasons behind the alterations of non-commuting trips, on the contrary, were the decision of the organizers, personal opinion, and the decision of the government. The analysis also depicted that few of the respondents decided solely by their opinion, which in turn can be influenced by the way they perceived risk. Additionally, the respondents ranked health of family and relative as a more concerning issue than own health. They adjusted their travel to avoid getting infected and any possible delay and relied on official announcements and press releases for information.

Deyshappriya (2020) discovered that, in terms of South Asian domestic travels, 33.2% of the respondents who scheduled local travels have completely canceled their trips and 26.2% have postponed their local travels. Education, health, and leisure are the most affected domestic travel types due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The study also observed the perceived risk attached to different traveling modes and the dynamic nature of such travelling modes during the pandemic period. The analysis confirmed that usage of public transportation such as bus and train are extremely high risk while the risks attached with a personal vehicle, taxi, and bike are extremely low.

Another research by Chemli, Toanoglou, and Valeri (2020) investigated the influence of Media Coverage and the perceived risks related to travel and tourism by the pandemic's time on the odds of potential outbound tourists' level of awareness. The result confirms that media have preeminent control over accentuating the awareness of potential travellers' during a crisis. Also, the physical danger perceived affects the probability of falling in the category of conscious people. The research offers perspectives and facts to tourism industry practitioners in destinations to prepare and better organize with government agencies and provide ethical, responsible, and reliable information through their coordination and information efforts during the recovery process situation and the health systems responses. Thus the quality of media sources and the level of the perceived physical risk of the target markets before their development are two important elements to consider while developing the content of the media messages.

### **Crisis and worldwide trending responses for COVID-19 and domestic tourism:**

A crisis can be defined as 'a low-probability, high-consequence event that develops very rapidly and involves ambiguous situations with unknown causes and effects' (Robert, Madsen, and Desai, 2007). This can range from unpredictable catastrophic transformation, natural disasters, biohazards (virus, flu, etc.) to terrorism. In response to such agents, management from both organizational and destination levels is necessary. In the case of tourism, the recovery should strategically include the marketing approach mainly focused on rebuilding consumer confidence, new services, and product development and building a strong collaborative network (Mair, Ritchie, and Walters, 2014). The public sector representative and businesses agreed that domestic tourism will lead the recovery process, ultimately putting countries with larger domestic markets such as India and China at a greater advantage (Darbari, 2020). The concept of travel bubbles is being introduced for regional promotion among countries India and Maldives for instance have negotiated it recently.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) presents an example of China restarting its travel pattern domestically. China has a capping system for tourist sites and parks to 30 and 50% and noted the change in the segment of travelers into younger and individual tourists with lower budget patterns favoring economy/ midscale accommodation. Accordingly, Chinese business strategies are now concerned with ensuring hygiene and social distancing, aggressive pricing promotion, and social media usage addressing the younger masses.

Jiang and Wen (2020) pointed out the anticipated effect on the hotel industry with the prospect of Artificial Intelligence, robotics, hygiene, cleanliness, and health/health care. It can be considered as a possible opportunity that can combat a pandemic crisis in the coming days. This can direct the travel trend in this pandemic situation towards the reduced potential of health risk through insurance policies. Similarly, China which is a collective cultural country along with other nations showed the tendency to avoid group tours and dining habits, their choices now are to order delivery or takeout (Wen, Kozak, Liu and Yang, 2020). Furthermore in terms of travelling options, shaping public transports via the sharing economy for instance: bike/ car/ ride-sharing services can be an option to a crowded transit. Likewise, destinations are likely to be identified with relative tranquillity; distribution channels are mostly practiced online, the younger generation is more inclined towards designing their itineraries and niche tourism. Novel outdoor activities are identified as hiking, driving recreational vehicles and the concept of smart tourism is introduced. This is concerned with visitation or time spent or tourist flow as peak and slack period to track



traffic and minimize crowding. Additionally, slow tourism with a contemporary approach, favouring deliberate trips with extended experience is projected.

A recent study done in china by (Wen, Wang, and Kozak, 2020) claimed that residual fear associated with the outbreak to avoid crowded destinations can change the travel pattern to destinations that capitalize on natural landscapes and relaxing environments. Likewise, within European Nations, the Maltese Government started to promote staycations by providing every resident aged 16 and above, 5 vouchers, 4 could be used in Malta Tourism registered hotels and restaurants, and remaining in retail outlets, similarly, Belgium started giving out 10 free train tickets for citizens to encourage domestic tours (Grech et al., 2020). All keeping in mind the family budget constraints at the current economic downturn. Besides, the placebo effect of second-home tourism to travel into rural areas like mountainous places is psychological to feel safe and healing is widely observed among France city dwellers (Seraphin and Dosquet, 2020). Moreover, the study also suggests that they should be called mutant "crisis tourists" who give hope to the befalling decline in the tourism industry. It has also been practiced in other parts of the world namely: USA, Turkey, Spain, Italy, Germany, Greece, and Norway.

### **Identified gaps**

Although we can find numerous admirable reports on the willingness to travel and traveling behaviour of people worldwide in the form of journal articles, almost all relevant reports are developed either based on a survey quantitative framework or through a review of previous literature on pandemics. There are very limited researches that used qualitative approaches specifically integrating focus groups with distinct demography and service provider's perspectives. Likewise, the full aspect of domestic tourist's decision-making process is not included in previous literature. This pandemic situation is unique and has an effect on lives unlike any seen in the past, thus exploratory research is required to bring together a complex topic that has not yet been studied in Nepal. Therefore, the research has attempted to collect information from both domestic travellers (consumers) and operators (service providers) to cover maximum aspects as possible.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research conducted primarily based on a qualitative approach with exploratory design, considering that it aims at understanding the underlying factors influencing the domestic tourist's behaviour to travel during the pandemic. An unstructured questionnaire was used for primary data collection, where the expert respondents were provided with questions in the interview and they chose to articulate their answers as per their observation and knowledge, without providing any choices of answers. Three focus group discussions were conducted; representing domestic tourists in this research. For this, the researcher selected the members for the first two groups based on their profession and the institutions they were currently employed in. Among them, the first focus group belonged to a government-run organization while the other was presently employed in a private organization. One of the discussions was conducted face-to-face while the other group was approached online to discuss their behavior for the analysis these group were termed as generation Y.

On the other hand, the third focus group included the youths who were seen active in travelling during the research period. They were students and currently unemployed individuals, and they were termed as generation Z. The population is the domestic tourists, including family and individual travellers with varying purposes of travelling. Within the population, the sampling size is limited to locals that are observed to be continuously involved in tourism, evidently through social media content. The non-probability method is preferred with the combination of convenience and judgment sampling for choosing sample units.

### **Respondent Information**

The domestic tourists in two different focus groups comprised people aged between 27 to 45 years. These were independent persons whose employment were not affected by the pandemic and were either remotely working or office based. There were ten respondents in each group, in the first focus groups, there were seven females and 2 males, and in the second group, there were eight male and 2 female respondents. The other focus group involved tourists who were between 20 to 25 years of age. Total members were ten which consisted of youngsters who are currently not employed among which four were female.

The experts in the tourism industry approached for the study were two Tourism Expert and Entrepreneur, and three Tourism Personnel. All interviewees had seven to fifteen years of experience in their field.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

#### **Figure. 1. Outlook of Nepalese domestic tourist's choices during pandemic**



**Need recognition/  
identified  
problems of  
Nepalese  
domestic tourists:**

1. Health, Safety and Sanitization
2. Refreshment and Relaxation
3. Accessibility/ trekking and hiking trails/ infrastructure
4. Full responsibility and assurances from locals and service providers plus other visitors
5. Unique Destination

**Decision is influenced by  
following factors:**

1. Economic factors →
2. Unusual situational and environmental factors →
3. Personal preference factors →
4. Family health risk factors →
5. Change in decision-making pattern →

prices/holistic packages/  
discounts/value added offers/  
affordability/ provisions of annual  
leisure leaves

pandemic situation of the  
area/community dealing with  
pandemic/ratio of infected population/  
safe or danger zone/ avoiding crowds/  
restricted area or open to tourists/ flow  
of tourists/ occupancy/ social distance  
maintenance/ demand for private and  
pre-booked vehicles/ rescue and health  
emergency facilities

trending activities/ package of value,  
privacy and peace/ pilgrimage/ soft  
adventures/ nearby destinations/short-  
haul/ self-exploration/ cycling/ hiking/  
trekking/sightseeings/ picnics

family restrictions/ kids and old  
member's concern/ self-  
consciousness + responsibility

Random to Extensive/ Unplanned  
to organized/ mass tourism to  
FIT and Fixed groups only

**Point of purchase and interaction:  
Self arrangement and operators**

1. Online and cashless
2. Phone
3. Emails
4. Direct negotiations

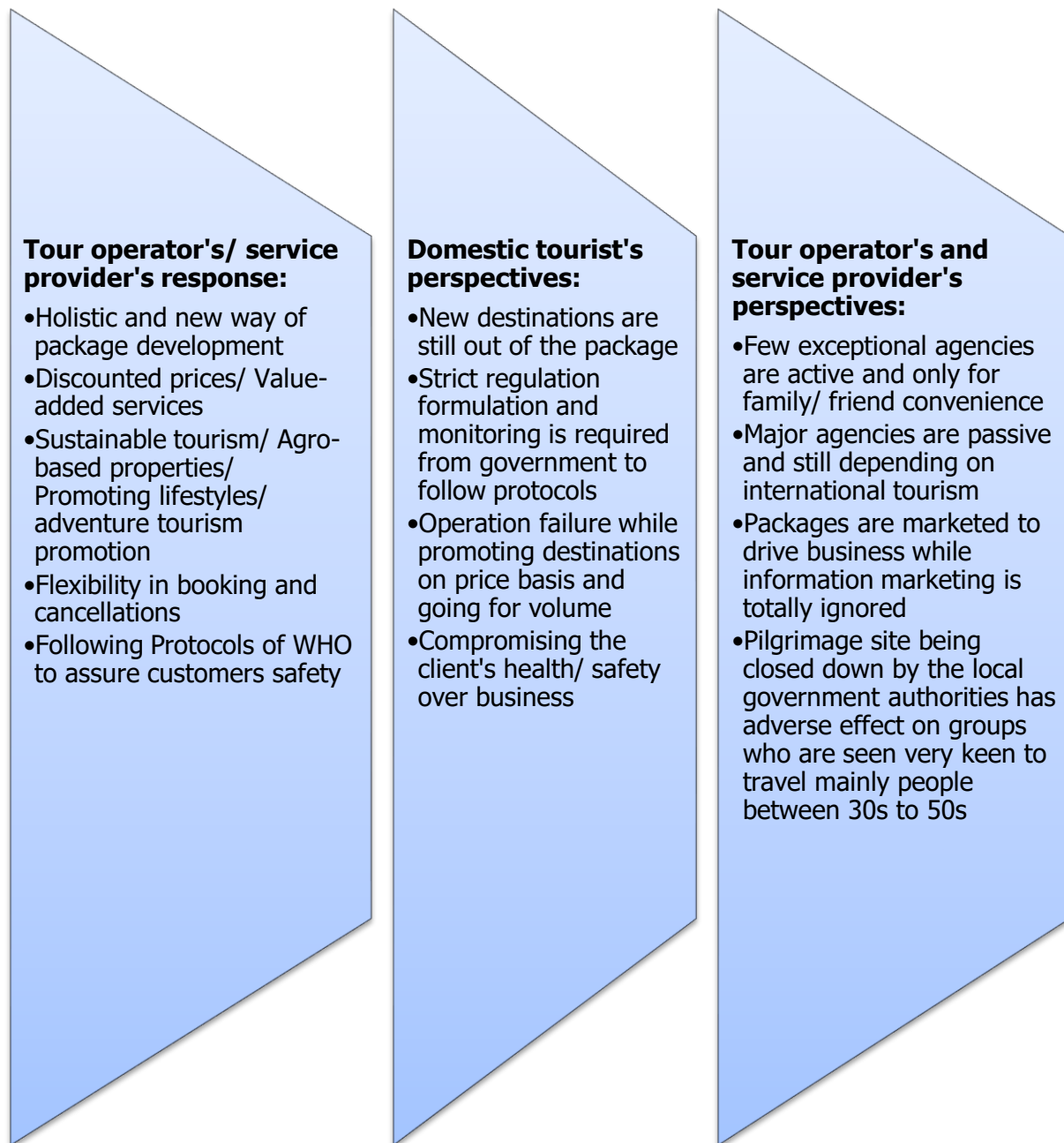
**Information search:**

1. Social media
2. Trust and Reliability- word-of-mouth/ reviews and recommendations/ friends, family and relatives

**Post-purchase:**

1. Social media hashtags/ blogs, vlogs, videos, photos,etc
2. Reviews and Recommendations
3. Travel advices through experience sharing

**Figure 2. Operator's and Domestic tourist's perspectives on efforts to promote domestic tourism**



**Figure. 3. Distinct views from group of the Generation Z**

**Reasons for travelling during pandemic, claiming to have practiced a safer way:**

- freedom/ considered a therapeutic activity/ gain wider outlook of the world/ learn something new/ energy and newness after 10 months long lockdown is a must

**Economic factors**

- money matters to them/ dependant to parents and guardians/ affordability of family/ discount and package promotions are major motivational factors

**Elements considered**

- personal purpose and choice/ interests of travelling is most important factor for them/ recommendation and reviews/ activities to be able to engage in the area comes secondary.
- more priority is given towards popularity of destination rather than flow of tourists
- researched youths seek new experiences instead of viral contents

**Influencing agents**

- Family and friends
- family as a decision makers/ source of money of expenditure/ insecure parents concerned about health/ affordability/ restrictions
- friends as the most important part of life/ strong bonding/ not wanting to be excluded from the group/ similar interest and choices/ want to enjoy life/ much valued entity for this age

## DISCUSSION

The finding of the current research revealed that although domestic tourists are concerned about safety and security, they have realized the need for relaxation and break. Similarly, Zheng, Luo, and Ritchie (2021), in their study found that people's travel behaviours in the post-pandemic period may be more fear-induced and they follow protection motivation and willing to choose cautious travel rather than travel avoidance against the pandemic threat. Moreover, the need for infrastructure is yet another issue found among domestic tourists and adventure enthusiasts. To refresh their minds, they seek to travel in their private vehicles in places that are easily accessible; as stated by De Vos (2020), that the travel demand will reduce and people will travel less by public transport which is analysed as extremely high-risk vehicles, while the risks attached with a personal vehicle, taxi and bike are extremely low (Deyshappriya, 2020).

The domestic tourists in the current study admitted that previously the decision used to be more random, unplanned, and followed a pattern of mass tourism; they ignored factors like health risk and social distancing. But now the travelling has become an extensive decision-making process through organized and deliberate planning. This notion was proposed by the prospect and regret theory by (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; & Loomes & Sugden; 1982) tackling the limitations in the uncertainty of decisions. Another concept of choice set theory is exemplified in the work of Wahab, Crampon, and Rothfield (1976) categorized this set of individuals as Homo Economicus trying to optimize the utility of their actions before purchase, through minimizing risk with extensive problem solving and advanced planning (Decrop, 2006). In this context, elements such as the pandemic situation of the area; community dealing with pandemic; a ratio of the infected population; safe or dangerous zone; avoiding crowds; restricted area or open to tourists; a flow of tourists; occupancy; social distance maintenance; demand for private and pre-booked vehicles; rescue and health emergency facilities are considered as evaluating factors for making destination choices by Nepalese domestic tourists.

Economically sound individuals and groups are already considering tour and travel options with activities that maintain quality and hygiene. Short-haul trips are preferred to a long stay. Likewise, the economic factors in the case of Generation Y are not a big issue, however; they believe that the opportunity of exploring places on their wish list in a discounted package with additional value for money works as a motivating factor. In the case of Generation Z on the contrary, money could be an issue as it depends upon the affordability of the family. The decisions of domestic tourists according to the research demonstrate to be influenced tremendously by family factors and group members or friends (Moutinho, 1993; Dimanche and Havitz, 1995). Youngsters seek a new and unique destination (Dimanche and Havitz, 1995; Wen, Kozak, Liu and Yang, 2020) thus; the trend of self-exploration is prevalent. The new normal concept proposed by (Zenker and Kock, 2020), i.e., engaging in social-distancing practices; pattern following slowing down the frequency of travels plus escaping to nature; the notion of enjoying the journey rather than the destination; lesser-known destinations that have natural beauty; unexplored closer destinations existing locally, are thus, in demand. As per the research, the respondents considered soft adventures like cycling, hiking, trekking, sightseeing, zipline riding, etc as the activities that they are interested in during pandemic while they would shun activity like hot spring swimming, rafting, fairs, festivals, etc.

While understanding personal preference based on observations is that pilgrimage tourism is more popular among people and therefore, restrictions made by the government regarding temples have affected many. As in China, Traditional Chinese Medicine practices are taken as one of the ways to revive domestic tourism (Wen, Wang, and Kozak, 2020), a certain group of Nepalese are inclined towards paying homage to temples and pilgrimage sites and it is considered a potential aspect of domestic tourism.

Another principal finding was that everything has turned cashless amidst this pandemic; people are depending upon the technology more than ever in the past. Social media to be particular is used widely for information search, a medium to interact with service providers, and also sharing the experiences in the form of photos, videos and posts. While analysing the external influence to affect consumer behaviour, technology; digitalization; extensive use of smartphones, and social media; the demography of tourism has favour from generation Y tending to share common cohorts and common behavioural patterns (Cohen, et al., 2013). Most of the evidence depicts the

fact that viral contents in social media play an important role to attract tourists in Nepal. On contrary, however, in the case of Nepalese domestic tourists, the other most utilized way of booking and inquiring is still based on traditional ways of trust and reliability sources. Additionally, in this study, the data has cast a new light on people aged over 40 to 50, who have developed a new trend of indulging in travelling, they are slowly learning the way of social media.

Although a variety of holistic packages and new bundling, sustainable tourism, adventure tourism, etc are being offered, the new destinations which are more anticipated by the youngsters are still out of the packages. Efforts made by few exclusive tour operators are worth the appraisals, but the passiveness of major travel agencies to promote domestic tourism is observed. Agility is valued in terms of adapting to new operating ways to turn threats into opportunity (Saenz, Anderson, Supko and Ledingham, 2020) industry leaders are expected to shift their operation from the old outdated idea of 'normal', however, in the case of Nepal, the agility still seems to be lacking.

The businesses are more price-oriented and marketing such content lacks information that is required by the clients. Not only that, but service providers are also promoting destinations without taking into consideration a carrying capacity and operational management. According to Mair, Ritchie, and Walters (2014), in the case of tourism, the recovery should strategically include the marketing approach mainly focused on rebuilding consumer confidence, new services, and product development and building a strong collaborative network. But, as per the experiences of domestic tourists and the service providers, none of the above-mentioned factors are taken care of. It directly shows the weakness in terms of regulation, monitoring, and execution of governments who are desperately trying to revive the industry through domestic tourism.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper argued about the contemporary needs and requirements of Nepalese domestic tourists and how they are dealing with the pandemic, and their urge of travelling. The findings of this study can be understood as a simple validation of previous studies on travel behaviours and relevant research papers. Just as past reports suggested, travel behaviour is highly influenced by social and psychological outlooks like ego-involvement, commitment, family decision making, and novelty seeking. Nepalese local tourists are tending to escape from their tedious restriction experience, however; they do not wish to put anybody at risk. They are caught in between their needs and their responsibilities towards family. Individuals who have already made decisions to realize their long-awaited vacations are seeking new and unique destinations without compromising on quality, health, and safety. They are on the hunt for pristine destinations. Additionally, complexity factors like group decisions and situational factors including experiential value are significant while understanding travelling behaviour. According to the findings, individuals are not only affected by their personal factors but also their influencing group members. The exceptional elements which never crossed one's thoughts in previous travelling decisions such as crowd, the flow of tourists, occupancy types, risk in the area, activities to indulge in during stays, health protocols, are now the basics for inquiring service providers. It can therefore be agreed that domestics are now turning into a term coined in one of the studies, 'Homo Economic behaviour' who tend to optimize the utility, before purchase, minimizing risks

with extensive problem solving and advanced planning is visible during a crisis. More generally, these basic findings are consistent with earlier researches.

Nepalese tour and travel operators and service providers agree on the above conclusions by sharing their own experiences dealing with locals. Although they accept the reality of Nepalese preferring self- arrangement instead of booking through agencies, they have faith that offering a basic health protocol, value-added services, exclusivity, holistic and bundled facilities, discounts, and packages, can appeal to tourists. Despite the attempts made by service providers and operators, domestic tourists who consider themselves rational and conscious consumers say that trust and recommendation play an important part in their decision to self-arrange or to rely on agencies. It is a widely observed fact which is evident from the national news that social media is the most inducing agent. Spending maximum time on online platforms during lockdowns, the craze of visiting popular destinations just to share it with the world has become a trend among all. Governments and companies trying to promote their content for tourism are only business and price-oriented. This is an important finding in the understanding of weakness from the side of organizers. Information marketing to be particular is the drawback being realized by both operators and customers. Except for limited exceptional tour operators such offers are not being marketed.

## REFERENCES

- Air New Zealand. (2020). COVID-19 FAQs. Retrieved on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020, from <https://www.airnewzealand.co.nz/covid19-faqs>
- Andereck, K., McGehee, N. G., Lee, S., & Clemmons, D. (2012). Experience expectations of prospective volunteer tourists. *Journal of Travel Research*, 51(2), 130 –141
- Balkhi, F., Nasir, A., Zehra, A., and Riaz, R. (2020). Psychological and Behavioural Response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic. *Cureus*, [online] 5(12). Available at: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7265762/>> [Accessed on 23 January 2021].
- Bronner, F., & de Hoog, F. (2008). Agreement and disagreement in family vacation decision-making. *Tourism Management*, 29(5), 967 –979
- Boksberger, P., Dolnicar, S., Laesser, C., & Randle, M. (2011). Self-congruity theory: To what extent does it hold in tourism? *Journal of Travel Research*, 50(4), 454– 464
- BBC STORYWORKS. (2020). Retrieved on 6 October 2020, from <http://www.bbc.com/storyworks/travel/travel-on/the-new-normal-travel-in-the-covid-19-world>
- Chemli, S., Toanoglou, M., and Valeri, M. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 media coverage on tourist's awareness for future travelling. *Current Issues in Tourism*, [online] pp.1-8. Available at: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13683500.2020.1846502>> [Accessed 23 January 2021].
- Cohen, S. A., Prayag, G., & Moital, M. (2013). Consumer behaviour in tourism: Concepts, influences, and opportunities. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 17(10), 872–909. doi:10.1080/13683500.2013.850064



UNDP. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal Retrieved on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020, from <https://www.np.undp.org/content/nepal/en/home/coronavirus.html>

Choi, S., Lehto, C., Morrison, A. M., & Jang, S. (2012). Structure of travel planning processes and information use patterns. *Journal of Travel Research*, 51(1), 26– 40

Dahal, R., (2020). COVID-19, Tourism, and Nepalese Leisure Traveler's Willingness to Travel. *Journal of Tourism and Adventure*, 3(1), pp. 92-117.

Darbari, R. (2020). Travel and tourism recovery: a perspective for South Asia and lessons for other regions in the age of COVID-19. Retrieved 3 October 2020, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/travel-and-tourism-recovery-south-asia-covid19-pandemic-economy-india-nepal-bhutan-sri-lanka/>

Decrop, A. (2006). *Vacation decision-making*. Wallingford, Oxon: CABI Publishing.

Dimanche, F., & Havitz, M. E. (1995). Consumer behavior and tourism. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 3(3), 37–57

Deyshappriya, N. (2020). Dynamics of Travel Behaviour and Mode of Travelling during COVID-19 Outbreak. Evidence from South Asian Countries. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 14-16

De Vos, J. (2020). *The effect of COVID-19 and subsequent social distancing on travel behaviour. Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 100121. doi:10.1016/j.trip.2020.100121

DNA, (2020). La Industria Turística y el COVID 19, La opinión de la demanda: Intención de compra de productos y servicios turísticos – Nuevos hábitos de consumo turístico, DNA Turismo y Ocio, Barcelona.

EY, (2020b). *Deconstruyendo al consumidor*.

Gnoth, J. (1997). Tourism motivation and expectation formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24(2), 283– 304

Santos, M.A., Gonzalez, M.C., Haegeman, K., and Rainoldi. A. (2020). Behavioural changes in tourism in times of COVID-19. *The joint research centre science for policy report*. European Commission. Retrieved on 20 December 2020 from <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/20182/392265/Behavioural+changes+in+tourism+in+times+of+COVID-19/059ea958-6696-467a-8507-2e8617a4b86a>

Griffith, K. (2020). The 'new normal' after coronavirus. Retrieved 6 October 2020, from <https://www.ksn.com/newsau/the-new-normal-after-coronavirus/capitol-bure>

Grech, V., Grech, P., & Fabri, S. (2020). A risk balancing act–tourism competition using health leverage in the COVID-19 era. *International Journal of Risk & Safety in Medicine*, (Preprint), 1-5

Gursoy, D., Chi, C.G. and Chi, O. H.,(2020) COVID-19 Report for the Restaurant and Hotel Industry - Restaurant and hotel customers' sentiment analysis: Would they come back? If they would, when? USA,

Hussin A. Rothan, Siddappa N. Byrareddy. (2020). The epidemiology and pathogenesis of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. *Journal of Autoimmunity*.

Hyde, K., & Lawson, R. (2003). The nature of independent travel. *Journal of Travel Research*, 42, 13–23.

Interface Tourism. (2020c) *Étude prévisions de voyage post-Covid 19*, Interface Tourism, France.

Jittrapirom, P. and Tanaksaranond, G. (2020). An exploratory survey on the perceived risk of COVID-19 and travelling. *SocArXiv* a trademark of *Cornell University*, 2-11. Available at <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/v3g5d/>. Accessed on 23rd January 2021.

Jiang, Y., & Wen, J. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 on hotel marketing and management: a perspective article. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print). doi:10.1108/ijchm-03-2020-0237

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1979). Prospect theory: An analysis of decisions under risk. *Econometrica*, 47, 262–291.

Loomes, G., & Sugden, R. (1982). Regret theory: An alternative theory of rational choice under uncertainty. *Economic Journal*, 92(368), 805–824.

Mair, J., Ritchie, B. W., & Walters, G. (2014). Towards a research agenda for post-disaster and post-crisis recovery strategies for tourist destinations: a narrative review. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19(1), 1–26.

Moutinho, L. (1993). Consumer behaviour in tourism. *European Journal of Marketing*, 21(10), 5–44

Robert, K. H., Madsen, P., & Desai, V. (2007). Organizational sense-making during crisis. In C. M. Pearson, C. Roux-Dufort, & J. A. Clair (Eds.), *International handbook of organizational crisis management* (1st ed., pp. 107 –122). *Los Angeles, CA: Sage*.

Santos, M.A., Gonzalez, M.C., Haegeman, K., and Rainoldi. A. (2020). Behavioural changes in tourism in times of COVID-19. *The joint research centre science for policy report*. European Commission. Retrieved on 20 December 2020 from <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/20182/392265/Behavioural+changes+in+tourism+in+times+of+COVID-19/059ea958-6696-467a-8507-2e8617a4b86a>

Schmoll, G. (1977). Tourism promotion. *London: Tourism International Press*.

Solomon, M. R. (1996). Consumer behaviour. *Engle-wood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall*. 3rd ed

Seraphin, H., & Dosquet, F. (2020). Mountain tourism and second home tourism as post-COVID-19 lockdown placebo? *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print). doi:10.1108/whatt-05-2020-0027.

Saenz, H., Anderson, N., Supko, M., & Ledingham, D. (2020). The “New Normal” Is a Myth. The Future Won’t Be Normal at All. Retrieved 6 October 2020, from <https://www.bain.com/insights/the-new-normal-is-a-myth-the-future-wont-be-normal-at-all/>

The Himalayan Times. (2020a). Preparation on to reopen hotels. *THT Online*  
<https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/preparations-on-to-reopen-hotels/>

The Kathmandu Post. (2019, May 26). Nepal tourism generated Rs 240b and supported 1m jobs last year. <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2019/05/26/nepal-tourism-generated-rs240b-and-supported-1m-jobs-last-year-report>

The Kathmandu Post. (2020f, March 14). Suspension of climbing permits and on-arrival visas entails losses of thousands of jobs and millions of dollars. <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2020/03/14/suspension-of-climbing-permits-and-on-arrival-visas-entails-losses-of-thousands-of-jobs-and-millions-of-dollars>

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). (2020). Covid-19 and Tourism: Assessing the economic consequences. Retrieved on 3 October 2020, from [https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ditcinf2020d3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ditcinf2020d3_en.pdf).

UNWTO. (2020). "Sustainability as the New Normal" a Vision for the Future of Tourism. Retrieved on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020, from <https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-oneplanet-responsible-recovery>

Wen, J., Kozak, M., Liu, F., & Yang, S. (2020). COVID-19: potential effects on Chinese citizens' lifestyle and travel. *Emerald Insight*. Retrieved 3 October 2020, from <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/TR-03-2020-0110/full/html>

Wen, J., Wang, C. C., & Kozak, M. (2020). Post-COVID-19 Chinese domestic tourism market recovery: potential influence of traditional Chinese medicine on tourist behaviour. *Anatolia*, 1–5. doi:10.1080/13032917.2020.1768335

Wahab, S., Crampon, L. J., & Rothfield, L. M. (1976). *Tourism marketing*. London: Tourism International Press.

World Bank. (2020a). *South Asia economic focus, Spring 2020: The cursed blessing of public banks*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33478>

Zaki, N., & Mohamed, E. A. (2020). The estimations of the COVID-19 incubation period: a systematic review of the literature. DOI: 10.1101/2020.05.20.20108340

Zenker, S., & Kock, F. (2020). The coronavirus pandemic – A critical discussion of a tourism research agenda. *Tourism Management*, 81, 104164. doi:10.1016/j.tourman

Zheng, D., Luo, Q., & Ritchie, B. (2021). Afraid to travel after COVID-19? Self-protection, coping, and resilience against pandemic 'travel fear'. *Tourism Management*, Available at: <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261517720301874>> [Accessed 23 January 2021].