



PERCEIVED STRENGTH OF HOMESTAY OPERATORS AND ITS IMPACT ON SUSTAINABILITY: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DARJEELING HILLS

¹Name **Sumit Pradhan**

¹Designation **Research Scholar**

¹Name of Department **Commerce**

¹Name of organization **University of North Bengal, West Bengal, India**

Abstract: The mushrooming growth of Homestay Tourism in Darjeeling has gained the enormous attention of all the stakeholders in the tourism sector of the place. The contemporary tourists prefer to stay in the rural areas close to the natural environment in the rural place rather than staying in luxurious hotels and motels. The paper has attempted to highlight the sustainability of Homestay tourism based on average tourists per year and the profitability as perceived by the Homestay operators. The regression analysis is used taking five explanatory variables i.e. the number of staffs, marketing tie-up, organic stuffs, cheap rate of tariff, and destination image which lead to influence the dependent variable such as average tourist per year and the profitability. The data is collected based on Snow-Ball sampling which is not a random sampling technique. Moreover, there is no sampling frame from which it could be possible to have the list of all Homestay operators doing business in the district of Darjeeling. Out of 113 questionnaires only 98 have been found useable in all respect. So the sample size has been reduced to 98 for this study. The finding of the study reveals that the marketing tie-up, destination image, organic stuffs influence both average tourists per year and profitability. But the number of staffs has no influence on both the dependent variables. The cheap tariff rate has influenced the average number of tourists per year but has no impact on profitability as revealed in the study.

Keywords: *Homestay tourism, sustainability, Regression analysis*

I. INTRODUCTION

Homestay tourism is one of the forms of rural tourism where the tourists are allowed to stay in private homes sharing the personal belongings of the family members. This form of accommodation facility allows the guest to participate in the usual daily activities in the host family. The guests are treated as the family members in the duration of their stay and share the cultural experiences between them. Unlike a hotel, the guests are not bounded by the pre-defined protocol in their stay. Rather, they can take part as family members in the routine activities and get the opportunity to taste the local cuisine. Cultural exchange between hosts and guests has added more beauty to this form of accommodation. The guests cherish the memorable moments in their stay with the host family. This form of tourism also considered environmentally responsible tourism by different researchers perceiving it as a part of eco-tourism.

Different researchers have given different definitions of Homestay as per their perception. However, the core idea of Homestay tourism remains the same. Hamzah & Ismail (2003) defines Homestay as a form of accommodation whereby tourists get an opportunity to stay with the private house owner or host, communicate with the host family as well as go through the family's daily routine which in a way let the tourists have a live experience of Malaysian cultures. Lanier and Barman (1993) describe Homestay ventures as "Private Homes in which unused rooms are rented for the purpose of supplementing income and meeting people". The idea of the Homestay is to accommodate tourists in a village with a local family, thus enabling the tourists to learn about the local culture, lifestyle, and nature (Hjulmand et al., 2003). Homestay in the ordinary sense is defined as a form of accommodation where the visitors are allowed to stay in a private home in a rural place, provides homemade cuisine and clean accommodation. Visitors are also allowed to take part in different activities pertaining to the locality. Basically, other adventurous activities are also provided to take part as per the location of the destination to the visitors. Visitors get an opportunity to experience the traditions, customs, and cultures of the local people. It is rural-oriented tourism basically flourished in village areas far away from the dean and bustle of congested cities (Bhattacharya and Pradhan, 2018).

Homestay tourism overlaps the other form of tourism such as adventure tourism, cultural tourism, village tourism, sustainable tourism, and eco-tourism. Apart from food and accommodation, Homestay tourism provides the visitors with ample other experiences. Different types of adventurous activities are provided to the tourists as per the suitability of the location such as fishing, trekking, rock climbing, bird watching, freshwater swimming, etc. Rural tourism is demand-driven tourism, emphasizes the desire of visitors to experience others culture and lifestyle which is considered as primitive and unique from their own. It includes activities encompassing walking, climbing, horse riding, fishing, hunting, seeing culture, heritage, monastery, temples (Kunwar, 1997).

Homestay tourism has been gaining popularity in different Indian states such as Kerala, Goa, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Sikkim, Orissa, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, etc. The state governments have been promoting this form of tourism in their respective states. Besides that, private stakeholders have also been playing a paramount role in bringing Homestay tourism into the limelight.

The richness of flora and fauna especially in the region of Darjeeling district and its soothing climatic condition has attracted a large number of visitors in the region. A tourism hub with the greenery of tea bushes tempts the people of the other places to visit the place once in a lifetime. Darjeeling was once the sanatorium during the first half of the nineteenth century in the British era is also one of the main reasons for the influx of foreigners in this place. British were the first to start planting tea seeds in the region. The British were successful because of the favourable climatic conditions and the slanted terrain of this place. Darjeeling embracing with favourable climate and scenic beauty further enhanced by the majestic view of Kanchenjunga, which is the third highest peak in the world has added more beauty to this place.

The contemporary tourists in recent times prefer to stay far away from the dean and bustle of congested cities. They feel to have new experiences in the rural areas. Hence, the emergence of Homestay tourism in Darjeeling is demand-driven and has been catering the services in the outskirts areas to the tourists. There is a tremendous growth of Homestays in Darjeeling especially in the rural areas. Approximately 800 Homestays are there in the district of Darjeeling. It has also become the medium to generate livelihood opportunities for the local people. It creates a market for local products.

The purpose of this study in this paper is to establish the different factors which allure the tourists to visit in a different destination in Darjeeling Homestays.

II. PAST LITERATURE:

Based on empirical study studied by Ahmadi et al., (2017), unique geographical landscape, diversities of flora, the suitable climatic condition comprises the strength in that region. Lack of planning, lack of leisure and residential centers, lack of facilities are the weakness and environment pollution by transported desert dust, destruction of existing flora is the threats identified by the researcher in the study. In SWOT analysis, all internal aspects covering the strengths as well as external constraints are taken into consideration (Snelling, 2012). Even the tiny homestay operators need to understand in their own way the strengths and weaknesses so that they can make the venture sustainable. Garyfallos and Grigoroudis (2010) identify the natural characteristics, the level of service, and the adequacy of the accommodation facilities are the factors taken for satisfaction level of the visitors, and management authority needs to concentrate on improvement actions. These factors may be termed as the strengths for any micro-enterprises. As the eco-tourism development is concerned, researchers identify the various Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats in the area (Bhattacharya and Kumari, 2004). In one of the study areas, the indigenous people have kept the environmental and cultural value intact and work for eco-tourism development collectively without harming nature are regarded as strength for that destination. Bhatia (2013) highlights the strengths consist of price, facilities, attraction and natural resources, and safety. Security, internet accessibility, infrastructure, cleanliness, local peoples' behavior are the critical factors to be considered as weaknesses. Sayyed (2013) et al., explored sustainability on the basis of SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) in that region and found that natural attraction, unique culture, and ancient culture of local people are the strengths of the destination. Lack of infrastructure and fundamental facilities consider being the major weakness of the place. Ghaderi and Henderson (2012) aim to study the feasibility of village tourism and its positive and

negative impact. Researchers evaluate the socio-economic and financial feasibility of the village. The destination has sufficient infrastructure and tourism facilities based on the analysis. Unfortunately, the up-gradation effort is not feasible as established by the researchers. The results of finding through factor analysis show that the Natural attraction, Infrastructural facilities, and culture being the most important mechanism of Rural Tourism Development in the destination (Arayesh and Sabouri, 2015). MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003) conducted a case study pertaining to the significance of cultural rural tourism of the French Acadian region on an island in eastern Canada and its potential for the short as well as long-term economic benefits to the rural communities. This form of tourism provides education, entertainment, and enrichment about the indigenous culture to the guests. Kayat (2010) studies the cultural contribution of community-based Homestays to both the visitors and the guest Homestay Programme, Malaysia. The living culture of the community is the core product component consisting of education, entertainment, and enrichment to the guests. Homestay tourism is a unique tourism product where the guests and the hosts establish the relation for years and keep in touch through emails, phone calls, and letters as found out by the researcher. This encourages the community to preserve local culture and provide knowledge of local customs and culture to enhance tourist's experience.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

In this paper an attempt is made to assess the perception of Homestay operators on their strengths in running a sustainable Homestay venture. The study mainly aimed at relating different strengths as revealed by the Homestay operators. In all fourteen strengths have been identified by them but six strengths have been frequently reported by the Homestay operators. The specific objectives of the study are based on these seven strengths identified by them. On the basis of their response the study aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- 1) To identify the strengths as perceived by the Homestay operators
- 2) To measure the strengths using appropriate scales
- 3) To analyze the impact of perceived strengths on the influx of tourists
- 4) To relate the strengths with the profitability of the Homestay ventures
- 5) To draw managerial conclusions for better sustainability of these Homestay operators.

IV. RESEARCH METHOD:

A descriptive research methodology has been adopted and a structured questionnaire was administered to 113 Homestay Operators surrounding the district of Darjeeling. Since the Homestays are widely separated it could not be possible to go for a random sampling technique. The researcher had to collect the data based on Snow-Ball sampling which is not a random sampling technique. Moreover, there is no sampling frame from which it could be possible to have the list of all Homestay operators doing business in the district of Darjeeling. Out of 113 questionnaires only 98 have been found useable in all respect. So the

sample size has been reduced to 98 for this study. Apart from using descriptive statistics, an OLS method has been applied to process the data for drawing meaningful conclusions.

Table I

Measures	Staffs	Profit	AvtYear	Destination Image	Cheap	Organic
Mean	3.26	3.70	394.44	3.55	3.63	3.54
Median	3.00	4.00	400.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode	3	4	410.00	4	3	4
Std. Deviation	1.019	.735	21.543	.720	.988	.706
Variance	1.037	.540	464.100	.518	.977	.498

Note: AvtYear connotes the Average number of tourists per year, Staffs include family members, Profit is measured in a Likert scale, a Destination Image is an image of the destination, Cheap means tariff rate is low and Organic means all the food stuffs are prepared using organic farming.

The descriptive statistics presents the central tendencies and dispersions of variables taken into consideration and the results are self-explanatory. The data almost follow a normal distribution where mean, mode, and median values are closer to each other except for average tourists per year. The variance of this variable is also found to be significantly on the higher side.

Table II

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.904 ^a	.817	.807	92.931	1.729

Note: (a) Predictors: (Constant), Organic, Staffs, Destination Image, Tie-up, Cheap, (b) Dependent Variable : AvtYear

Table II presents the model summary of regression results incorporating four explanatory variables and arrival of tourists per year as the dependent variable. The R square value is found to be quite significant as revealed by the F statistic in table III below which is significant beyond $p < 0.00$

Table III

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	-329.980	71.334		-4.626	.000
Staffs	16.000	9.762	.077	1.639	.105
Tie-up	287.339	21.392	.671	13.432	.000
Destination Image	53.167	14.006	.181	3.796	.000
Cheap	42.463	10.965	.198	3.873	.000
Organic	44.970	14.428	.150	3.117	.002

Note: (a) Predictors: (constant), Organic, Staffs, Destination Image, Tie-Up, Cheap.
(b) Dependent Variable: AvtYear. $F=82.125$, $p < 0.000$.

In table III the values of regression coefficients are presented along with corresponding t statistic and the level of significance. All the regression coefficients are found to be highly significant indicating the

importance of the influence of independent variables except the number of staffs in predicting the influx of tourists throughout the year.

The tie-up is found to be the most important variable followed by the value for money the tourists get from the Homestay operators. The tourists feel that it is cheaper to stay in Homestay rather than staying in hotels. Tourists also like to have organic food for which they prefer to stay in Homestays.

Table IV
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.809 ^a	.655	.636	.443	1.888

(a) Predictors: (Constant), Staffs, Destination Image, Organic, Tie-up, Cheap. (b) Dependent variable: Profit

A separate regression was run using the same explanatory variables but profitability as the dependent variable. The R square value is found to be significant indicating that profitability can be predicted with the explanatory variables considered in the study.

Table V

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.796	.340		5.280	.000
Tie-up	1.013	.102	.681	9.931	.000
Destination Image	.134	.067	.131	2.006	.048
Cheap	.060	.052	.081	1.153	.252
Organic	.153	.069	.147	2.227	.028
Staffs	.022	.047	.030	.466	.642

Note: (a) Predictors: (constant), Organic, Staffs, Destination Image, Tie-Up, Cheap.
(b) Dependent Variable: Profit F=34.966, Sig.,p<0.000

So far as the coefficients are concerned shown in Table V, it is observed that the explanatory variables tie-up, destination image, and organic greatly influence the portability of the Homestay ventures. It seems that the tie-up influences the profitability of the Homestay venture to a large extent. It can be inferred that the influx of tourists largely depends on marketing tie-up resulting in influencing profitability. Destination Image and organic kinds of stuff preference of the tourists have also influenced the profitability of the Homestay venture to a large extent. The number of staff and the tariff charged in the Homestays do not influence the profitability as revealed in the study. However, the Homestay operators feel that the less tariff rate does not impact its profitability due to the fact that the average annual tourist influx seems to increase taking the cost advantage of the low tariff rate in Homestay accommodation.

V. Discussion and Conclusion:

The finding of the study reveals some interesting results which are worth mentioning. The arrival of tourists largely depends on the marketing tie-ups with various tour operators who send tourists to various Homestay destinations. In essence, it implies that the Homestay operators do not have the network to bring tourists to various remote places. The profitability also to a great extent depends on the marketing tie-up with external agencies. Neither the influx of tourists nor the profitability depends on the number of staff kept in the Homestays. In both cases, it is found that the number of staff employed is not significantly influencing the turnover as well as the profitability of the Homestays. The beauty of the destination significantly influences the arrival of tourists as well as the profitability of the Homestay operators. However, it is observed that the level of significance of destination image is much more in the case of tourists' arrival. It can be concluded that the tourists have a definite preference for organic foods provided to them during their stay at various Homestays. Apart from that, tourists prefer to stay in Homestays due to the fact that it is a cheaper form of accommodation as compared to the tariff charged by hotels and resorts in the same locality. The implication of the study unravels that the destination image and the proper tie-ups are very important for the sustainability of the Homestays in the district of Darjeeling. The major limitation of the study is that the survey was conducted using a small sample and multiple-item scales have not been considered while collecting the data. In future studies, a more scientific approach to measurement techniques should be employed to derive meaningful conclusions.

References:

- Ahmadi, M., Khodadadi, M., & Shahabi, H. (2018). Planning for ecotourism in the protected area of Manesht and Ghelarang, Ilam Province, Iran. *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism*, 19(2), 243-268.
- Amran Hamzah and Hairul Nizam Ismail (2003) An Assessment of the Socio-Economic Impact of the Homestay Program at Kampung Banghuris, Sepang, Selangor. Short Term Research Grant, Research Management Centre, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
- Arabatzis, G., & Grigoroudis, E. (2010). Visitors' satisfaction, perceptions and gap analysis: The case of Dadia–Lefkimi–Soufion National Park. *Forest policy and economics*, 12(3), 163-172.
- Arayesh, M. B., & Sabouri, M. S. (2014). Investigating Mechanism of Rural Tourism with emphasis on the Natural tourism (A Case Study: Heidarabad village, Ilam province). *Journal of Tourism Hospitality Research*, 2(1), 127-146.
- Bhatia, A. (2013). SWOT analysis of Indian tourism industry. *International Journal of Application or Innovation in Engineering & Management*, 2(12), 44-49.
- Bhattacharya, D., & Pradhan, S. Perception of tour operators on the sustainability of home stay projects: an empirical investigation.
- Bhattacharya, P., & Kumari, S. (2004, August). Application of criteria and indicator for sustainable ecotourism: Scenario under Globalization. In *Abstract and Paper Submitted for the IASCP Bi-Annual*

Conference on "The Commons in an Age of Global Transition: Challenges, Risk and Opportunities" at Oaxaca, Mexico from (pp. 9-14).

Chin, C. H., Lo, M. C., Songan, P., & Nair, V. (2014). Rural tourism destination competitiveness: a study on Annah Rais Longhouse Homestay, Sarawak. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 144, 35-44.

Ghaderi, Z., & Henderson, J. C. (2012). Sustainable rural tourism in Iran: A perspective from Hawraman Village. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 2, 47-54.

Hamzah, A., & Ismail, H. N. (2003). An assessment of the socio-economic impact of the Homestay Program at Kampung.

Hjulmand, L. G., Nielsen, U., Vesterlørkke, P., Busk, R. J., & Erichsen, E. (2003). Tourism as a development strategy in rural areas adjacent to the Croker Range National Park, Sabah, Malaysia. *ASEAN Review of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation (ARBEC)*, 1-19.

Kayat, K. (2010). The nature of cultural contribution of a community-based Homestay programme.

Kunwar, R. R. (1997). *Tourism and Development: science and industry interface*.

Lanier, P., & Berman, J. (1993). Bed-and-breakfast inns come of age. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 34(2), 15-23.

MacDonald, R., & Jolliffe, L. (2003). Cultural rural tourism: Evidence from Canada. *Annals of tourism research*, 30(2), 307-322.

Reihanian, A., Mahmood, N. Z. B., Kahrom, E., & Hin, T. W. (2012). Sustainable tourism development strategy by SWOT analysis: Boujagh National Park, Iran. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 4, 223-228.

Sayyed, M. R. G. (2013). SWOT analysis of Tandooreh National Park (NE Iran) for sustainable ecotourism. *Proceedings of the International Academy of Ecology and Environmental Sciences*, 3(4), 296.

Snelling, J. (2012). *The Influence of the SWOT Analysis in Organizational Development Strategic Planning*. GRIN Verlag.