



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

GENDER EQUALITY: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE TOURISM ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract- This paper aims to explore the critical issue of gender equality within the framework of promoting inclusive and equitable tourism entrepreneurship in the context of Assam, India. Assam is a perfect place to study how gender inclusion influences the local tourism business scene because of its distinctive cultural and geographic characteristics. The study will concentrate on investigating: Women's empowerment leading to community development, diversity leading to sustainable tourism, and gender representation in Assam tourism entrepreneurship. This study aims to highlight the transformative potential of empowering women entrepreneurs in promoting sustainable tourism development in nearby tourist regions by exploring the problems, opportunities, and strategies relevant to gender equality. This study highlights the transformative power of creating an inclusive environment for female entrepreneurs in the tourist industry by examining the effects of women-led initiatives on destination development, community participation, and gender equality.

Keywords- Women entrepreneurs, tourism industry, empowerment, sustainable development, gender equality, community engagement.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship - Finding and seizing chances to provide new value is a key component of entrepreneurship. It is the process of identifying, assessing, and seizing chances to introduce new goods, services, or procedures into markets in order to fill gaps in the market and establish long-term competitive advantage (Stevenson, H. H., & Gumpert, D. E. (1985). The capacity and willingness to plan, organize, and run a business initiative, with all associated risks, in order to turn a profit are referred to as entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are those who take advantage of chances, gather resources, and coordinate activities to realize their goal (Kuratko, D. F., & Hodgetts, R. M. (2021). Entrepreneurship is the dynamic process of spotting and seizing new business possibilities, frequently entailing the founding and running of new businesses as well as the modification and growth of already existing ones. Combining resources, such as financial resources, human talent, and technological know-how, is

what this process requires in order to produce new goods, services, or solutions that meet consumer desires, address issues, or provide value. The people who drive entrepreneurship, or entrepreneurs, are essential to the process. They can discover market gaps or unmet demands, are prepared to take measured risks, and are capable of effectively mobilizing and allocating resources to turn their ideas into profitable and long-lasting businesses Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2000).

Tourism Entrepreneurship - In order to develop cutting-edge goods, services, or experiences that meet tourists' demands and preferences, tourism entrepreneurs must locate and seize possibilities within the sector. It includes the process of planning, creating, and running businesses that support the expansion, diversification, and improvement of the tourism industry (Getz, D., & Carlsen, J. (2005). The inventive and enterprising actions made by people and organizations in the tourism industry are collectively referred to as tourism entrepreneurship. It entails locating market niches, creating novel goods or services, and providing visitors with pleasurable experiences. This kind of business enterprise is crucial in determining the personality and competitiveness of tourist locations (Prideaux, B., & Cooper, C. (2002).

Women entrepreneurs in tourism- Women entrepreneurs are people who start, run, and manage businesses, enterprises, or initiatives while playing major roles in their development, strategic direction, and creation. While overcoming hurdles specific to their gender, these entrepreneurs are distinguished by their leadership, invention, and contributions to social and economic progress (Brush, C. G., de Bruin, A., & Welter, F. (2009). The participation of women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry has gained substantial attention due to its potential to drive economic empowerment, social progress, and sustainable development. Tourism, as a global economic force, offers significant opportunities for women to not only participate but also thrive as entrepreneurs. Women have carved out roles in a variety of industries, providing guests with distinctive and culturally genuine experiences in everything from lodging and dining to tour companies and handicrafts. Beyond monetary benefits, women's empowerment through tourist enterprise. It has the ability to spur community growth and give one more decision-making authority. To achieve both economic prosperity and social advancement, women entrepreneurs must actively participate in the tourism sector. Stakeholders may cooperatively strive toward an inclusive and equitable tourism landscape that benefits both people and destinations by acknowledging and solving the specific difficulties they confront and amplifying their contributions. Women's engagement in entrepreneurship within the tourism industry has gained increasing attention due to its potential to drive economic empowerment, foster social development, and contribute to sustainable tourism practices.

Literature review

Women entrepreneurs in tourism

Women-led businesses can improve women's access to decision-making positions, self-esteem, and general standing in their communities, according to Jamal and Getz (1995). Additionally, these companies frequently invest back into their communities' economy, creating jobs and assisting in the fight against poverty.

Getz and Carlsen (2005) highlight the strong participation of women in tourism-related micro and small businesses, such as lodging, dining, and handicraft-based businesses. In response to the growing desire for distinctive and regionally focused tourism products, these women-owned enterprises frequently provide authentic and culturally immersing experiences.

The difficulties with restricted access to financing, cultural gender standards, and work-family balance are highlighted by Brush and de Bruin (2009). These obstacles may prevent women-owned tourism enterprises from expanding and being viable, highlighting the demand for gender-sensitive policies and support systems.

Women-led tourism projects, according to Chukwumerije and Ezeuduji (2018), support community-based tourism models that empower local people while protecting natural and cultural resources. This is in line with the overarching objectives of sustainable tourist growth.

Gender equality

Places that prioritize gender equality can become hubs for women's empowerment. Women can achieve economic independence while promoting communal development through programs like women-owned cooperatives and cultural preservation projects. The transformative potential of such programs in raising women's status and agency is highlighted by Agarwal and Shaw (2007).

Sigala (2012) asserts that empowering women through equal participation in the tourism workforce and entrepreneurship contributes to more diversified products and services, attracting a wider range of travelers and enhancing destination image.

Jamal and Camargo (2015) highlight persistent gender disparities in terms of wages, representation in leadership positions, and access to resources. These challenges are often rooted in societal norms, biases, and unequal power dynamics, requiring concerted efforts to overcome.

According to Raj, Anand, and Kumar (2020), encouraging gender equality can result in more well-rounded and ethical tourism practices because women are frequently more focused on social and environmental sustainability in their operations. Women's leadership and entrepreneurship can support neighborhood prosperity as well as the preservation of regional ecosystems and cultures.

Objectives

1. To Assess Gender Representation in Assam Tourism Entrepreneurship
2. To find relation between women Economic Empowerment and Community Development
3. To understand the role of Gender Diversity in Promoting Sustainable Tourism

Methodology

This descriptive study is based on literature review done on the women entrepreneurs and their participation in tourism sector.

Findings of objective 1:

A complex combination of opportunities, difficulties, and the potential for revolutionary change is shown by the assessment of gender representation within Assam's tourism entrepreneurial scene. It is crucial to examine how much women are engaging in entrepreneurship and to understand how their participation affects the industry as a whole as Assam's tourism industry develops. This remark clarifies the importance of evaluating gender representation and the effects it may have on Assam's socioeconomic structure. Assam has established itself as a prospective tourist destination thanks to its rich cultural heritage, stunning natural surroundings, and active traditions. In this light, examining gender representation is crucial to determining whether or not female entrepreneurs are advancing the industry and whether their potential is being completely realized. Due to Assam's diverse culture, there are many prospects for women business owners to operate tourism-related businesses. Women are essential in maintaining and displaying Assam's distinctive identity to tourists, whether through traditional textile weaving or providing gastronomic experiences. By measuring their engagement, we can pinpoint industries where women's knowledge and innovation are making significant contributions. Yet, gender representation in Assam's tourism entrepreneurship is not without challenges. Societal norms, access to finance, and limited networks can hinder women's entry and growth in the sector. Assessing gender representation allows us to pinpoint these obstacles and work towards dismantling them, creating an environment that encourages women to step into entrepreneurial roles. The panorama of tourism entrepreneurship in Assam is not just about financial advantages; it also emphasizes women's empowerment, gender equality, and sustainable development. When women entrepreneurs succeed, they not only contribute to their personal financial security but also act as role models for others, encouraging them to adopt similar practices. Thus, this evaluation becomes a critical stage in establishing a positive cycle of advancement and empowerment.

Statistics alone cannot fully capture the evaluation of gender representation in Assam's tourism industry. It involves comprehending the experiences, obstacles, and successes of female entrepreneurs who are influencing the narrative of the sector. We may work toward an industry that is really inclusive, where both women and men contribute their abilities to realize Assam's full tourism potential, by recognizing gaps and inequalities. Analyzing the gender distribution of tourist businesses in Assam provides a complex view of the dynamics of the sector. It is a step in the right direction toward unleashing the unrealized potential of female entrepreneurs, encouraging economic expansion, and advancing social transformation. The tourism industry in Assam can work toward a more equitable and prosperous future for everybody by recognizing and eliminating gender inequities.

Findings on objective 2:

The complex interplay between community development and women's economic empowerment in Assam's booming tourism sector is a wonderful example of the transforming power of inclusive entrepreneurship. This letter emphasizes the mutually beneficial relationship between encouraging holistic community growth and supporting women entrepreneurs as Assam's tourism industry grows. The foundation of more comprehensive community development in Assam's tourism industry is women's economic empowerment. Women business owners that actively work in the tourism industry not only improve their own socioeconomic standing but also serve as change agents in their local communities. As they advance, they contribute to a chain reaction of advancement that goes beyond personal accomplishment. The various positive side of Women's Economic Empowerment are mentioned below-

- **Development stimulus:** Increased revenue production, the development of jobs, and better living conditions are the benefits of the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Assam's tourism industry. Local retailers, artists, and service providers are given opportunities as a result of the economic gains that are shared throughout communities. Local companies are supported and a vibrant local economy is aided by the injection of financial resources at the grassroots level.
- **Opportunities for Education and Skill Development:** The economic empowerment of women through tourism entrepreneurship creates chances for learning and skill improvement. Women invest in education, training, and capacity-building as they achieve financial access and independence. As talented and educated women foster a culture of lifelong learning in their families and communities, this empowerment spreads over generations.
- **Social Well-being and Gender Equality:** By encouraging female entrepreneurs in Assam's tourism industry, gender equality is promoted as old norms and preconceptions are pushed to the limit. Women's influence within households and communities increases when they engage in decision-making and income-generating activities. In addition to improving their own wellbeing, this promotes discussions on gender equality and pushes society to adopt more inclusive practices.
- **Community Infrastructure and Services:** Infrastructure and services in a community benefit from the financial success of female entrepreneurs. Opportunities to invest in amenities like healthcare, education, and public facilities exist when local businesses prosper. These upgrades raise the standard of living for both locals and visitors, making the area a more alluring and warm tourist destination.
- **Preserving Cultural Heritage:** Women's business frequently entails presenting regional handicrafts and cultural practices, helping to preserve Assam's cultural legacy. Women actively promote and preserve their cultural identity by working in tourism-related businesses. This not only enhances the experiences of visitors but also boosts local communities' sense of pride.

In the tourism industry of Assam, there is a positive feedback loop between community development and women's economic empowerment. As women business owners prosper, they give back to the communities where they live, promoting infrastructural growth, educational opportunities, and better social conditions. As a result, empowered communities are more able to support prospective female entrepreneurs. The interconnectedness of community development and women's economic empowerment in Assam's tourism industry is evidence of the potency of inclusive entrepreneurship. As female business owners succeed, their

influence spreads throughout localities, sparking change and promoting a harmonious balance between economic progress and societal well-being.

Findings of objective 3:

In the effort to promote sustainable tourism practices globally, gender diversity has become a key motivator. Recognizing and embracing the importance of gender diversity is crucial as destinations work to strike a balance between economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental preservation. Promoting gender diversity is essential to attaining sustainable tourism and building a more just and resilient future. The tourism sector's gender diversity encourages inclusive decision-making. Destinations can access a wealth of creative ideas by embracing a variety of viewpoints and experiences. The tourist sector becomes more sensitive to shifting trends and consumer expectations when men and women participate in designing tourism strategies, goods, and experiences. The potential of women as engines of economic growth and community development is unleashed by gender diversity in the tourism entrepreneurship sector. Women develop a wide variety of tourism businesses when they have equal access to resources, education, and employment opportunities. In line with the ideals of responsible tourism, these firms frequently give priority to sustainable practices, community involvement, and cultural preservation. Gender diversity makes ensuring that the advantages of tourism are shared fairly across all communities. Economic empowerment is facilitated by the presence of women in the workforce, whether in hotels or as tour guides. In turn, this improves social wellbeing as women reinvest in healthcare, education, and community initiatives, starting a fruitful circle of growth. The preservation of cultural authenticity is aided by the participation of both men and women in tourism-related activities. Diverse viewpoints are guaranteed to be represented by gender diversity in cultural performances, craft displays, and storytelling sessions. As a result, travelers have richer experiences and develop a deeper appreciation for regional customs. Promoting gender diversity gives local communities the power to take an active role in the growth of tourism. A sense of ownership is fostered when all genders participate in the planning, management, and benefits of tourism programs. This leads to more resilient and sustainable tourist practices that are in line with the needs and values of the local community. The advancement of gender equality and gender diversity in sustainable tourism are strongly related. The business world serves as a stage for dispelling gender norms, dismantling obstacles, and showcasing the ability of women to lead and contribute. Travelers who experience these gender-equal environments are more likely to support similar programs once they return home. The road to sustainable tourism calls for constant dedication. Gender variety encourages this dedication by involving both men and women as guardians of ethical behavior. As gender-equal workplaces and projects flourish, they serve as role models for promoting social inclusion, economic resilience, and environmental stewardship. Gender diversity is crucial for developing sustainable tourism, to sum up. The industry lays the path for a future in which economic progress, social well-being, and environmental protection coexist peacefully by embracing varied ideas, encouraging women's entrepreneurship, and providing equal rewards.

Summary of the findings

The results of the study on the interaction of opportunities, difficulties, and transformative potential in Assam's gender representation, women's economic empowerment, community development, and sustainable tourism practices. The evaluation of gender representation in Assam's entrepreneurial tourism scene highlights the significance of looking closely at women's involvement in entrepreneurship as the tourism industry grows. Assam has established itself as a prospective tourist destination thanks to its rich cultural heritage, magnificent natural surroundings, and active traditions. To maximize the potential of the sector, it is therefore essential to comprehend the level of women's participation in tourism-related entrepreneurship. The varied culture of Assam offers a wealth of opportunity for women entrepreneurs, but obstacles still exist. Women's admission into and advancement within the tourism industry may be hampered by social standards, restricted financial access, and networking restrictions. The first step in addressing these issues and fostering the engagement of women is, however, acknowledging these obstacles through an evaluation of gender representation. The

study's findings also shed light on the complex relationship that exists in the tourist industry between women's economic empowerment and community development. In the tourism sector of Assam, women business owners not only improve their personal socioeconomic standing but also spark positive change in the neighborhoods where they live. Women who are economically empowered generate more revenue, create more jobs, and have better living conditions, which benefits local retailers, artists, and service providers. An improved quality of life and a thriving local economy are both influenced by this cascade of economic rewards. The study also emphasizes how important gender diversity is in implementing sustainable tourism practices. Gender diversity encourages inclusive decision-making, which produces novel concepts and tactics. Women's business ownership and involvement in the industry support gender equality, neighborhood improvement, and cultural integrity. The preservation of cultural heritage, improvement of cross-cultural interchange, and promotion of intercultural understanding are all achieved by incorporating men and women in many parts of tourism operations. The results show how important diversity is for developing sustainable tourism, particularly variety in terms of gender. The tourist sector lays the groundwork for a future in which economic progress, social well-being, and environmental protection live peacefully by accepting varied ideas, encouraging women's entrepreneurship, and providing equal benefits. This all-encompassing strategy for tourism supports inclusive decision-making, strengthens local communities, and promotes gender equality, all of which advance the more general objectives of sustainable development.

The study's findings highlight the importance of gender diversity and diversity in general for the tourist sector as well as for promoting sustainable practices that benefit local communities, the environment, and the world's travel landscape. The tourism industry in Assam can contribute to a more just and successful future for all parties involved by valuing diversity and actively promoting it. The knowledge gained from this study has the potential to guide industry practices, enlighten policy choices, and motivate cooperative efforts to create a more sustainable and inclusive tourist economy in Assam.

Suggestion

Promoting gender equality in Assam's tourism industry requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses structural, cultural, and economic barriers. Here are some suggestions to foster gender equality within the tourism sector:

1. **Education and Training:** Implement educational and training programs that focus on empowering women in various aspects of the tourism industry, from hospitality and management to tour guiding and entrepreneurship. These programs can enhance skills, boost confidence, and provide women with the tools they need to excel in their chosen fields.
2. **Access to Finance:** Establish microfinance initiatives, grants, or low-interest loans specifically tailored for women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector. Financial empowerment is crucial for women to start and sustain their businesses, leading to greater economic independence and community development.
3. **Networking and Mentorship:** Create platforms for networking and mentorship that connect women in the tourism industry with established professionals, both women and men. Mentorship programs can offer guidance, insights, and support, helping women navigate challenges and capitalize on opportunities.
4. **Promoting Leadership Roles:** Encourage women to take on leadership roles within tourism organizations, associations, and governing bodies. Ensuring diverse representation at decision-making levels promotes a more inclusive industry culture and facilitates the implementation of gender-sensitive policies.
5. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Develop and promote cultural sensitivity training for tourism stakeholders, including employees, guides, and visitors. This training should emphasize respect for local customs, traditions, and gender norms, creating an environment where all tourists and employees feel valued and respected.
6. **Empowering Local Communities:** Support community-based tourism initiatives that involve and empower local women. By engaging women in crafting authentic experiences, such as culinary

workshops, handicraft demonstrations, and cultural performances, the tourism sector can celebrate and preserve local traditions.

7. **Promotion of Female Role Models:** Highlight successful women entrepreneurs, leaders, and professionals in the tourism industry through storytelling, media, and marketing efforts. By showcasing their achievements, the industry can inspire the next generation of women to pursue careers in tourism.
8. **Gender-Equal Employment Practices:** Encourage tourism businesses to adopt gender-neutral recruitment, promotion, and compensation policies. Providing equal opportunities and fair treatment for all employees regardless of gender fosters a positive work environment.
9. **Safety and Security:** Ensure the safety and security of women working in and visiting the tourism sector. Implement measures that address safety concerns, such as well-lit public spaces, safe transportation options, and training for staff on addressing harassment and gender-based violence.
10. **Research and Data Collection:** Continuously gather data on gender representation and experiences within the tourism industry. This data can inform evidence-based policies and strategies to address gender disparities effectively.
11. **Collaborative Partnerships:** Foster partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private sector entities, and local communities to collectively promote gender equality in tourism. Collaborative efforts can amplify the impact of initiatives and ensure a comprehensive approach.
12. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch public awareness campaigns that promote gender equality in tourism, aiming to change societal perceptions and attitudes. These campaigns can encourage tourists to support women-owned businesses and destinations committed to gender equality.

By implementing these suggestions, Assam's tourism industry can create an environment that empowers women, promotes gender equality, and contributes to sustainable and responsible tourism practices. The collective efforts of various stakeholders will play a pivotal role in shaping a more inclusive and equitable tourism sector in Assam.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study delves into the multifaceted dynamics of gender representation, women's economic empowerment, community development, and sustainable tourism practices in the context of Assam's tourism industry. Through a comprehensive analysis of these interrelated aspects, several key findings have emerged, shedding light on the transformative potential of promoting gender equality and diversity within the sector. The assessment of gender representation underscores the importance of closely examining the involvement of women in entrepreneurship as Assam's tourism industry evolves. The recognition of women's contributions and potential is essential in harnessing their innovative ideas, expertise, and creativity. Assam's rich cultural heritage and diverse offerings make it a prime ground for women entrepreneurs to contribute meaningfully to the tourism landscape. However, this progress is not without its challenges, including societal norms and limited access to resources. By acknowledging these barriers, the industry can work towards creating an environment that encourages and supports women's participation. The connection between women's economic empowerment and community development reveals a symbiotic relationship that drives positive change. When women thrive in the tourism sector, they not only uplift their own socioeconomic status but also foster an environment where community growth, improved living conditions, and local economic stimulation become achievable. The study highlights how women's economic agency can ignite a positive cycle of development that extends beyond individual success. Moreover, the study underscores the pivotal role of gender diversity in promoting sustainable tourism practices. By involving men and women equally in decision-making processes, tourism destinations can unlock a wealth of creative ideas and perspectives that enhance the overall visitor experience. Gender diversity in the tourism sector not only advances economic growth but also supports social inclusion, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. The synthesis of these findings reinforces the critical importance of a holistic approach to fostering gender equality and diversity within Assam's tourism industry. Through education, access to finance, mentorship, and equal opportunities, women entrepreneurs can play an integral role in shaping the industry's future. Furthermore, promoting leadership roles, ensuring safety, and raising public awareness contribute to a more equitable and inclusive tourism landscape. In a broader sense, this study has implications beyond the local context of Assam. The insights gleaned from this research can serve as a blueprint for other regions striving to achieve similar goals of gender equality, community empowerment, and sustainable tourism.

development. By acknowledging the transformative power of women entrepreneurs and embracing diversity, the tourism industry can contribute not only to economic growth but also to the holistic well-being of communities and the preservation of cultural heritage.

In conclusion, the study advocates for a collaborative effort among stakeholders, including government bodies, NGOs, private sector entities, and local communities, to realize a vision of gender equality and diversity-driven sustainable tourism. By implementing the recommendations outlined in the paper, Assam's tourism industry can foster an environment that empowers women, promotes inclusivity, and paves the way for a brighter and more equitable future.

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