Strategies for developing sustainable tourism business in the Indian Himalayan Region: Insights from Uttarakhand, the Northern Himalayan State of India

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the tourism sector of Uttarakhand, the Northern Himalayan State of India, and offer prospective strategies for developing sustainable tourism business in the region. Besides in-depth interviews of the associated stakeholders, SWOT and QSPM analyses were performed to investigate the sector and to determine appropriate strategies. The study's findings reveal that the prevailing incongruous practices of tourism, unplanned developmental activities in the sector, and massive inflow of visitors in Uttarakhand are not compatible with the region's fragile ecology and the sustainability of the tourism business. Nevertheless, if the policymakers operate within the identified strategies, then Uttarakhand tourism's prevailing incongruous practices and massive inflow of visitors can transform into a sustainable business and developmental prospects.

1. Introduction

1.1. Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region and Uttarakhand

For centuries, the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) has been a preferred destination for religious, spiritual, and recreational activities for both domestic and foreign visitors (Bandyopadhyay, Morais, & Chick, 2008; Farooquee, Budal, & Maikhuri, 2008; Gupta, Anand, & Gwal, 2018; Mahapatra, Pandey, & Pradhan, 2012; NITI, 2019; Sharma, Agrawal, & Chandra, 2016). However, due to an increase in modern facilities, supplemented by comprehensive tourism infrastructure, marketing, and promotional efforts, tourism activities have substantially grown in the IHR in recent decades. Specifically, between the years 2011 and 2015, the IHR has recorded outstanding progress in the number of visitors and, with a growth rate of 8.42 percent, significantly contributed to the overall progress of the Indian tourism businesses (NITI, 2019).

The tourism activities or businesses of the IHR is a longstanding source of economic prosperity for the local communities, and now its expansion is enabling sustainable prospects for seasonal employment and entrepreneurship in the sector. Moreover, the Indian Himalayan Region's tourism sector is also well-known as a revenue source for the State governments (NITI, 2019). Hence, the region's tourism sector is considered a growth engine for the future development of the Indian

Himalayan Region (NITI, 2019). On the contrary, the geography and ecology of the Indian Himalayan Region are very susceptible to unplanned developmental activities and anthropogenic interferences, and therefore, expanding tourism as the usual business approach in the IHR is not sustainable for the region's ecology and stability (Gupta et al., 2018; Kuniyal, Jain, & Shannigrahi, 2003; Maikhuri et al., 2017; Sati, 2018).

In the Indian Himalayan Region, Uttarakhand - the Northern Himalayan State of the country, is globally known for its innate tourism attractions and is a preferred destination for pilgrimage, leisure, and recreational activities for both domestic and foreign visitors (NITI, 2019; Sharma et al., 2016). The tourism sector of Uttarakhand collectively offers spirituality, psychological liberation, and adventurous sensation for the visitors. In particular, the innate tourism attractions of Uttarakhand; such as the four world-famous shrines (also popularly known as Chardhama - Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamunotri, and Gangotri), the valley of flowers (the UNESCO world heritage site), national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, unique chain of snow-covered mountain and peaks, sacred forest, lakes and meadows, glimpses of mountainous lifestyle and cultural integrity, locally processed foods and beverages, handicraft and agricultural products, traditional eco-friendly hut (Fig. 1), medicinal and aromatic plants diversity, and historical sites (Aukland, 2017; Chandra, Sharma, & Kant, 2019; Kuniyal, 2013; Nayak & Bhalla, 2016; Sharma et al., 2016; Singh, 2004; UNESCO, n.d.); forms an inclusive

Fig. 1. Traditional eco-friendly rural hut amid potato fields in a seasonal timberline habitation of Uttarakhand.
[Photo Credit: Dr. C P Kuniyal]

combination of pilgrimage, leisure, adventurous, and recreational activities to lead the visitors toward spirituality and psychological liberation, along with unique human-nature connections.

Uttarakhand's tourism sector is also well recognized for its contributions to local communities' livelihood and employment and as a prospective revenue generation source for the State Government. It has been estimated that nearly 20–25 percent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Uttarakhand is tourism based (Badola et al., 2018; Sati, 2020; Tourism Statistics, 2015).

Recognizing Uttarakhand's tourism attractions and its contribution to employment and State revenue, it can be said that the tourism sector or business of Uttarakhand signifies substantial prospects, as a growth engine, for the future development of the region. Nevertheless, being a part of the Indian Himalayan Region, Uttarakhand's ecology and geography are similarly susceptible to unplanned developmental activities and anthropogenic interferences (Gupta et al., 2018). Precisely, the existing policy framework, incongruous practices of tourism, unplanned developmental activities, and the massive inflow of visitors in Uttarakhand do not represent sustainability for its ecology and tourism business (Farooquee et al., 2008; Gupta et al., 2018; Kuniyal et al., 2003; Mahapatra et al., 2012; Sati, 2018). Because the collective human interface, caused by impulsive tourism activities, is forming adverse circumstances for Uttarakhand's ecology and environment, and as a result, diverse challenges are evolving for regional stability. In reality, tourism without attentive strategies is a dangerous truth of the Indian Himalayan Region (Pandit, 2013), like the catastrophic incident of 2013.

The catastrophic tragedy of 2013, also known as the Kedarnath disaster, has severely affected Uttarakhand's tourism infrastructure and perished thousands of visitors present on the site (Down To Earth, 2013; Gupta et al., 2018; Pandit, 2013; Singh, 2017). Subsequently, the tourism business and industry of Uttarakhand had undergone to a distressing phase nearly for two to three years, and as a consequence, the livelihoods and economy of many natives were badly affected (Gupta et al., 2018; Maikhuri et al., 2017; Sati & Gahalaut, 2013). Scientific studies on the cause and consequences of the 2013 disaster recognized ecological dispossession as a major cause behind the catastrophic disaster of 2013. For which the unplanned developmental activities in the region, the massive inflow of visitors, and impulsive increase in tourism activities were primarily responsible (Dash & Punia, 2019; Gupta et al., 2018; Kala, 2014; Maikhuri et al., 2017). These scientific research findings indicate that without attentive strategies, expanding tourism activities and infrastructure as the usual business approach in Uttarakhand does not represent sustainability for its ecology, stability,

and tourism business.

After the incident of 2013, through various administrative plans, the Government of Uttarakhand and its associated agencies worked uninterruptedly to reinstate and uplift the tourism infrastructure and heritage of Uttarakhand (see Rautela, 2018). Consequently, the glory of the tourism industry of Uttarakhand had been re-established within three years, and after that, the tourism business of Uttarakhand has started substantial progress in terms of visitor's number and frequency, niche segments, tourism-based employment, and revenue generation (Dash & Punia, 2019; Sati, 2020).

According to the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, between the years 2016 and 2019, the number of visitors and tourism activities has significantly grown in the State, and various niche segments of tourism, like adventure, homestay, ecotourism, and religious tourism; have shown remarkable growth and expansion. (UTDB, 2019). But, ontologically, this might not be considered sustainable for Uttarakhand's ecology, stability, and tourism business. Because in Uttarakhand, attentive strategies lack to transform the increasing tourism activities into a sustainable business and developmental prospects. Therefore, the present growth and expansion of tourism activities in the region, once again, may lead to distressing situations for the tourism sector and regional stability (Dash & Punia, 2019; Gupta et al., 2018). Hence, attentive strategies are necessary to link the tourism potential of IHR or Uttarakhand with future development planning and sustainable business prospects.

The means by which incongruous practices of tourism and unplanned developmental activities are forming unsustainable conditions for the ecology, stability, and tourism business of Uttarakhand have been studied adequately in previous research (Allan, 1998; Dey et al., 2018; Farooquee et al., 2008; Gupta et al., 2018; Jasrotia & Sharma; 2020; Kala, 2014; Kuniyal, 2013; Kuniyal et al., 2003; Mahapatra et al., 2012; Maikhuri et al., 2017; Sharma et al., 2016). However, strategic directions aimed to transform these challenges into a sustainable business and developmental prospects are lacking. Due to the fact that most of the previous research studies conducted in the tourism sector of Uttarakhand or IHR are grounded in scientific and technical epistemologies; and therefore, for managing tourism business in the IHR or Uttarakhand, strategy and sustainable business studies have not received adequate attention. In particular, despite the significance of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis and Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM) to explore and evaluate future strategies for sustainable tourism businesses in the ecologically sensitive regions (see Bonzanigo, Giupponi, & Balbi, 2016; Buta, 2007; Ghorbani, Raufirad, Rafiaani, & Azadi, 2015; Reihanian, Mahmood, Kahrom, & Hin, 2012; Roxas, Rivera, & Gutierrez, 2020; Thimm, 2017; Yfantidou & Matarazzo, 2017), no previous research has been conducted to explore the SWOT of the Uttarakhand tourism sector or business, and no efforts have been made to identify strategies through QSPM analysis. This represents a significant research gap in the sustainable tourism literature of the IHR and Uttarakhand. Therefore, the study focuses on two key objectives; (i) to conduct the SWOT analysis of the tourism sector of Uttarakhand and (ii) to offer prospective strategies for developing sustainable tourism business in the region. For which in-depth interviews of the associated stakeholders were first conducted to determine the Uttarakhand tourism sector's SWOT factors, then SWOT and QSPM analysis are used to identify and offer the prospective strategies for developing sustainable tourism business in the region.

This article is structured as follows; the next section explains the research context and the paper's methodology. Then, the study results and findings are reported before discussing the findings, and finally, the article ends with a conclusion.

2. Research context and methodology

2.1. Research context

In the IHR, Uttarakhand, the Northern Himalayan State of India is a good setting to explore strategies for sustainable tourism business and developmental prospects because; (a) Uttarakhand is a leading player in the tourism businesses of the country, (b) Uttarakhand is globally known for its innate tourism attractions and is a preferred destination for pilgrimage, leisure, and recreational tourism activities (Sharma et al., 2016), (c) despite being an ideal and preferred destination for tourism services and a key player in the tourism businesses of India, the tourism industry of Uttarakhand is facing sustainability challenges, and attentive strategies are lacking in the direction, and (d) more importantly, conducting a research study in localities where things happen, generates real insights (Steyaert & Landström, 2011; Yessoufou, Blok, & Omta, 2018) for practical implications.

2.2. Design, sample, data collection, and analysis

This exploratory research study employed a case study research design. Because of its suitability for a situation in which research questions need extensive, non-manipulative, and in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon and its ability to recognize the relevance of contextuality in a research study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). Further, the interview was chosen as a preferred method for data collection because the interview method is considered one of the best data collection tool that gives voice to the research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Kebete & Wondirad, 2019).

Using a purposeful sampling method (Guba & Lincoln, 1982), the author purposefully selected the interview participants. This research study's main objective is to conduct the SWOT analysis of the Uttarakhand tourism sector or business and offer prospective strategies for developing sustainable tourism business in the region. Therefore, to collect the primary data, the author deliberately selected a sample of participants who have a firm association with Uttarakhand's tourism sector and adequately know its functional and operative requirements.

In Uttarakhand, the Northern Himalayan State of India, 29 in-depth interviews, with participants from five groups; i.e., policymakers-3; scientist-3; operators-6; transporters-4; and small business owners and local natives-13; were conducted, and then SWOT and QSPM analysis were performed to identify the strategies. The interviews were continued untill data saturation was reached (Chandra & Sharma, 2019; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Mason, 2010; O'reilly & Parker, 2013) at 29 because, after this point, no additional new insights were observed. The interviews were conducted between August 2019 and December 2019 as part of an independent project that explores strategic business and marketing prospects for developing sustainable tourism business in Uttarakhand, India.

All the interviews were primarily based on semi-structured interview protocols, designed to investigate Uttarakhand's tourism sector and offer prospective strategies for developing sustainable tourism business in the region. The interview protocols were initially created, reviewed, and refined from the initial stage to the end of the data collection process to attain all the potential information that has contributed to generate practical insights and exploring prospective strategies. The protocol for policymakers, scientists, operators, transporters, small business owners, and local natives primarily comprised questions; (a) on identifying the SWOT factors of the tourism sector of Uttarakhand and (b) how these factors can be useful for formulating prospective strategies for developing sustainable tourism business in the region. Further, the collected primary data and information are corroborated with available scholarly literature and reliable information sources, such as the web source of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, the Government of Uttarakhand.

Given the study's exploratory nature, an inductive approach (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002) was employed for data analysis. First, all the study participants' interviews were transcribed verbatim, and then a conventional qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) is conducted. Second, the factors of SWOT were identified for the tourism sector of Uttarakhand (Table 1). Then, some study participants, i.e., policymakers and scientists, are further contacted to evaluate the findings and assign weights and attractive scores for each SWOT factor. The main reasons behind contacting only the policymakers and scientists to evaluate the findings and assigned the weights and attractive scores were the study subject's technicality and their knowledge and experience in dealing with it. Finally, prospective strategies were identified and offered for Uttarakhand's sustainable tourism business, the Northern Himalayan State of India. An overview of the methodological framework used for this study is shown in Fig. 2.

Throughout the data collection and analysis phase, the author duly acknowledged the criteria of credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of qualitative research to ensure the trustworthiness of data collection, analysis, and the internal

Table 1
The SWOT of Uttarakhand's tourism sector.

Strengths
1. Diverse geographical landscape and natural beauty form unique and multiple tourism attractions.
2. Uttarakhand is well-known for some of the world-famous destinations, religious sites, national parks, and other sacred places.
3. Naturally originated adventures and water sports topographies.
4. Good policy environment and support to elevate tourism in the region.
5. Strong local participation and commitment.
6. Small villages and residing communities represent a perfect unification of mountainous enthusiasm and peace.
7. Well-developed tourism infrastructure and facilities.

Weaknesses
1. The geography and ecology are too sensitive for unplanned development and anthropogenic interferences.
2. Lack of management is leading the issues of mismanaged waste and unregulated moments on multiple sites.
3. Lack of coordination between planning, management, and scientific agencies.
4. Strategy and marketing understanding are inadequate.
5. Lack of awareness amongst the visitors on Uttarakhand's ecology, geography, cultural, and social aspects.
6. Other forms of tourist attractions are not widespread, mainly rural and ecotourism.
7. Lack of professional service approach.

Opportunities
1. Good prospects are available for developing niche tourism and recreational activities.
2. Opportunities are existing for planned, but a convention-based expansion of tourism services in the region.
3. Growing tourism activities at a particular site might transform into sustainability by focusing on niche tourism.
4. Scientific interventions are worthwhile for determining the caring capacity of a particular tourism site.
5. Vital interests amongst natives on tourism-related entrepreneurship are good for future developmental prospects.
6. Awareness and mass promotional activities to aware and educate visitors for sustainability cause.
7. Facilities and services might upgrade through a mutual public, private, and professional association.

Threats
1. Extensive anthropogenic interferences and massive vehicular movement is a big challenge.
2. Lack of strategy and marketing understanding is leading to an unfavorable perception among the visitors.
3. The deficiency of management on the tourist sites of Uttarakhand can damage the natural environment.
4. Unregulated and massive movement of visitors may cause severe climatic crisis anytime.
5. The absence of coordination between agencies is forming inconsistency between tourism developmental activities and regions' sustainability.
6. The primary focus on pilgrimage and religious tourism is causing anthropogenic threats for some destinations.
7. Lack of a professional service approach is leading dissatisfaction among the visitors.
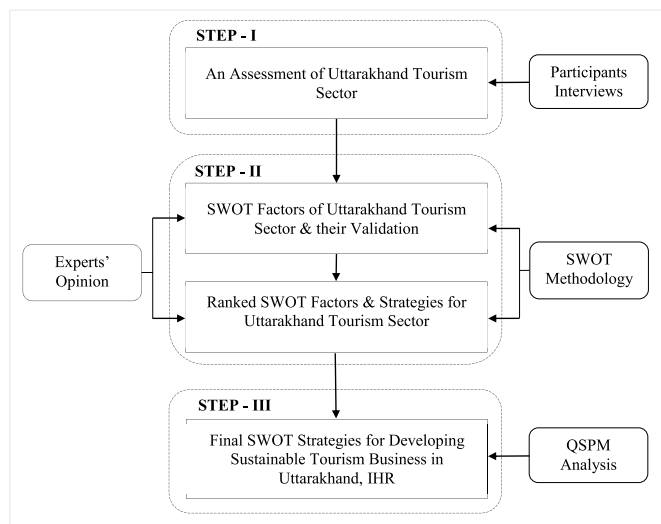
Fig. 2. Methodological framework.

validity of the research findings.

2.3. SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis is a well-known strategic planning method used for evaluating the prospective management priorities of a business (Buta, 2007; Chandra & Sharma, 2018; Ghorbani et al., 2015). SWOT is aligned with strategy and marketing theory and therefore considered a practical management tool for offering alternative strategies and recommendations to comprehend opportunities present in the external business environment (Chandra & Sharma, 2018; Sepehr, Mansoureh, & Mandana, 2011). Besides the foundation and applications of SWOT analysis for the general businesses, now its applications are promisingly extending in natural resource management, tourism, and sustainability research (Chandra & Sharma, 2018; Ghorbani et al., 2015; Reihanian et al., 2012). Using SWOT analysis, one can determine the internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and the external factors (opportunities and threats) of a business (Nikolaou & Evangelinos, 2010), which have strategic significance for deciding prospective strategies to capitalize the strengths and opportunities for the competitive advantage and to lessen the weaknesses and threats (Chandra & Sharma, 2018).

2.4. QSPM analysis

"Quantitative strategic planning matrix (QSPM) is an analytical tool used to evaluate the relative attractiveness of various strategies based on the key internal and external factors" (David, 1986; David, David, & David, 2017, p. 343). With less computation, objectively QSPM analysis helps determine and select more realistic strategies than other management techniques (Chandra & Sharma, 2018; Ghorbani et al., 2015).

The QSPM analysis primarily comprises six main steps (David, 2017): (i) the key internal and external factors of a business are identified; (ii) based on the relative importance of each internal and external factors, a weight/rating is assigned. Importantly, the weight must be a sum to 1.0 for the external factors and 1.0 for the internal factors; (iii) prospective strategies are identified for consideration by strategically matching internal and external factors; (iv) the attractive scores between 1 and 4 are determined for each prospective strategy by individually examining each internal and external factor, where 1 stands for fundamental threats, 2 for moderate threats, 3 for threats, and 4 for excessive threats. These scores were based on the present assessment of the tourism sector of Uttarakhand and its sustainability challenges; (v) the total attractive scores are calculated for each internal and external factor

by multiplying the rating of step 2 with the attractive scores of step 4; (vi) lastly, the final total attractive scores are calculated based on the cumulative power of each internal and external factor, which concludes the most realistic strategy for practical consideration.

3. Results and findings

To develop a sustainable tourism business in Uttarakhand or IHR and to explore attentive strategies for future developmental planning of the region, this exploratory research study focuses on two key objectives; (i) to conduct the SWOT analysis of the tourism sector of Uttarakhand and (ii) to offer prospective strategies for developing sustainable tourism business in the region. Accordingly, the author attend the required information through in-depth interviews of the study participants, and then SWOT and QSPM analysis were performed to identify, evaluate, and offer the prospective strategies. This section presents the results and findings that emerged from the conventional qualitative content analysis of the interview transcripts in the form of SWOT factors and final SWOT strategies.

All the factors of SWOT (Table 1) for Uttarakhand's tourism sector or business were reviewed and using the weights assigned by research participants, IFEM (internal factor estimate matrix) and EFEM (external factor estimate matrix) were determined respectively for external (Table 2) and internal factors (Table 3) of the SWOT. In the external factor estimate matrix; if the calculated final total attractive score is less than 2.5, it is considered that the opportunities and strengths are less than the threats and weaknesses. However, if the calculated final total attractive score is more than 2.5, it is considered that the opportunities and strengths are higher than the threats and weaknesses (Chandra & Sharma, 2018; Ghorbani et al., 2015).

3.1. External factor estimation matrix (EFEM)

In the SWOT of Uttarakhand's tourism business, primarily seven factors were pertaining to opportunities and threats (Table 2) with weights between 0.04 and 0.11 and attractive scores between 3 and 4 for opportunities, and weights between 0.02 and 0.11 and attractive scores between 1 and 4 for threats.

For opportunities, the results of EFEM shows that the most significant factors which obtained the highest weight were 'good prospects are available for developing niche tourism and recreational activities' followed by 'growing tourism activities at a particular site might transform into sustainability by focusing on niche tourism' and 'scientific interventions are worthwhile for determining the caring capacity of a particular tourism site.' In contrast, 'awareness and mass promotional activities to aware and educate visitors for sustainability cause' had the lowest weights.

For threats, 'extensive anthropogenic interferences and massive vehicular movement is a big challenge' and 'the deficiency of management on the tourist sites of Uttarakhand can damage the natural environment' have obtained the highest weights, followed by 'unregulated and massive movement of visitors may cause severe climatic crisis anytime', the absence of coordination between agencies is forming inconsistency between tourism developmental activities and regions' sustainability', and 'lack of strategy and marketing understanding is leading to an unfavorable perception among the visitors'. On the contrary, 'the primary focus on pilgrimage and religious tourism is causing anthropogenic threats for some destinations' and 'lack of a professional service approach is leading dissatisfaction among the visitors' had the lowest weights. The total attractive scores for external factors (Table 2) were 3.38, which means the opportunities overweight the threats.

3.2. Internal factor estimation matrix (IFEM)

Further, for strengths and weaknesses, seven factors were identified (Table 3) and examined. Weights between 0.04 and 0.14 and attractive

Table 2
External factor estimation matrix (EFEM).

	Weight	Attractive Score	Total Attractive Score
Opportunities			
1. Good prospects are available for developing niche tourism and recreational activities	0.11	4	0.44
2. Opportunities are existing for planned, but a convention-based expansion of tourism services in the region.	0.06	3	0.18
3. Growing tourism activities at a particular site might transform into sustainability by focusing on niche tourism.	0.09	4	0.36
4. Scientific interventions are worthwhile for determining the caring capacity of a particular tourism site.	0.07	4	0.28
5. Vital interests amongst natives on tourism-related entrepreneurship are good for future developmental prospects.	0.06	3	0.18
6. Awareness and mass promotional activities to aware and educate visitors for sustainability cause.	0.04	4	0.16
7. Facilities and services might upgrade through a mutual public, private, and professional association.	0.08	3	0.24
Threats			
1. Extensive anthropogenic interferences and massive vehicular movement is a big challenge.	0.11	4	0.44
2. Lack of strategy and marketing understanding is leading to an unfavorable perception among the visitors.	0.06	2	0.12
3. The deficiency of management on the tourist sites of Uttarakhand can damage the natural environment.	0.11	4	0.44
4. Unregulated and massive movement of visitors may cause severe climatic crisis anytime.	0.08	3	0.24
5. The absence of coordination between agencies is forming inconsistency between tourism developmental activities and regions' sustainability.	0.06	3	0.18
6. The primary focus on pilgrimage and religious tourism is causing anthropogenic threats for some destinations.	0.05	2	0.1
7. Lack of a professional service approach is leading dissatisfaction among the visitors.	0.02	1	0.02
Total	**1**		**3.38**

Table 3
Internal factor estimation matrix (IFEM).

	Weight	Attractive Score	Total Attractive Score
Strengths			
1. Diverse geographical landscape and natural beauty form unique and multiple tourism attractions.	0.14	4	0.56
2. Uttarakhand is well-known for some of the world-famous destinations, religious sites, national parks, and other sacred places.	0.07	4	0.28
3. Naturally originated adventures and water sports topographies.	0.09	3	0.27
4. Good policy environment and support to elevate tourism in the region.	0.05	2	0.1
5. Strong local participation and commitment.	0.04	2	0.08
6. Small villages and residing communities represent a perfect unification of mountainous enthusiasm and peace.	0.05	3	0.15
7. Well-developed tourism infrastructure and facilities.	0.06	3	0.18
Weaknesses			
1. The geography and ecology are too sensitive for unplanned development and anthropogenic interferences.	0.11	4	0.44
2. Lack of management is leading the issues of mismanaged waste and unregulated moments on multiple sites.	0.06	3	0.18
3. Lack of coordination between planning, management, and scientific agencies.	0.09	3	0.27
4. Strategy and marketing understanding are inadequate.	0.06	2	0.12
5. Lack of awareness amongst the visitors on Uttarakhand's ecology, geography, cultural, and social aspects.	0.07	4	0.28
6. Other forms of tourist attractions are not widespread, mainly rural and ecotourism.	0.07	3	0.21
7. Lack of professional service approach.	0.04	4	0.16
Total	**1**		**3.28**

approach' had the lowest weights. The total attractive scores for internal factors (Table 3) were 3.28. It suggests that the strengths outweigh the weaknesses.

3.3. SWOT strategies

Using the SWOT methodology and after a strategic evaluation and selection of each internal and external factors and recognizing the relationships between these factors - four types of strategies, i.e., SO (Strength–Opportunities), WO (Weakness–Opportunities), ST (Strength–Threats) and WT (Weakness–Threats), were developed. The SO strategies indicate opportunities, ST strategies guide the possible ways to improve the present situation, WO strategies are helpful to overcome the weaknesses, and WT strategies are useful to formulate defensive plans and strategies. Finally, 12 strategies (Table 4) were identified for developing sustainable tourism businesses in the IHR or Uttarakhand.

3.4. QSPM strategies

The QSPM analysis was performed further to rank the strategies according to their total attractive scores (Table 5). The computation data of QSPM analysis is provided in Appendix A-D. Consistent with the QSPM analysis results, the best strategy for Uttarakhand's sustainable tourism business is WO1, i.e., scientific intervention, public participation, and strategic plans are necessary to reduce anthropogenic

scores between 2 and 4 were allocated for strengths. For weaknesses, the allocated weights and attractive scores were respectively 0.04 and .011, and 2 and 4. For strengths, 'diverse geographical landscape and natural beauty form unique and multiple tourism attractions' had the highest weights, followed by 'naturally originated adventures and water sports topographies' and 'Uttarakhand is well-known for some of the world-famous destinations, religious sites, national parks, and other sacred places'. In contrast, 'good policy environment and support to elevate tourism in the region' and 'strong local participation and commitment' had the lowest weights.

For weaknesses, 'the geography and ecology are too sensitive for unplanned development, and anthropogenic interferences' have obtained the highest weights, followed by 'lack of coordination between planning, management, and scientific agencies' and 'lack of awareness amongst the visitors on Uttarakhand's ecology, geography, cultural, and social aspects. On the contrary, 'the lack of professional service

Table 4
SWOT strategies for sustainable tourism business of the IHR and uttarakhand.

SO Strategies
1. Capitalizing scientific inputs and recognizing the conventional sustainability practices, Uttarakhand's diverse tourism attractions can be nurture into niche tourism segments.
2. Through vocational training programs and increasing a focus on local volunteers and representatives, an innovative professional service environment might be developed for sustainable tourism in the State.
3. Through education and awareness programs (using the traditional ethos and message), the state government can inculcate sustainable behavior among visitors regarding local culture, ecological sensitivity, and geography.

ST Strategies
1. Strategic scheduling to visit a particular site at a specific point of time is useful to regulate the massive moment and unregulated tourism in the State. For which, the authorized institutions may adopt the information and communication technology as a planning tool.
2. A holistic advisory and checkpoints are useful to limit the waste disposal and unnecessary anthropocentric interferences on various tourism destinations.
3. Reinstating coordination amongst various agencies will ensure sustainable tourism operations in the State.

WO Strategies
1. Scientific intervention, public participation, and strategic plans are necessary to reduce anthropogenic interferences from ecologically sensitive destinations.
2. Coordinated involvement of the scientific community, local natives, and business and marketing professionals for planning tourism in the State will ensure mutual coordination and sustainability in tourism development.
3. To increase competitiveness, visitors' experience, and sustainable business intervention in the sector, the state government may increase the participation of marketing professionals, the private sector, and local communities.

WT Strategies
1. Shifting focus from religious tourism to the development of ecotourism, rural tourism, and other niche forms of tourism is a rational strategy for developing sustainable tourism businesses in Uttarakhand.
2. The quality of tourism service in Uttarakhand can enhance through proper professional training of the associated stakeholders.
3. Without compromising sustainability, employment, and revenue, proper and continuous coordination; between scientific, marketing, and service professionals; is necessary for initiating and realizing sustainability in Uttarakhand's tourism businesses.

Table 5
Final QSPM analysis for suggested SWOT strategies.

Strategies	Total Attractive Score
WO1 – Scientific intervention, public participation, and strategic plans are necessary to reduce anthropogenic interferences from ecologically sensitive destinations.	3.42
SO1 – Capitalizing scientific inputs and recognizing the conventional sustainability practices, Uttarakhand's diverse tourism attractions can be nurture into niche tourism segments.	3.39
SO2 – Through vocational training programs and by increasing a focus on local volunteers and representatives, an innovative professional service environment might be developed for sustainable tourism in the State.	3.31
WT1 – Shifting focus from religious tourism to the development of ecotourism, rural tourism, and other niche forms of tourism is a rational strategy for developing sustainable tourism businesses in Uttarakhand.	3.27
WT2 – The quality of tourism service in Uttarakhand can enhance through proper professional training of the associated stakeholders.	3.22
WO3 – To increase competitiveness, visitors' experience, and sustainable business intervention in the sector, the state government may increase the participation of marketing professionals, the private sector, and local communities.	3.18
WT3 – Without compromising sustainability, employment, and revenue, proper and continuous coordination; between scientific, marketing, and service professionals; is necessary for initiating and realizing sustainability in Uttarakhand's tourism businesses.	3.16
ST1 – Strategic scheduling to visit a particular site at a specific point of time is useful to regulate the massive moment and unregulated tourism in the State. For which, the authorized institutions may adopt the information and communication technology as a planning tool.	3.2
ST3 – Reinstating coordination amongst various agencies will ensure sustainable tourism operations in the State.	3.1
ST2 – A holistic advisory and checkpoints are useful to limit the waste disposal and unnecessary anthropocentric interferences on various tourism destinations.	3.05
WO2 – Coordinated involvement of the scientific community, local natives, and business and marketing professionals for planning tourism in the State will ensure mutual coordination and sustainability in tourism development.	2.93
SO3 – Through education and awareness programs (using the traditional ethos and message), the state government can inculcate sustainable behavior amongst visitors regarding local culture, ecological sensitivity, and geography.	2.82

interferences from ecologically sensitive destinations. Subsequently, SO1, SO2, WT1, WT2, WO3, WT3, ST1, ST3, ST2, WO2, and SO3 strategies are appropriate for transforming the incongruous practices of tourism, unplanned developmental activities, and the massive inflow of visitors of Uttarakhand into future developmental planning and sustainable business prospects. Though all the prospective strategies offered in this study are practical for implementations, but the final total attractive score guides the relative importance of each strategy and sequence that the policymakers and associated stakeholders may follow while implementing.

4. Discussion

The tourism sector and potential of the IHR are considered a growth engine for the future development of the area (NITI, 2019). However, underlining the fact that the Indian Himalayan Region and Uttarakhand possess sensitive ecology and geographical landscape; the existing policy framework, incongruous practices of tourism, unplanned developmental activities, and the massive inflow of visitors in the region do not represent sustainability for its ecology, stability, and tourism business (Gupta et al., 2018; Kuniyal et al., 2003, 2012, p. 2012; Sati, 2018). Therefore, while focusing on developing tourism infrastructure and expanding tourism activities in the Indian Himalayan Region or Uttarakhand - attentive strategies are necessary to link the region's tourism potential with future development planning, ecological wellbeing, and sustainable business prospects.

In an attempt to investigate the tourism sector of Uttarakhand and to offer prospective strategies for linking the tourism potential and business of the State with future developmental planning, ecological

wellbeing, and sustainable business prospects; the results of SWOT analysis performed in this study reveal that several factors like extensive anthropogenic interferences, issues of mismanaged waste, and unregulated vehicular movement are currently representing critical issues for the sustainable tourism business of Uttarakhand. Consequently, diverse challenges are increasingly evolving for the ecology, stability, and tourism business of Uttarakhand. These findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Dash and Punia (2019), Kuniyal et al. (2003), Kuniyal (2013), and Pandit (2013).

Further, the study results reveal that the unregulated and massive movement of visitors and lack of coordination between various coordinating agencies are not a good sign for the sustainability of the region's ecology and tourism sector. Because the unregulated and massive movement of visitors can intensify undesirable anthropogenic interferences on Uttarakhand's various tourist destinations and the lack of coordination amongst the agencies may further lead to more conflicts between tourism developmental activities and the region's sustainability. Therefore, strategic actions are essential to bringing support and cooperation from coordinating and scientific agencies to transform Uttarakhand's tourism potential into a sustainable business and developmental prospects (Berry & Ladkin, 1997; Pandit, 2013; Scott, 2011). It is also necessary to notice that threats like lack of strategy and marketing understanding, primary focus on pilgrimage and religious tourism, and

lack of professional service approach are other critical challenges that the tourism business of Uttarakhand is facing from an ecology, business, and regional sustainability perspective (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008; Hanna, Font, Scarles, Weeden, & Harrison, 2018).

On the other hand, Uttarakhand tourism has many opportunities and strengths. Like, the opportunities for developing and expanding Uttarakhand's tourism business represent sustainable prospects for other niche tourism and recreational activities in the region. Moreover, the most significant strengths are diverse geographical landscapes and natural beauty, unique and multiple tourism attractions, naturally originated adventures and water sports topographies, and small villages and residing communities represent a perfect unification of mountainous enthusiasm and peace. These strengths categorically represent meaningful prospects for developing a sustainable tourism business in Uttarakhand and offers opportunities for linking the region's tourism prospects with future developmental planning.

The results and findings of the SWOT analysis confirm that the strength overweighs weaknesses and opportunities overweighs threats. This indicates that the tourism sector of Uttarakhand shows valuable potential for sustainable business prospects. However, some strategic issues, such as - lack of coordination between planning, management, and scientific agencies, the inadequacy of strategy and marketing understanding, and lack of management in handling mismanaged waste and unregulated moments on multiple sites are not favoring sustainability and sustainable business prospects in the sector. Hence, the study argues that without attentive strategies, the existing tourism business practices, prevailing activities, and management cannot be considered sustainable for Uttarakhand's ecology, stability, and tourism business. Therefore, if the policymakers operate within the identified strategies (Table 5), then the prevailing incongruous practices of Uttarakhand tourism and massive inflow of visitors in the region can be transformed into a sustainable business and developmental prospects. For example, the SO strategies, which represent opportunities, are practical for developing and expanding Uttarakhand's tourism business into diverse niche segments and thereby reducing the overburden of visitors on a particular site. Further, the SO strategies are also appropriate to link the State's local communities with professional and sustainable tourism business practices and promote ecological sensitivity and affirmative behavior amongst the visitors. As a consequence, the SO strategies will transform the prevailing incongruous practices of tourism, unplanned developmental activities, and the massive inflow of visitors into a sustainable business and developmental prospects (Poudel, Nyaupane, & Budruk, 2016).

The ST strategies, aimed to improve the present situation, are vital to limit visitors' massive inflow (Kebete & Wondirad, 2019) and waste disposal and to promote participatory management of the tourism business in Uttarakhand, to ensure sustainable tourism activities in the region. Further, WO strategies, a tool to overcome the weaknesses, are practical to prevent the massive inflow of visitors on the ecologically sensitive tourism sites and to improve competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism business of Uttarakhand or the Indian Himalayan Region. Finally, WT strategies are practical for developing defensive plans and policy frameworks to ensure lasting sustainability and developmental prospects (Liu, 2003). Such as shifting a focus from religious tourism to the development of ecotourism, rural tourism, and other niche forms of tourism and establishing proper and continuous coordination between scientific, marketing, and service professionals is necessary for initiating and realizing sustainability in the tourism business of Uttarakhand.

In addition to the strategies offered in this study, applications of information communication technology, a powerful tool for technology-enabled sustainable tourism business (Li, Robinson, & Oriade, 2017), can be an excellent facilitator for managing the region's tourism business and ensuring a tradeoff between tourism developmental activities and sustainability.

5. Conclusion

To develop a sustainable tourism business in the Indian Himalayan Region, the study, using SWOT and QSPM analysis, investigates Uttarakhand's tourism sector and offers prospective strategies. The results and findings of the study reveal that the Uttarakhand's tourism sector and business are continuously expanding and progressing. However, the lack of attentive strategies, the existing policy framework, incongruous practices of tourism, unplanned developmental activities, and the massive inflow of visitors; is not sustainable for the ecology, stability, and tourism business of the Indian Himalayan Region and Uttarakhand. Therefore, this study concludes that if the policymakers operate within the identified strategies, then the prevailing incongruous practices of Uttarakhand tourism and massive inflow of visitors in the region can be transformed into a sustainable business and developmental prospects.

This research study offers several key contributions to sustainable tourism literature. First, it attempts to link the Uttarakhand tourism business's SWOT factors to prospective strategies for sustainable business prospects and future developmental planning in the regions. While doing so, the study extends the scope of tourism literature by adding insights to the models and theories that support the practicality of SWOT and QSPM analysis for developing strategies for sustainable tourism businesses (Bonzanigo et al., 2016; Ghorbani et al., 2015; Reihanian et al., 2012; Thimm, 2017). This study also advances an understanding of linking the Indian Himalayan Region's tourism potential to sustainable business prospects and future developmental planning (Gupta et al., 2018; NITI, 2019) by identifying and offering strategies through field research. Similarly, this study fills the gap present between the tourism prospect and sustainability, particularly in the regions where the ecology and geographical landscape are susceptive to massive anthropogenic interferences; and the activities of tourism merely cannot perform as a usual business approach.

This study is conducted in Uttarakhand, the northern Himalayan State of India. Therefore, several limitations need acknowledgment. The choice of sampling frame and approach was guided by the aim of developing an understanding of how the prevailing incongruous practices of tourism can transform into the sustainable business prospects rather than obtained conclusions that can be generalizable at the entire IHR. The findings of this qualitative research study suggest that if the policymakers operate within the identified strategies, then the prevailing incongruous practices of Uttarakhand tourism and massive inflow of visitors in the region can be transformed into a sustainable business and developmental prospects; however, it requires further validations and research across the entire IHR. Besides this, this research further calls for several research avenues. First, to the perspective of future developmental planning through tourism potential of the IHR, future research studies should address the tourism business challenges and issues of the other states of the IHR and, second, in the context of Uttarakhand, further research might be carried out on each of the suggested final SWOT strategies to explore and validate their applicability in an extended context.

Contribution

Both authors (PC & JK) contributed equally to this manuscript.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

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