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Editorial

The Janaprakash Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (JJMR) with ISSN: 3021-9892 in print and ISSN 3021-9906 in online versions is a multidisciplinary journal published annually by the Janaprakash Multiple Campus, which is an affiliated campus of Tribhuvan University. The journal is committed to advancing publications of scholarly research articles, review articles, theoretical notes, and case studies. The journal provides a forum for scholars and practitioners from diverse and multidisciplinary viewpoints and discuss theories and practices focusing on management, social science, education, law, arts and humanities, the environment, language, literature, pedagogy, and statistics among others. The journal publishes in English and Nepali languages and provides high values for research conducted using primary and secondary data collected and processed by the researcher(s). The articles are also accepted in specific areas: gender studies, globalization, human resource development, language and communication, population, enterprises and entrepreneurship, public and business policies, management of social welfare, social work, tourism, internship and apprenticeship among others. The journal is also expected to function as the medium of disseminating standard conference papers.

Teaching is always required to be based on research and the higher education teaching staff should regularly publish scholarly research papers, theoretical notes, review articles, case studies singly on his/her areas of concentration and expertise, as well as jointly with co-workers in common areas, and with students in areas where students have interests to their dissertation and other research works. As research and publication are the major activities for knowledge creation, this journal is expected to supplement the needs of scholars in accessing avenue for their scholarly publications. Thus, this journal encourages faculties, researchers and students to publish their work as it has provided and expanded the platform to publish research outputs and other scholarly writings.

Submitted papers are referred, and are evaluated on the basis of academic contribution to the body of knowledge by advancing understanding of creativity, quality of scholarship, completeness of the content and the structure/components of research, clarity of the presentation and organization, accuracy and correctness academically, consistency in findings, thoroughness in discussion and conclusion, appropriate referencing and citation, and language usage.

This volume is the second attempt in publication, which has incorporated five research papers and five review papers/articles of different areas of studies and contributors from different institutions. The Editorial Board in the future is also considering to publish a thematic part and special issues with dedicated research papers and articles in one specific faculty.

The Editorial Board in this regard sincerely thanks to all the contributors for submitting their papers and articles within given short period of time. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the reviewers of these manuscripts. Similarly, the Janaprakash Research Management Committee (RMS) and the Campus Administration are praise worthy as they have facilitated the Board in making the publication process smooth. Similarly, Tribhuvan University Central Library (TUCL) and NepJOL for managing and disseminating this journal online.

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Assessing the Impact of Credit Risk on the Financial Performance of Commercial Banks in Nepal

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Abstract

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This study explores the impact of credit risk on the financial performance of Nepalese commercial banks, focusing on critical performance indicators such as Return on Assets (ROA), Return on Equity (ROE), and liquidity ratios. The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the relationship between credit risk factors such as Non-Performing Loan Ratio (NPLR), Loan Loss Provision Ratio (LLPR), Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR), and Credit Risk Ratio (CRR), and key financial metrics, and their influence on profitability and stability. Adopting a positivist research philosophy, the study employs a quantitative methodology using secondary data from the annual reports of commercial banks. The population consists of all commercial banks operating in Nepal, while a sample of seven banks was selected through the lottery method, a random sampling technique. Correlation and regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between the variables. The results disclose significant negative correlations between NPLR and both LAR and CAR, indicating adverse impacts of rising non-performing loans on asset leveraging and capital adequacy. Conversely, NPLR positively correlates with ROE, highlighting complex dynamics where banks with higher credit risks may achieve increased equity returns under certain conditions. Regression analysis indicates that LLPR and CRR negatively influence both ROA and ROE, whereas CAR positively impacts profitability. The findings highlight the critical importance of effective Credit Risk Management (CRM) in *enhancing financial performance. Banks must balance lending activities with risk management to maintain profitability and stability. The study concludes that robust CRM strategies are essential for mitigating credit risks and sustaining growth in Nepal's banking sector. These findings hold implications for policymakers, regulators, and practitioners aiming to strengthen the resilience of financial institutions in developing economies.*

Keywords: *Commercial banks, credit risk, financial performance, Nepal, profitability.*

Introduction

The banking sector plays a pivotal role in fostering the economic development of a country by serving as a cornerstone for financial intermediation and resource allocation. Financial institutions, particularly banks, act as conduits for channeling funds from savers to borrowers, thereby supporting the economy's real growth (Chhetri, 2021). However, banking inherently involves risk-taking, a fundamental aspect of financial intermediation. The inability to adequately assess and manage these risks can lead to significant losses, potentially jeopardizing the stability of individual institutions and the broader financial system (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2018). As banks adapt to evolving economic environments, they encounter various risks that can impede their operations and performance, making risk management an indispensable aspect of their functioning (Santomero,1997). Among the myriad risks faced by banks, credit risk is particularly significant due to its direct impact on profitability and operational sustainability. Credit risk arises when borrowers fail to meet their debt obligations, either through default or delayed payments. This risk is a major challenge for banks as it directly affects their revenue streams, primarily derived from interest earned on loans and advances (Boland, 2012). Effective credit risk management (CRM) is crucial for ensuring a bank's profitability, financial health, and long-term growth (Li & Zou, 2014). Banks that fail to manage credit risks adequately expose themselves to heightened bankruptcy risks, which can undermine depositor confidence and destabilize the financial ecosystem. The significance of CRM extends beyond individual institutions to encompass the broader banking sector. The Basel Accords 1999, a global regulatory framework, identifies credit risk as one of the three fundamental risks, alongside market and operational risks, that financial institutions must address (Jobst, 2007). Credit risk is not only external, stemming from borrower defaults, but also internal, often caused by managerial inefficiencies, poor credit standards, and inadequate oversight (Mwaurah, 2013). The consequences of mismanaging credit risks are severe, including an increase in non-performing loans (NPLs), which reduce profitability and threaten the viability of banking operations (Bhattarai, 2016).

In Nepal, the banking sector is a vital component of the economy, with commercial banks playing a central role in credit creation and financial intermediation. However, the sector faces challenges in managing credit risks effectively, given the dynamic economic environment and the diverse nature of its loan portfolios (Thapa & Sejuwal, 2023). Credit risk management is a multifaceted process involving the identification, measurement, monitoring, and mitigation of risks associated with lending activities. Effective CRM strategies ensure that banks maintain adequate capital buffers, manage loan portfolios prudently, and mitigate the impact of credit defaults (Botchwey, 2023). In this context, performance evaluation serves as a critical tool for stakeholders, including regulators, investors, and depositors, to assess the health and efficiency of banks (Tadele, 2021). The CAMEL framework provides a comprehensive approach to evaluating bank performance, considering factors such as the return on assets (ROA), return on equity (ROE), NPL ratios, and liquidity ratios.

The study explores the role of non-performing loans and loan loss provisions in shaping the profitability and sustainability of Nepalese commercial banks. NPLs represent a significant challenge for banks, as they not only reduce income but also increase the cost of maintaining provisions. High NPL ratios indicate poor asset quality, which can erode stakeholder confidence and destabilize the financial system (Baral, 2005). Conversely, effective management of loan portfolios and provisions can enhance profitability and ensure the long-term sustainability of banking operations (Ogboi et al., 2013). Furthermore, the study investigates the interplay between credit risk and other financial risks, such as liquidity and market risks. Banks must adopt a holistic approach to risk management, accounting for the interactions between various risk types and their cumulative impact on performance (Odawo et al., 2019). By focusing on key performance indicators, such as the capital adequacy ratio (CAR), credit-to-deposit ratio, and risk sensitivity, the study aims to provide actionable recommendations for improving credit risk management practices in Nepalese commercial banks.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the impact of CRM on the financial performance of Nepalese commercial banks. Specifically, the study evaluates the structure and patterns of key performance indicators, such as ROA, ROE, and liquidity ratios, and analyzes their relationship with credit risk factors. The rationale for this study lies in the critical importance of CRM for the stability and growth of the banking sector. In Nepal, the banking industry is characterized by a diverse range of players, each facing unique challenges in managing credit risks. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for banks, regulators, and policymakers, enabling them to adopt best practices in CRM and enhance the resilience of the financial system. Moreover, the study contributes to the existing body of literature by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between CRM practices and bank performance in the Nepalese context. Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations. It focuses on a subset of Nepalese commercial banks, limiting the generalizability of its findings to the entire sector. Additionally, the analysis is based on a specific timeframe, which may not capture the long-term dynamics of credit risk management. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a broader sample of banks and extending the analysis over a longer period.

Credit risk management is integral to the financial health and performance of commercial banks, particularly in developing economies like Nepal. Effective credit risk management minimizes potential financial losses by identifying, measuring, monitoring, and mitigating risks inherent in loan portfolios. Poudel (2012) emphasized the importance of robust credit risk models to optimize risk-adjusted returns, while Moti et al. (2012) noted that the process extends until full loan recovery. The Merton Theory of Credit Risk Assessment, developed by Merton (1974), provides a foundational framework for understanding credit risk. It encompasses structural and reduced-form models. Structural models assess a firm's capital structure to predict default based on economic fundamentals, while reduced-form models treat default as an external, unpredictable factor. Hybrid models, integrating these approaches, address limitations in traditional methods, enabling a more comprehensive risk assessment. The CAMELS framework offers a multi-dimensional approach to evaluating bank performance by analyzing Capital Adequacy, Asset Quality, Management Efficiency, Earnings Ability, Liquidity, and Sensitivity (Alzayed et al., 2023). Capital Adequacy gauges a bank's solvency and risk-bearing capacity, aligning with Basel Accords' international standards. Basel I and II emphasize adequate capital levels to mitigate credit risks, with Nepal Rastra Bank mandating minimum core capital at 6% and total capital fund at 11%. Asset quality, a critical determinant of profitability, evaluates credit risk in loan and investment portfolios (Kadioglu et al., 2017). Poor-quality assets, including non-performing assets (NPAs), undermine financial performance. Management quality, as per Grier (2007), is pivotal in ensuring effective risk identification and control mechanisms. Earnings sustainability and liquidity management are additional pillars influencing banks' resilience and ability to meet obligations.

Credit risk management has been extensively studied to understand its influence on the performance and profitability of commercial banks (Pradhan & Shrestha, 2017) emphasized the the impact of capital adequacy and bank operating efficiency on financial performance of Nepalese commercial banks. The study revealed that primary factors influencing the financial success of Nepal's commercial banks are the ratio of total deposits to total assets and the efficiency of bank operations. The financial performance of commercial banks is greatly enhanced by bank operational efficiency, loan ratio, total deposit to total assets, and loan loss provision to total equity. The financial performance of Nepalese commercial banks is negatively impacted by loan loss provision to total loan, core capital ratio, risk weighted ratio, and total capital ratio. Bhattarai (2016) analyzed the impact of credit risk on bank performance, concluding that non-performing loan ratios (NPL) had a negative impact, while cost-per-loan assets positively influenced profitability, demonstrating the efficiency of loan distribution. Similarly, Bhattarai (2019) extended this analysis and identified significant relationships between credit risk indicators like capital adequacy ratio (CAR), NPL, and profitability indicators like return on assets (ROA), reinforcing the importance of effective risk management in Nepalese banks.

Shah and Pradhan (2019) explored the relationship between credit risk management practices and loan repayment, finding a positive correlation with mitigation measures. Their research provided insights for managers to design sustainable credit risk management models. Chhetri (2021) highlighted the need for scientific credit risk management to enhance loan management and minimize the adverse effects of NPLs on financial performance. Bagale (2023) further emphasized the critical role of credit risk management in influencing profitability, identifying factors such as liquidity ratios and capital adequacy ratios as key determinants. The study also noted the challenges of maintaining an optimal balance between risk and profitability, stressing the need for robust risk assessment frameworks. International studies corroborate these findings. Gizaw et al. (2015) concluded that credit risk indicators like NPLR and CAR significantly affect profitability in Ethiopian banks. Isanzu (2017) identified similar trends in Chinese banks, where credit risk indicators impacted financial performance. In South Africa, Munangi et al. (2020) found a negative relationship between credit risk and financial performance, highlighting the importance of managing NPLs to enhance profitability. Siddique et al. (2022) extended this analysis to South Asia, demonstrating that credit risk factors such as NPLs and CAR have significant effects on financial performance metrics like ROA and ROE. These studies underline the universal relevance of credit risk management while emphasizing regional and institutional differences in its impact.

Although credit risk management and its influence on financial performance have been widely studied, significant gaps remain, particularly in the Nepalese context. Most studies focus on general credit risk indicators like NPLs and CAR but fail to capture the comprehensive dynamics of risk management practices in Nepalese commercial banks. Limited research has been conducted to analyze the specific determinants of profitability in these banks, often relying on small sample sizes and narrow time frames. Additionally, while international studies provide valuable insights, their findings are not always directly applicable to Nepal due to differences in economic environments, regulatory frameworks, and institutional capabilities. This gap highlights the need for focused research that evaluates credit risk management practices tailored to the unique challenges faced by Nepalese banks. Comprehensive studies with larger samples, extended timelines, and advanced methodologies are essential to provide actionable insights. Addressing these gaps will not only enhance understanding but also support the development of effective strategies to improve financial performance and resilience in Nepalese commercial banks.

Method of Data Collect and Analysis

This study employed a positivist philosophy with causal-comparative research designs to examine the relationship between credit risk indicators and the performance of Nepalese commercial banks. The causal-comparative approach assessed whether credit risk indicators could predict performance metrics such as Return on Assets (ROA) and Return on Equity (ROE). This study adopted a random sampling strategy to select banks from the population of 20 'A' class commercial banks regulated by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB). Using the lottery method, seven banks were chosen to represent the sample for the period from 2012/13 to 2021/22. The selected banks include Nabil Bank Limited, Standard Chartered Bank Limited, Himalayan Bank Limited, Global IME Bank Limited, Agriculture Development Bank Limited, Siddhartha Bank Limited, and Machhapuchchhre Bank Limited. The nature of data was quantitative and secondary sources were used, including NRB directives, annual reports of the selected banks, and NRB's Statistics and Bank Supervision reports. Quantitative methods were employed to quantify the relationships and impact between variables, utilizing financial tools such as Non-Performing Loan Ratio (NPLR), Loan Loss Provision Ratio (LLPR), Loan and Advance Ratio (LAR), Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR), Liquidity Ratio (LR), ROA, and ROE. Statistical tools such as correlation and regression analysis were applied, with the regression model defined as:

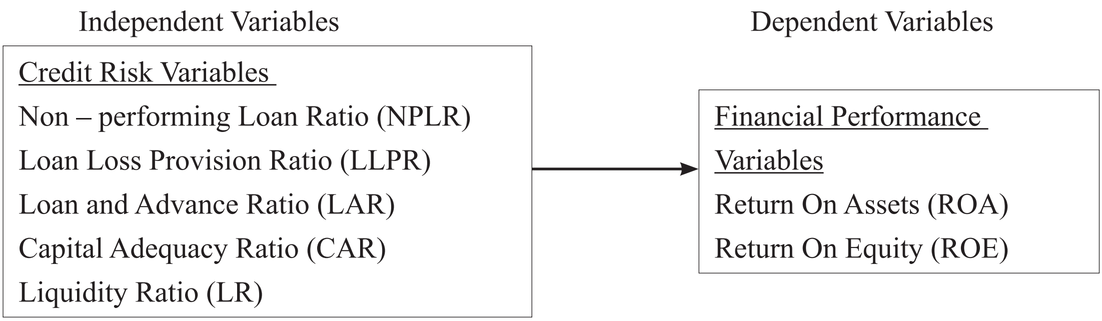
$$ROA = \alpha + \beta 1\ NPLR + \beta 2\ LLPR + \beta 3\ LAR + \beta 4\ CAR + \beta 5\ LR + e$$

$$ROE = \alpha + \beta 1\ NPLR + \beta 2\ LLPR + \beta 3\ LAR + \beta 4\ CAR + \beta 5\ LR + e.$$

This methodology provided a strong framework to analyze the influence of credit risk indicators on the performance of Nepalese commercial banks. The conceptual framework used in this study is as:

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Results

This section presents the results from inferential including correlation and regression analysis systematically and presents the findings.

Table 1 presents the correlations between various financial metrics of seven commercial banks in Nepal, aiming to elucidate the impact of credit risk on their financial performance. The metrics analyzed include Non-Performing Loan Ratio (NPLR), Loan to Asset Ratio (LAR), Loan Loss Provision Ratio (LLPR), Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR), Cost to Benefit Ratio (CBR), Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR), Return on Assets (ROA), and Return on Equity (ROE).

Table 1

Pearson's correlation coefficients matrix for the dependent and independent variable of Nepalese commercial banks for the selected period of 2011/12 to 2020/21.

	NPLR	LAR	LLPR	CAR	CBR	CRR	ROA	ROE
NPLR	1							
LAR	-.714*	1						
Sig.	0.020							
LLPR	0.508	-0.229	1					
Sig.	0.134	0.524						
CAR	-.834**	.867**	-0.216	1				
Sig.	0.003	0.001	0.549					
CBR	-0.580	0.452	-0.247	0.416	1			
Sig.	0.079	0.190	0.492	0.232				

CRR	.813**	.782**	0.396	-.648*	-0.360	1		
Sig.	0.004	0.008	0.258	0.043	0.307			
ROA	0.085	-0.390	-0.570	-0.305	-0.438	0.082	1	
Sig.	0.814	0.265	0.085	0.391	0.205	0.821		
ROE	.775**	-.676*	0.077	-.764*	-.812**	0.502	0.571	1
Sig.	0.008	0.032	0.832	0.010	0.004	0.139	0.085	

Note: Data sources from annual reports of respective banks

A key observation is the significant negative correlation between NPLR and both LAR and CAR. This indicates that as the ratio of non-performing loans increases, there is a corresponding decrease in the loan to asset ratio and capital adequacy ratio. This relationship suggests that higher levels of non-performing loans, which signify higher credit risk, adversely impact the bank's ability to leverage its assets and maintain sufficient capital. Conversely, NPLR shows a significant positive correlation with CRR and ROE, implying that higher non-performing loans are associated with increased cash reserves and return on equity. This could indicate that banks with higher credit risk might be holding more liquid assets as a precaution, and despite the risk, are able to generate higher returns on equity. There is significant negative correlation with NPLR (-.835, -.813, -.775, -.714) on CAR, CARR, ROE and LAR respectively.

The Loan to Asset Ratio (LAR) exhibits a strong positive correlation with the Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR), highlighting that banks with higher loan to asset ratios tend to maintain better capital adequacy. However, LAR is negatively correlated with both CRR and ROE, indicating that as banks allocate more of their assets to loans, their cash reserves and return on equity tend to decrease. This underscores the balancing act banks must perform between lending and maintaining liquidity. CAR also shows a negative correlation with CRR, suggesting that higher capital adequacy is associated with lower cash reserves. This relationship may reflect a strategic choice by banks to allocate less capital to liquid assets in favor of other forms of capital that improve their adequacy ratios. Additionally, the Cost to Benefit Ratio (CBR) has a significant negative correlation with ROE, indicating that higher operational costs relative to benefits result in lower returns on equity.

Retain on ROA

A regression analysis was conducted to analyze the return on assets (ROA). Estimated regression result on impact of NPLR, LLPR, LAR, CAR and CRR on Return on Assets (ROA) is calculated by using the following equation and the result is presented in table 2.

$ROA = \alpha + \beta 1\ NPLR + \beta 2 LLPR + \beta 3 LAR + \beta 4\ CAR + \beta 5\ CRR + e$

Table 2

Impact of NPLR, LLPR, LAR, CAR and CRR on ROA

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Std. Coef. Beta	t	VIF Value
	B	Beta			
Constant	10.890	2.997		3.634	
LAR	-.109	.043	-1.862	-2.519	9.037
CAR	.344	.180	1.693	1.912	9.283
NPLR	.851	.418	1.703	2.036	1.875
CRR	-.161	.080	-1.268	- 2.009	9.422
LLPR	-1.329	.390	-.995	-3.411	8.775

a. Predictors: (Constant), LLPR, CAR, CRR, LAR, NPLR

b. Dependent Variable: ROA

R Square = 0.818

Adjusted R Square = 0.592

F = 3.067

The regression analysis examining the impact of various financial ratios on the Return on Assets (ROA) of Nepalese commercial banks provides valuable insights into the relationships and influences of these ratios. The model, with an R Square of 0.818 and an Adjusted R Square of 0.592, explains 81.8% of the variability in ROA, indicating a relatively strong predictive power, though there is room for improvement in the model fit. The analysis highlights the effects of the Loan & Advances Ratio (LAR), Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR), Non-Performing Loan Ratio (NPLR), Credit Risk Ratio (CRR), and Loan Loss Provision Ratio (LLPR) on the ROA. The LAR has an unstandardized coefficient of -0.109, suggesting an increase in the loan and advances ratio reduces the ROA. The negative t-value -2.519 indicates a significant negative impact, with a VIF 9.037 indicating suggests minimal multicollinearity for this variable. The CAR shows a positive unstandardized coefficient (0.344), implying that a higher capital adequacy improves ROA, whereas a unit increase in CAR leads to a 0.344 increase in ROA. The t-value of 1.912 indicates marginal significance, but the VIF value less than 10 indicates suggests minimal multicollinearity for this variable, i.e. no potentially affecting the stability of this coefficient.

The NPLR, with a coefficient of 0.851, positively impacts ROA, indicating that better management of non-performing loans enhances profitability. The t-value of 2.036 confirms its significance, and the relatively low VIF of 1.875 suggests minimal multicollinearity for this variable. The CRR has a negative coefficient of -0.161, indicating that higher credit risk decreases ROA, with a t-value of -2.009 showing significance. However, the high VIF of 9.422

suggests minimal multicollinearity for this variable. The LLPR negatively impacts ROA with a coefficient of -1.329, suggesting that higher loan loss provisions reduce profitability. The t-value -3.411 highlights its significance, and the VIF 8.775 indicates some multicollinearity. The t-values for these coefficients underscore their statistical significance, with LAR -2.519, CAR 1.912, NPLR 2.036, CRR -2.009, and LLPR -3.411 all showing relevance in the model. However, the high VIF values for LAR 9.037, CAR 9.283, and CRR 9.422 suggest some multicollinearity among these predictors, indicating that these ratios are interrelated, however, the value less than 10 is acceptable in interpreting their impacts.

The overall regression model is statistically significant, as indicated by the F-statistic 3.067. This confirms that the selected predictors collectively influence the ROA. The findings imply that effective management of these financial ratios is crucial for enhancing bank performance. For instance, maintaining an optimal level of loans and advances, ensuring adequate capital, effectively managing non-performing loans, controlling credit risk, and setting appropriate loan loss provisions are essential strategies for improving profitability.

Estimation of ROE on NPLR, LLPR, LAR, CAR and CRR

Estimated regression result on impact of NPLR, LLPR, LAR, CAR and CRR on Return on Equity (ROE)

ROE = α + β1 NPLR +β2LLPR + β3LAR + β4 CAR+ β5 CRR+e

Table 3

Impact of NPLR, LLPR, LAR, CAR and CRR on ROE

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Std. Coef. Beta	t-value	VIF Value
	B	Beta			
Constant	83.409	5.630		14.816	
LAR	-0.850	0.081	-1.555	-10.448	9.037
CAR	2.964	0.338	1.566	8.780	9.283
NPLR	11.574	0.785	2.482	14.736	9.422
CRR	-1.754	0.151	-1.473	-11.593	8.775
LLPR	-7.713	0.732	-o.619	-10.539	1.875

a. Predictors: (Constant), LLPR, CAR, CRR, LAR, NPLR

b. Dependent Variable: ROE

R Square = 0.993

Adjusted R Square = 0.983

F = 107.898

The analysis of the impact of various financial ratios on the Return on Equity (ROE) of Nepalese commercial banks reveals significant insights into the relationships and influences these ratios exert. The model, with an R Square of 0.993 and an Adjusted R Square of 0.983, demonstrates an excellent fit, explaining 99.3% of the variability in ROE, thus indicating a strong predictive power of the selected financial ratios. The regression analysis highlights that the Loan & Advances Ratio (LAR), Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR), Non-Performing Loan Ratio (NPLR), Credit Risk Ratio (CRR), and Loan Loss Provision Ratio (LLPR) collectively have a profound impact on the performance of commercial banks in terms of ROE. Specifically, the LAR has a negative unstandardized coefficient -0.850, indicating that an increase in the loan and advances ratio reduces the ROE. This suggests that while loans and advances are essential for bank profitability, excessive levels may lead to diminishing returns. Conversely, the CAR shows a positive unstandardized coefficient 2.964, suggesting that higher capital adequacy improves bank performance by enhancing stability and reducing risk. Similarly, the NPLR, with a coefficient of 11.574, positively impacts ROE, indicating that effective management of non-performing loans can substantially boost bank profitability.

The CRR has a negative coefficient -1.754, reflecting that higher credit risk reduces profitability, underscoring the importance of maintaining a prudent risk management framework. The LLPR also negatively impacts ROE with a coefficient of -7.713, suggesting that higher provisions for loan losses, while necessary for risk mitigation, can decrease overall profitability. The t-values for these coefficients further substantiate their significance, with LAR -10.448, CAR 8.780, NPLR 14.736, CRR -11.593, and LLPR (-10.539) all showing strong statistical relevance. However, the high Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for LAR 9.037, CAR 9.283, and NPLR 9.422 indicate some multicollinearity among these predictors. This multicollinearity can distort the estimated coefficients and suggests that these ratios are interrelated, however, a VIF value of less than 10 is acceptable in interpreting their impacts.

The overall regression model is statistically significant, as indicated by the F-statistic 107.898. This confirms that the selected predictors collectively influence the ROE. The findings imply that effectively managing these financial ratios is crucial for enhancing bank performance. For instance, maintaining an optimal level of loans and advances, ensuring adequate capital, effectively managing non-performing loans, controlling credit risk, and setting appropriate loan loss provisions are critical strategies for improving profitability.

Discussion

The findings from the correlation and regression analyses provide crucial insights into the relationships between financial ratios and the financial performance of Nepalese commercial banks, as measured by Return on Assets (ROA) and Return on Equity (ROE). These results are contextualized within the broader literature, shedding light on both alignments and deviations. The correlation analysis reveals a negative relationship between the Non-Performing Loan Ratio (NPLR) and metrics such as the Loan to Asset Ratio (LAR) and Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR). This suggests that higher credit risk adversely affects asset utilization and capital adequacy, consistent with Bagale (2023), who emphasized the detrimental effects of credit risk on asset management. Similarly, Baral (2005) and Bhattarai (2016) highlighted that increasing non-performing loans often diminish the efficiency of resource allocation and capital adequacy. However, a significant positive correlation between NPLR and ROE found in this study contrasts with findings by (Ghosh, 2015; Gizaw et al., 2015), which reported a predominantly negative impact of non-performing loans on profitability. This discrepancy may reflect unique credit risk management practices within Nepalese banks, as also suggested by (Thapa & Sejuwal, 2023).

Regression analysis further corroborates these findings. LAR was observed to negatively impact ROA, indicating diminishing returns from excessive lending. This aligns with prior studies such as Al-Tamimi and Obeidat (2013), Shah and Pradhan (2019), which emphasized the need for prudent asset allocation to ensure profitability. The positive influence of CAR on ROA observed in this study supports (Berger & Bouwman, 2013), as well as Bhattarai (2019), both of which underscore the stabilizing role of higher capital adequacy in volatile financial environments. Contrastingly, the positive relationship between NPLR and ROA diverges from studies by (Rashid et al., 2020; Moti et al., 2012), which highlighted increased provisioning and operational costs associated with rising non-performing loans. This difference might be attributable to adaptive strategies employed by Nepalese banks, as discussed by Chhetri (2022).

The predictors collectively explain 99.3% of the variability in ROE, highlighting their profound influence. Similar to ROA, CAR positively impacts ROE, reiterating its critical role in ensuring financial stability and profitability, as noted by (Pradhan & Shrestha, 2017). Conversely, the negative effect of LAR on ROE highlights the risks of aggressive lending practices, aligning with findings from (Poudel, 2012; Kadioglu et al., 2017).

While the findings are consistent with some existing studies, deviations, particularly the positive impact of NPLR on ROA and ROE, underscore the unique banking environment in Nepal. This may reflect the effectiveness of credit risk management practices and regulatory frameworks tailored to the Nepalese context (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2018). The adaptive strategies of Nepalese banks in leveraging non-performing loans to mitigate adverse impacts on financial performance further differentiate these findings, as highlighted by Santomero (1997) and Boland (2012). These results contribute theoretically to how financial ratios impact the performance of commercial banks, providing valuable insights for stakeholders in Nepal's banking sector. Future research could explore the interplay of these factors in different macroeconomic contexts to validate and extend these findings.

Conclusion

This research study is conducted especially to investigate the impact on the performance of commercial banks in Nepal. The study is conducted using the sample of seven commercial banks operating in the Nepalese economy i.e. NABIL, SCBL, HBL, ADBL ,GBIME, SBL and MBL. During the study period of the concerned sample banks, certain conclusions have been derived after analyzing the financial as well as statistical tools on behalf of different aspect of this study.

According to this study, ROA has a positive correlation with ROE, NPLR, and LAR and a negative correlation with LLPR, CAR, and CRR. Positive relationships exist between ROE and the NPLR, LLPR, and CRR, and negative relations with LAR and CAR. The investigation also discovered a link between profitability and credit risk management. According to the regression analysis, CAR and ROA have a major detrimental effect on commercial banks. The research indicates a negative significant relationship between the LLPR and ROE. The computed regression table demonstrates that the NPLR and ROE beta coefficients are positive and significant.

Following data analysis, the researcher concluded that NPLR, LLPR, and LAR had positive correlations with ROA but negative correlations with CAR and CRR, and that NPLR and LLPR had positive correlations with ROE but negative correlations with LAR, CAR, and CRR. According to the regression results, there is a considerable beneficial impact of NPLR and LAR on ROA, LLPR, CAR, and CRR and a negative impact on commercial banks ROA of Nepalese commercial banks. NPLR and LAR have significant and positive impacts on bank's ROE, LLPR, CAR, and CRR have negative and significant impacts on bank's ROE.

The study examined the relationship between the financial performance and credit risk factors that affect the profitability of Nepalese commercial banks. This study provides research in future days ahead which can be taken in terms of data, model, and approach. The study's findings hold significant policy implications, particularly for the financial sector in Nepal. Policymakers can use these insights to develop targeted strategies and regulations aimed at enhancing risk management practices in commercial banks. For institutions within the financial sector, such as commercial banks, insurance firms, development banks, and microfinance institutions, the study's implications are crucial. Institutions can use these findings to strengthen their risk management frameworks, particularly by addressing credit risk, foreign currency risk, human resource risk, and other identified factors. From an academic perspective, this study provides a foundation for future research endeavors. Academics can build upon these findings by conducting more in-depth analyses using larger sample sizes and longer time periods. Exploring the preferences of different investors and stakeholders can also enrich the academic discourse on risk management and financial performance.

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Interrelationship of Tourism and Indigenous Knowledge, Skill, and Technology: A Study of Gurung, Magar, and Tharu (GMT) Homestays in Gandaki Province

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Abstract

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Since this decade, tourism has become the world's biggest industry in terms of people's peaceful movement, income generation, and employment creation. The desires of Nepal are to focus on tourism due to its 'low investment, high return' attribute. Tourism, being a strong agent of change, transformation, promotion, and conservation of nature, culture, and the economy, is the priority sector of the central and provincial governments of Nepal. Tourism seems to be favored both people and state, mostly due to its economic derivatives. Its non-economic progenies are mostly obscure and latent. Therefore, this paper investigates and analyzes the interrelationships between tourism and indigenous knowledge, skills, and technology. Data from both primary sources and secondary literature was used to support the arguments. Qualitative methods were used to gather the information. Sixty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted: 25 with the Gurung community, 15 with the Magar community, and 25 with the Tharu homestay. The finding revealed that these ethnic communities used their peculiar indigenous knowledge, skills, and technology to entertain tourists in a home-friendly environment with their customs and traditions. Additionally, these communities helped revitalize their obsolete traditions while practicing homestay entrepreneurship.

Keywords: *Tourism, homestay, Indigenous, knowledge, skill, and technology.*

Introduction

In the contemporary world, indigenous people, their knowledge, skills, customs, and culture are threatened with extinction. People live in environments that are changing drastically. Nevertheless, they have adapted to competing forces of modern structures and global systems for their sustainability. They are active, working on thriving and ongoing efforts of cultural innovation, preservation, and transformation that incorporate aspects of the 'modern,' 'developed,' and 'global' without jeopardizing indigenous heritage. Tourism has played an important role in the country's economic prosperity and is the primary source of foreign currency in a developing country. Nepal's scenic beauty, cultural relevance, and breathtaking archaeological sites attract tourists in droves. Nepal's tourist potential is high due to its many enticing traits. That potential appears to have been squandered up to this moment. Its expansion has been hindered by problems like poor infrastructure, restricted air access, and a lack of a solid marketing plan. Homestay tourism is getting popular in Nepal. However, it appears that insufficient planning and programming have mismanaged this industry, which is required for the sector's development. A need for proper management and planning in homestay tourism is crucial for its growth and success. Community participation is not just important; it is critical for the sector's long-term growth. The stated goals cannot be met unless people in the community are aware of their own skills and actively involved in the process. To mitigate the gaps in our long-term strategy, capacity building, and awareness campaigns on the various aspects of tourism need to be prioritized.

Nepal is a small country with high geo-diversity from 60 m above sea level to the highest peak Mt. Everest (8848 m). The three major corollaries of this geo-diversity are North-South climatic variation in a very short aerial distance, enriched bio-diversity flourished in panoramic natural settings, and unique cultural multiplicity in every village. Nepal has very few options other than these naturally endowed variables for people's happiness through national success. Tourism, an important global economic industry that thrives with the aforementioned diversities, has emerged as a strong growth engine (UNWTO, 2018) in emerging nations. Culture is an important sub-sector of global tourism and can be a key competency in diverse countries such as Nepal, which has 125 ethnic tribes that speak 123 various languages (CBS, 2011). Gurung, Magar, and Tharu ethnic communities have been at the forefront of embracing tourism through homestay as part of rural tourism initiatives. Because of its proximity to Tibet (China) in the north and India in the south, Gandaki Province almost perfectly mirrors the national ethnic diversity. Gandaki Province has over 68 villages registered for homestay tourism, with the majority representing Gurung, Magar, and Tharu ethnicities, with a small number of other ethnicities represented in a few villages. Homestay tourism has the potential to be a significant component of rural tourism in Gandaki Province, whether in a community-based or home-based setting. The province promoted village tourism as a cornerstone of economic success, with plans to implement homestay services for tourists in 300 communities. The province has already committed three crores from its current fiscal year (2075 B.S.) budget for study, research, and preliminary activities (PPPC, 2018). Thus, the study aims to amend understanding of the structural mechanisms and actual social relationships to contribute to establishing the interrelation between homestay tourism and indigenous knowledge, skills and technology, to uplift lifestyle but also reduce poor economic of the people.

This section will discuss how indigenous culture assists in the promotion of homestay tourism. Empirical research has shown that homestay tourism in Nepal has profound effects on the environment, local cultural economy, women's development, and community development. Referring to Acharya & Halpenny (2013) assert that homestay tourism has an important role in women's empowerment through their direct involvement. Similarly, Kimaiga (2015) focused on the socioeconomic well-being of the people through the homestay operation. Homestays are sustainable tourism that affects host families and communities (Lama, 2013). Nonetheless, no study has been conducted to demonstrate the relationship between indigenous knowledge, skill, and technology and homestay promotion in Gandaki province. This study is based on local customs and traditions, which are also based on indigenous knowledge, skills, and technology for the promotion of homestay tourism.

According to Cohen (1984), homestay tourism transforms local culture and customs—such as traditional dance ceremonies, music and art forms, rituals, and knowledge and skills—that were previously outside the horizon of capitalism into commodities for tourists. Thus, it is assumed that tourism-induced commercialization affects and destroys the authenticity of cultural goods, symbols, and interpersonal interactions for both locals and visitors. Because of their perceived vulnerability, indigenous people are frequently portrayed as potential victims of tourism-related commercialization. Similarly, Willard (2005) asserts that the commercialization of culture is jeopardizing the very culture sold to tourists because as the economy shifts from a traditional subsistence to a commercial, the pressure to earn income and westernize ways of life means abandoning traditional ceremonies, practices, and arts. Their importance is lost; the tradition is no longer practiced and passed on to younger generations; it is performed as entertainment.

Thus, one should attempt to uncover the meaning hidden in their social connotations to analyze the detrimental relationship between tourism and indigenous culture. Perhaps the most pervasive aspect of tourism is its inherent link to the “modern,” “commercial,” and “global.” Indigenous culture is acknowledged as a traditional system, the modern antithesis both in organizational forms and in mental terms, connoting words like “primitive,” “nature,” and “exotic” (Meethan, 2001). It tends to reduce reality to simple binary oppositions, such as “traditional” and “modern,” “authentic” and “inauthentic,” and “local” and “global,” which are theoretically unable to coexist. This is the problem with using these perceptions to explain empirical circumstances. Thus, the basic, reified cultural markers—”cultural stuff” resistant to change—remain of the cultural reality. For instance, Native American civilizations are thus viewed as closed, passive, unified systems incapable of withstanding the impact of modernity.

In contrast to this binary viewpoint, culture must be studied and approached as an ever-changing, contingent process that is created, modified, and transformed in response to shifting conditions (Jenkins, 1997). This makes it feasible to identify the dynamic cultural contexts that tourism enters as well as the range of proactive reactions to tourism that enable cultural innovation and continuity. Therefore, rather than viewing change in indigenous culture as a simple aberration, it is more productive to view it as merely another, albeit faster, stage in the ongoing process of cultural transition (Cohen 1984). It is not that travel agencies, governments, or indigenous people reify culture for profit or political gain; rather, the commercialization of culture is the fundamental problem with cultural essentialization. However, suppose these reified notions are taken as “reality” and included in everyday interactions. In that case, they may end up serving as yet another instrument to develop and maintain unequal relationships not only between but also within groups.

Salazar’s work (2016) highlights the difficulty of creating tourism that pleases everyone in a community. This tourism also needs to make money and protect the environment. In community-based tourism (CBT), the entire community is involved in total hospitality operations, from receiving guests, food, lodging, and entertaining to the stage of see-off. In doing so, the community people try to apply their indigenous knowledge, skills, and technology to provide possible service to the fullest extent for guest satisfaction. Thus, it is believed that homestay tourism, a segment of rural tourism, might be the best way to promote, enrich, and conserve local knowledge, skills, culture, and technology, though the issue of sustainability still remains a challenge (ibid). On the other hand, the enrichment and conservation of indigenous knowledge, skill, culture, and technology might also be helpful in acting as pulling forces and factors for the tourism of the village.

However, the impacts and implications of tourism as a factor of modernization are not always as desired. It comes up with both positive and negative effects on society, culture, economy, and environment. The urban, suburban, and rural areas of Nepal have not and will not remain in isolation from the influence of globalization. Tourism is an agent of change and a factor of globalization, and its implications for homestay communities have to be investigated and analyzed. The homestay concept as a segment of rural tourism in Nepal does not have a long history and, therefore, lacks adequate study and research about the implications of tourism on the community. Thus, the potential benefits of tourism for cultural survival should be acknowledged and investigated, regardless of the complexity of the tourism and culture debate. Therefore, this research aims to go above static important-priori ideas and instead look empirically at the social-cultural-economic-political dynamics that play a role in the interaction between tourism and Indigenous people. It attempts to demonstrate how, through processes of cultural preservation, transformation, and innovation—and perhaps even with an eye toward sustainable indigenous development and empowerment—tourism may turn into a vehicle for the coexistence of the “modern” and the “traditional,” the “global” and the “local,” the “authentic” and the “inauthentic.” Nevertheless, the question remains: Does the Government of Nepal (GoN) push for local participation and control over tourism development go far enough to establish “true” sustainable development? Moreover, can travel that offers visitors people (or at least their genuineness) as the main attraction rather than just relaxation or game viewing really be empowered?

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The fieldwork was conducted from March to May 2023 in three districts of the Gandaki Province. Ministry of Industry Commerce Tourism Forest and Environment of Gandaki Province (2075- 76) identified 272 homestays in the Province: Gorkha (22), Manang (2), Lamjung (23), Kaski (36), Mustang (.3), Myagdi (10), Baglung (28), Parbat (47), Syangja (44), Tanahu (47), and Nawalpur (10). This study selected the Gurung community homestay of Sirubari in Syangja and Lamjung, the Magar community homestay of Beshisahar-2, and the Lamjung and Tharu community of Amaltari in Nawalpur District. The researcher used random purposive sampling methods for the sample selection. Semi-structured interviews and case studies were used as tools for information collection. Sixty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted: twenty-five in-depth interviews among the Gurung community, fifteen among the Magar community, and twenty-five among the Tharu Homestay. Ten case studies were collected: five from the Gurung community, two from the Magar homestay community, and three from the Tharu homestay community were studied and collected. All the qualitative information was analyzed using the manual thematic techniques.

Results and Discussion

Cultural identity as a means of homestay promotion

Presenting one's culture strengthens the idea of living within a community, thus increasing identity and pride (Besculides et. al. 2002). Homestay tourism assists in the preservation of indigenous customs/traditions and increases the alternative income sources of the community. The Gurung, Magar, and Tharu communities are enriched with knowledge and skills on a local tradition, which is also a source for alternative income generation. The Tharu community homestay of Amaltari uses its cultural resources for identity construction and income generation. For instance, a Stick dance performance by Tharu is more than just a captivating display of skill and artistry; it's a vibrant celebration of the Tharu people's culture. It's evidence of their resilience, deep connection to land, and their enduring artistic spirit. According to Boley (2014), tourists visit the community homestay to observe local tradition and culture, and during the process, these locals reconsider long-neglected customs and cultural practices. Thus, the local traditions and cultural practices are crucial for the flourishing of homestay entrepreneurship, and the people of the study area used this as their means for entertaining the visitors. The people of Sirubari and Ghale Gaun acknowledge their traditional way of life and culture as a prominent source of tourist attraction. One of the homestay operators from Sirubari mentioned that both national and foreign tourists come to observe their traditions, culture, and festivals.

A 52-year-old man from Ghale Gaun interestingly said that people come to see how they live, how they dress, what food they eat, and how they celebrate their festivals. Tourists come to learn about their daily life activities, dressing patterns, local dances, festivals, and rituals. Furthermore, he added that Nepalese college students also come to study and prepare reports on their way of life. Similarly, the operators of Amaltari homestay claimed that visitors come to observe their way of life, i.e., to see their festivals, their traditional costumes, and taste traditional food. Tharu cultural dances and folk songs are the major attractions for tourists. Tourists come to watch their *Laathi naach*, *Jhumra naach*, and *Sathiya naach*. How local people dress attracts visitors and motivates them to dress up in their customs and capture their memories. The way of serving the food with traditional menu items such as *ghongi*, fish, rice, and daal pitthi gives different tastes and tourists' ask for the recipes, a female homestay operator shares. The respondents from Magar community homestay adhere that they welcome tourists with their local food items especially, *batuk* (bara) and *kodo ko raksi* (local alcohol made from millet). A female homestay operator, during a conversation, shared that though *batuk* is occasionally made by their community after the implementation of homestay, other people in the community. Homestay tourism assists in the preservation of local traditions and serves as the easiest means of accumulating capital through cultural performances. For instance, in the Magar homestay, people usually perform cultural dances like Chudka, Kaurah, Sorathi, and Maruni, with traditional folk songs as a major attraction.

> A 57-year-old man in Sirubari emotionally added, "Visitors come to our place to see our traditions and culture. If we do not preserve them and don't show them, then why do they come to this remote area, leaving five-star hotels in the city? We cannot run a homestay without showing our culture because people come to this village to see it. So, we ask our children to follow our culture and traditions so they can easily operate the Homestay after our demise."

In the field sites, the Gurung, Magar, and Tharu community people have practiced local culture since historical times, and it has now become a sustainable means of production as tourists come to observe and feel their way of life. The value of local tradition and culture assists in increasing the daily income of the local people and revitalizing their traditions. A 56 years old man from Tharu homestay stated the essence of the stick:

> "In order to awaken the goddess Durga's tremendous spirit, laathi naach are performed mainly during Dashain, Nepal's greatest festival. Both males and females are well-trained from childhood to strike small sticks together, creating a rhythmic symphony. This is an ingrained custom rather than just fun. These sticks are made in the community using the timber from the forest. It is not only the tools, but it's our connection to nature. These leather we use for naach are not only tools for dancing purposes, but also help protect our life against wild animals. Besides this, after the implementation of Homestay in the community, stick dance has become a major tourist attraction, and the very young men and women in the group perform the dance, which becomes an unforgettable cultural experience for visitors. This is our real unique identity. As these dances are passed down from generation to generation, they ensure the legacy of the

community continues to captivate tourists to visit us."

Thus, the people involved in homestay businesses believe that their customs and traditional practices are instrumental to strengthening their identity and preserving cultural assets because the residents feel that a decline of tradition and culture results in a loss of identity. All the respondents in the study area have the same concern for their culture.

Indigenous knowledge and homestay operation

The term "indigenous" relates to the origins of initiatives. Indigenous systems may incorporate elements and procedures from the outside world as long as the initiative is local. Traditional systems are, by definition, old, whereas indigenous knowledge systems are frequently new and evolving. According to Gill (1993), traditional systems may be indigenous and vice versa. Thus, perusing indigenous knowledge systems with homestays requires understanding the concept of homestay. Homestay tourism, as a segment of rural tourism, assists in promoting, enriching, and conserving local knowledge, skills, culture, and technology. Thus, the enrichment and conservation of indigenous knowledge, skill, culture, and technology act as pulling forces and factors for the village's tourism. For instance, the indigenous Gurung and Ghale songs, music, and dances performed during the welcome ceremony entertain the guests and help preserve their customs and traditions. The young people learn and perform the songs, music, and dances during the welcome of guests. Dances, such as *Ghatu* (traditionally performed during festivals and major life events), *Putpute* (performed when the first son of a family reaches age five or seven), and *Rodhi* (mostly songs and dances performed by boys and girls as musical dialogue) where villagers wear special traditional costumes showed the cultural enrichment of Gurung community. The cultural tradition of *Rodhi* has its history. The study conducted by Gurung (1978) adheres to the idea that *Rodhi* denotes a residence where people sleep because "ro" and "dhi" both imply sleeping. In another sense, "Ro" means wool, and "dhi" means residence. It indicates that *Rodhi* is a place where people whirl. It emphasizes *Rodhi* as a spot where youngsters congregate to sweep, implying growth and the creative singing expression of youth vitality (Gurung, 2013). Since singing and dancing during *Rodhi* are important to the Gurung people on a professional, cultural, and recreational level, they are tightly linked to the traditional Gurung culture. The involvement of individuals of various ages promotes unity and cooperation among *Rodhi* house occupants (ibid). People exchanged their labor, skills, and knowledge, which served as the foundation for cooperative agricultural activity and the weaving process during *Rodhi* (Macfarlane, 1976). A 59 years old man from Sirubari said:

After implementing homestay in our community, we focused on local harvesting systems

> *and produced crops and vegetables. All the Rodhi members worked in groups in the field and collected firewood from the forest. During this interaction, we shared our knowledge and skills to deal with everyday problems. Nevertheless, the younger children didn't like to work in farmland but participated in singing and dancing during the welcome of tourists.*

The homestay operators of Ghalegaun along with other members of the village, produce traditional handicrafts such as *bakkhu, radi, and paakhi* and sell to tourists. Such handicrafts are made using their knowledge and skills in a beautifully decorated way. A 46 years Gurung woman from Ghalegaun adheres:

> "Community homestay activities empower them as they start to earn. We women knit bakhu (a woolen coat), radi (a woolen carpet), paakhi (a woolen blanket), a woolen small bag, in our free time. Whenever visitors come to stay at our homestay, we display them and explain the process of making and using them. After that, some of them bought, whereas others only took pictures and enjoyed seeing our products."

The Magar of Besisahar, Lamjung, whose livelihood depends on natural resources such as forest and water, along with their ritual and ceremonies that they practiced for a long time, have become a major attraction for tourism development. The houses are built in a two-story traditional pattern with thatch or slate roofing. These houses are round or oval and washed with reddish mud. Most of these materials are locally produced, and indigenous technology is used to build them. The homestay operators, including other village members, contribute to saving flora and fauna at their local level forests as these people directly depend on the forest for firewood and timber.

Cultural practices become a driving force for good hospitality. A 57 years man from the village showed the connectivity between traditional customs and homestay operations:

> "When tourists come to the village, they are welcomed with traditional Magar songs and dances, female wears phariya or lungi with a blouse or cholo, patuka, and different ornaments such as Madwari in the ears, Bulaki and Phuli on the nostrils, silver coin mala on the neck, yellow and green potey, with gold cylinder, etc. and men wear kacchad, bhoto, patuka with national weapon khukuri. People perform their magar folk dances like Kauraha, Maruni, and Sorathi with songs such as oholi, jhora, nachang, jhabbura, and ratawali. The dance begins with worshiping Madal, the dress, and other ornaments of dancers, followed by obeisance to all gods and goddesses like Saraswati, Ram, and Sita. The dance ends with blessings to the family, who has offered alms to the

dancing group and brings the end to the dance ritualistically."

The performance showed the indigenous life history of the Magar community and provided an aesthetic enjoyment that transcends ordinary life. Such types of performances preserve their customs and traditions and also help them earn money. Maruni is a festival observed between mid-October and mid-November in the English calendar. Nowadays, this performance has evolved into a ritualistic performance for visitors to reinforce their distinct cultural identity. The dance's bodily performance conjures up a sacred environment that unites Magar in support of hospitality. For this dance, the ladies sing in a group called Maruni, and the melodies they sing offer a distinctive perspective on women's cultural roles in the home and society. The women perform rituals that support the ideology of the traditional notion of body privilege on the one hand, and they criticize the wider political situation and social relations that have marginalized them on the other hand, by creating a new society through songs, dances, and physical movements that attempt to maintain harmony. The song performed in Maruni offers an additional viewpoint and remarks on the status of women in society but also reveals the struggles, the pain, the allegations against their husbands and daughters, and the subtle or overt protests against the social structure that renders them defenseless and exposed. All the cultural performance shown by Magar helps in discovering, controlling, and projecting the self-identity of being Magar, where these people used their presentation skills using local knowledge.

According to Lama (2013), homestay tourism focuses on traditional lifestyles, local culture, and customs to attract tourists that have economic potential for the operators. Tourists form close bonds with their host families and become familiar with their culture, traditions, food, traditional outfits, and community. Guests are greeted with their local traditions and can follow daily activities that the host family follows (Hamzah, 2008). In the field sites, each of the three communities has developed and practiced their pattern of knowledge to homestay promotion. The way of life practiced by the Tharu community, such as plowing the field, rice plantation, fishing, bull cart riding, and the way of their settlement in the community, are used as tools for tourism development. The houses are built with indigenous materials such as timber, bamboo, and mud and crafted in various pictures outside the wall. The people use local ingredients to prepare food such as: *dhikiri* made from rice flour, *bagiya* made from rice, *chichar* made from steaming *anadi* rice, *ghongi* (water sanails), *jhingiya macchari* freshwater shrimp, and so many other delicious foods for serving the tourists. The Amaltari Buffer Zone User Group in the homestay made a nuanced connection with nature and men as the wildlife in forest becomes major tourists' attraction. This group has played a key role in the conservation of community forests and the Chitwan National Park. This has led to increased invasion of wildlife in the village area and easy availability of wild animals during jungle safari. In case of animal attacks or sickness during the safari, these people use local herbs available in the forests for treatment as they know about their uses. This all indicates how Tharu people used their indigenous knowledge and skills to balance the ecosystem, protect the natural habitat of the wild lives, and help in the promotion of community homestay.

The *laathi naach* (stick naach) performed by Tharu shows their connection with nature and indigenous skills. It is a traditional dynamic dance, a vibrant manifestation of cultural heritage, and involves skillful manipulation of sticks harmonized with traditional Tharu music, often accompanied by instruments like the madal and murli. These instruments are made from locally available materials using traditional skills and knowledge. Sticks in their dance symbolize their relationship with the environment, acting as an extension of their daily interactions with the natural world. Their reliance on the land for agriculture, sustenance, and other resources roots this connection. It plays an important role in safeguarding and transmitting the Tharu people's distinct cultural identity across generations, making it an integral part of the region's cultural legacy. A 65-year-old man in the community very interestingly adheres to the essence of a stick used for dance purposes.

> "The inclusion of sticks in ceremonial dances symbolizes our relationship with the environment. In the past, the stick was generally used to threaten wildlife that attacked our agricultural fields, and we needed to protect the crops from wildlife. We usually perform the laathi naach to depict the communal effort to ward off these threats, emphasizing our community's unity and collective strength. Similarly, sticks in traditional dances such as Maghi hold ceremonial and ritualistic significance, linked to specific events, seasons, or rites of passage within our culture. So, we take the dance as a symbol of unity and communal strength, expressing cultural identity and reinforcing bonds within us. Performing this dance in front of guests not only preserves our cultural identity but also helps in maintaining a sense of continuity and shared history in the community."

The homestay operators of Amaltari show their peculiar skills in entertaining tourists and selling them handmade products to earn money. For example, a 38-year-old woman from a homestay showed me practically her skill and knowledge to produce the handicraft, which she learned from her mother during her childhood. The chairperson of Amaltari homestay said how homestay tourism generates income for the community. He said:

> "In their free time, the women and men in villages made bena (homemade pankha) using bamboo and wool, dhakiya (basket) made from straw and bamboo, and muda (chair) made from bamboo and timber. Whenever tourists come to stay in a homestay, they like it and buy it. The way we produce these things only uses the indigenous skills and knowledge that we learn from our parents. Sometimes, tourists like to make these products, and we teach them practically. It will help to preserve our traditional profession."

This helps ensure local customs and culture continue to exist and are maintained while maintaining the sense of continuity and shared history within the community. The daily survival of the Tharu people is contingent upon their environment. These people entertain tourists by using their expertise and experience in dealing with the forest and its inhabitants while contributing to the preservation of the natural environment and wild creatures. Since the Amaltari community members and the environment are mutually dependent, they use their traditional knowledge systems to use, manage, and safeguard the forest products in their immediate surroundings.

In all three study areas, indigenous technology plays a dominant role in the flourishing of homestay tourism as well as the means of sustainable livelihood sources for people. People in the community transmitted their indigenous knowledge and skills to their children to revitalize their customs and traditions and a means of production. For instance, the traditionally made alcohol, i.e., *jand* or *chyang*, is popular among Gurung and Magar communities, which is made from *kodo* (millet) or *bhaat* (rice) and has both cultural and livelihood importance.

Conclusion

Nepal is blessed with natural beauty, culture, ethnicity, and many other unique features. The country's employment opportunities are restricted to limited fields, which leads a huge mass of youth to migrate in search of better opportunities with high wages. One can easily notice a lesser number of young people in the country, and so in rural areas where it is hard to find working agricultural labor. Rural areas are primarily inhabited by elderly men and women. In such a situation, local people in the villages use their traditional knowledge, skills, and technology to generate income and promote alternative livelihoods.

The study found that homestay tourism assists in thriving the life of Gurung, Magar, and Tharu communities, where their ethnic, cultural, and geographic features prove to be a means for attracting both internal and external tourists. The villager employed their various indigenous knowledge, skills, and technology to entertain and create a friendly environment for the tourists. The process induces the enrolment of indigenous culture, customs, and traditions. Thus, both host and non-host households have benefited from homestay tourism. Referring to homestay operators, the basic facilities such as food, lodges, entertaining with local folk music and dances, and selling homemade handicrafts are a few activities performed by them. Additionally, non-host households also engaged in agricultural work, producing vegetables, crops, chickens, goats, domesticating buffaloes, and cows for the milk consumed by host families for the tourists. Regular income, more work options, alternative livelihood sources, and occupational mobility were some of the beneficial economic effects at the household level. At the local level, an increase in alternative income generation is carried out, improved living standards of people can be easily observed, and increased engagement of locals to save their traditions and customs. The case of the Amaltari homestay shows the profound effects on natural resources, which become a means of production for survival. These people use these resources to entertain tourists, whereas, on the other hand, the homestay program assists in environmental conservation; there is now more vegetation, the forest cover has thickened, and there are more wild animals. Nature care has elevated the idea of environmental conservation.

The heart of homestay lies in warm, welcoming people; to see and learn about various cultures and ways of life; to see and learn about different places, and cultures; to find a clean, comfortable place to stay, feeling safe and secure, and experiencing a rural setting so the hosts' families, along with other villagers take an active role for the good management of homestay operation. The logic behind such an innovative idea is all about income generation in a local environment without any scuffle and burden. In the field sites, all of these homestay operators used their traditional folk dances and songs as dominant instruments for entertaining the tourists in which they can show their dancing and singing skills and knowledge using different techniques. So, the local people become aware of their customs and traditions, which have been neglected by young people in the name of westernization and modernization, whereas on the other hand, these types of traditions and customs have been revitalized through their homestay operation. Thus, homestay, which is based on sustainable development principles like in Amaltari, emphasizes natural conservation that leads people to find alternative sources of livelihood.

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Challenges of Learning English Vocabulary

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Abstract

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This study explored the challenges and strategies of learning vocabulary in the context of English language education. It employed a phenomenological research design. To collect primary data, the researcher used 10 open-ended questionnaires to investigate the learners' and teachers' challenges towards vocabulary learning and teaching. It involved 16 students and 3 English teachers from a Nepali educational institution i.e. Janajyoti Campus Bhimad, Tanahun. The findings highlighted various experiences among students, with some finding vocabulary acquisition challenging, while others effectively utilized multiple resources and techniques for learning new vocabulary. Pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and memorization emerged as prominent challenges, alongside the importance of peer and teacher support. The study highlighted the significance of employing multiple learning strategies to improve vocabulary skills and overall language proficiency and recommended promoting collaborative learning environments and developing intrinsic motivation among learners. Overall, the research emphasized the importance of systematic instructional approaches for learners' diverse needs and preferences in English language education. Ultimately, the study offered comprehensive insights into the dynamic nature of vocabulary acquisition and stressed the necessity of structured instructional approaches tailored to English language learners' multifaceted needs and preferences.

Keywords: *Challenges of learning English vocabulary, grammar, strategies, spelling, pronunciation*

Introduction

Vocabulary is a list or collection of words and phrases usually alphabetically arranged and explained, also called a lexicon. Vocabulary is the set of words for which meanings are understood. It refers to the set of words that an individual knows and uses in a particular language. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, vocabulary is a list of words with their meaning, especially in a book for learning a foreign language. According to Vygotsky (as cited in Thornbury, 2006) a word is a microcosm of human consciousness.

Bai (2018) has opined that vocabulary is generally known as all the words in a language. The term 'vocabulary' is used in different senses. English is one of the world's highly developed languages. Naturally, English vocabulary is one of the largest vocabulary words in all the languages in the world. Vocabulary learning doesn't only refer to acquiring a certain number of words or phrases but also the capability to use vocabulary correctly. Vocabulary plays a significant role in language learning.

Likewise, Yawiloeng (2020) has supported the notion that vocabulary is a fundamental and indispensable skill for acquiring a second language. Highlighting the importance of vocabulary, he has stated that nobody can learn a language without acquiring vocabulary. It is globally recognized that one can't efficiently learn a language without originally acquiring a considerable vocabulary base. Wangdi (2022) termed vocabulary as the capacity to successfully listen, speak, read, and write in a particular language is significantly affected by the basic knowledge of that language. Afzal (2019) focuses that vocabulary achievement and mastery are significant as English competency depends on the vocabulary knowledge developed by second and foreign students and native speakers.

Siddiqua (2016) has suggested that there should be a combination of essential components such as students, teachers, materials, teaching methods and techniques as well as assessment for language teaching and learning. The study has presented the attitudes of learners and teachers towards the communicative Language Teaching and Grammar Translation Method. It has been investigated that most of the respondents had affirmative views toward learning new words in context and isolation. The study revealed the use of the mother tongue according to the need and situation of the learning. Elmahdi and Hezam (2020) have attempted to introduce certain relevant areas of teaching-learning vocabulary. The study has included definitions, types, importance, and general principles of teaching-learning vocabulary in English. It has highlighted contextual challenges, techniques, and the need for teaching vocabulary. The researchers have concluded by classifying challenging as students related challenging, teachers challenging and methods/techniques/strategies related challenging. Rosyada and Apoka (2023) found a large number of learners faced difficulties in learning vocabulary. These challenges are revealed in areas such as correct pronunciation and spelling of new words, proper usage, and memorization of vocabulary. The study is focused on applying ICT-based media resources, games, and consulting dictionaries to overcome the difficulties while learning vocabulary.

Alqahtani (2015) has highlighted the importance of vocabulary learning as an inevitable aspect of foreign language learning although it was neglected for many decades. Vocabulary knowledge is vital for communicative competence and acquiring a second language. He has also attempted to review the trends in teaching vocabulary through various teaching techniques of EFL teachers. The study has noticed the type of vocabulary, students' level as well as characteristics and value of techniques before presenting the meaning of vocabulary items. So teachers need to be aware while applying teaching techniques and providing students' vocabulary learning strategies with opportunities. Thus, it has been summarized the importance of vocabulary by explaining many techniques used by English teachers when teaching English. Afzal (2019) focuses on the significance of learning English vocabulary points out the challenges faced by students and encourages the students' consciousness of the vocabulary. It has been investigated vocabulary learning problems tackled by the students. It has been completed the learners who face vocabulary learning problems at any level of education. The problems are in the areas of pronouncing new words, spelling new words, using new words correctly, identifying the grammatical structure of words, and guessing contextual meanings. These vocabulary learning problems weaken the students' reading comprehension, writing power, and communication skills. Kamil and Hiebert (2005) define the term vocabulary as the knowledge about the meaning of words. They stated that words come in two types : oral and print. Oral vocabulary belongs to a set of words in which the learners know the meanings while speaking or reading orally. The print vocabulary consists of words for which the learners know the meaning they write or read silently. Kamil and Hiebert also categorize vocabulary as productive words that are well-known and used frequently and receptive words that are less frequent and used.

Farjami and Aidinlou (2013) elaborated on the learners' problems in vocabulary learning and offered some guidelines to improve the problems. They have introduced language vocabulary learning strategies that make learning easy and interesting for the learners. They have also highlighted useful techniques and activities for presentation. Baniabdelrahman Al-shumai Meri (2014) pointed out some strategies that the students use together for the betterment of results for guessing the meaning of new words. It is recommended to train students on how to combine strategies for knowing unfamiliar words. They also suggested students be trained while using different vocabulary learning it motivates teachers to be aware of their students' weaknesses so that they can assist in improving their proficiency in vocabulary learning. Most EFL teachers of English language are native speakers therefore it is essential to familiarize students with the background and the teaching strategies. AlRashidi, (2024) investigated the result of insufficient teacher training on learners' vocabulary improvement using secondary data. It is shown that because of untrained teachers, more attention is extended to teaching grammar than vocabulary which impacts lexical development among the high school students negatively. Farjami and Aidinlou (2013) elaborated on learners' problems in vocabulary and presented some guidelines to improve or even eradicate them. The study introduced some language learning strategies for making vocabulary learning easy and interesting for learners by familiarizing with useful techniques and activities. They aimed to present practical vocabulary learning strategies offering important learning techniques and activities for teachers.

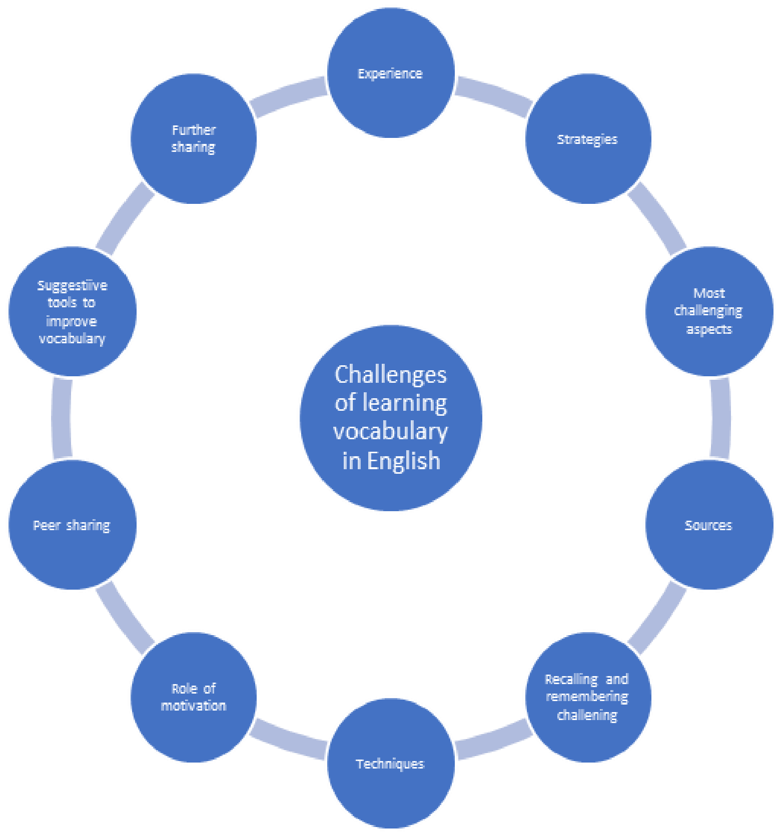
Celik and Toptas (2010) emphasized the need for vocabulary learning strategy instruction effectively. The study indicated that the participants' general use of vocabulary learning strategies was not sufficient. The study also suggested that language learning programs should be revised to promote the use of vocabulary learning strategies across all levels of language. For improving vocabulary learning the researchers also suggested designing related strategies, appropriate materials, and activities for lexical competency. Janggo and Yumelking (2024) revealed that students have a diversity of challenges while learning vocabulary. The major factors are grammar, pronunciation, and meaning. Furthermore, there are external and internal factors that influence how well students learn vocabulary. The usage of learning media, academic institutional facilities, family, and different teaching methods are regarded as external factors whereas development, IQ, experience, and memory power are internal factors. It is suggested to read a lot of English vocabulary, practice through exercises, and create curiosity and motivation for learning vocabulary. Komalasari (2022) highlighted the challenges that students have when learning vocabulary, including their inability to pronounce words clearly and accurately, their incompetence to tell apart words with similar spellings and pronunciations, their difficulty understanding grammar, and their inability to comprehend

English context. The most frequent challenge faced by students is their incomplete hold of the context of English phrases in terms of pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and syntax.

Lutfiyan et al. (2022) showed that there were several obstacles in learning vocabulary such as how to spell and pronounce words correctly, developing their vocabulary skills, using vocabulary correctly, and understanding the connotations. They also pointed out some strategies such as dictionary strategy, memorization, peer practice, listening to English music videos, sharing with friends, and extra individual class. Yulyana (2024) investigated English teacher strategies in teaching vocabulary and the problems faced by English teachers in this context. The findings reveal several effective strategies employed by English teachers for vocabulary instruction. These strategies include vocabulary corners, contextual Vocabulary Learning, and Introduction via literacy materials, mapping exercises, quiz vocabulary, and games. These strategies enhance vocabulary comprehension and retention, engage students actively in the learning process, and foster independent learning. Raw and Ismail (2021) investigated the usefulness of online tools in improving vocabulary learning in the language classroom under five major notions namely vocabulary knowledge and retention, motivation in learning, active participation, immediate feedback, and self-regulated learning. This study further discovered that instructors and learners are facing numerous challenges in using online tools in the classroom. Zhe Saadon (2024) explored an essential area designed to raise the English vocabulary skills of Malaysian university students. By integrating gamification principles into a quiz game, the application intended to inspire and engage students, transforming learning into a charming experience. Moreover, the app's inclusivity is praiseworthy, providing English content in Chinese and Malay languages to provide to a various student population. Addressing these important elements, this research significantly attempted to improve English language learning outcomes among the students.This study emphasizes how crucial it is to look at how teacher preparation, technology integration, and successful teaching methods relate to improving vocabulary learning. Although there is a growing body of research on vocabulary acquisition, there aren't many thorough studies examining the ways in which these variables interact in diverse educational settings. To improve vocabulary outcomes, it is essential to comprehend how well-prepared instructors may use technology and new teaching strategies. Closing this gap could result in more effective teacher preparation programs that are in line with modern pedagogical trends and resources, as well as improved assistance for students from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework



Method of Data Collection and Analysis

This study employed phenomenological research. There were 250 students and fourteen teachers at Janajyoti Campus Bhimad Tanahun in 2024. Out of them, sixteen students were selected, eight students from education and eight students from management from the purposive sampling method who were studying English as a compulsory subject and, three English teachers were selected. All the participants were Nepali Native speakers studying English as a compulsory subject. The primary data was collected through a questionnaire survey and the study analyzed the data using a descriptive method. The study used a questionnaire to investigate the learners' and teachers' challenges towards vocabulary learning and teaching. The questionnaire on challenges of learning vocabulary involved 10 open-ended question items. The question items incorporate the areas of experience, strategies, challenging aspects of learning vocabulary, sources of learning vocabulary, challenges of retaining vocabulary, techniques of teaching vocabulary, the role of motivation and peer sharing in learning vocabulary, and further suggestions to improve learning vocabulary.

Results and Discussions

The researcher formulated ten open-ended questions to investigate the students' attitudes toward the challenges of vocabulary learning in English. Each question response is discussed herewith. During the research work, the researcher intended to understand the students' experience with learning English vocabulary. Depending on their experience, a question was asked to 16 students "How would you describe your general experience with learning vocabulary in English? "The responses were interesting and diverse. Six students share their struggles during the learning process. They found learning vocabulary tough and sometimes embarrassing. They hesitated to use new words, fearing they might make mistakes. Another six students had different attitudes. They consulted different materials such as books, apps, dictionaries, and glossaries. They believed that these resources assisted them in improving their vocabulary. Three students found learning English vocabulary enjoyable and exciting. They found it easy to grasp new words and interesting as well as comfortable to learn new meanings. Two students responded that they were able to improve their vocabulary through exposure, practice, word training, and repetition. They believed that using English in their daily lives facilitated them to develop their vocabulary skills.

Similarly, the researcher asked three English teachers the same question about their learning and teaching vocabulary experiences. Two teachers responded to a difficult area of language learning and instructed them to consult the dictionaries and one teacher responded learning vocabulary as a "what" factor of any language.

In response to the question "What strategies do you currently use to learn new vocabulary? "It was found that the majority of the respondents which is five out of the total respondents, favored reading different genres such as stories, poems, novels, and dramas to improve their vocabulary. This strategy not only helps them to learn new vocabulary but also provides them with context to understand the meaning and usage of those words. Similarly, five students responded that they use different resources such as movies, YouTube, Google search, and technology to learn and improve their vocabulary. They consider that watching movies, and online videos, and using technology-based resources are effective ways to learn new in a fun and attractive way. Three students said that they consult media such as magazines, newspapers, books, radio, articles, and television to expand their vocabulary. By applying this, they get to learn new words as well as they informed about recent happening and news. Moreover, three students stated that they develop their vocabulary skills by engaging in various activities such as listening, speaking, contextual reading, engaging in conversation, playing word games, and using apps. These strategies not only help them to learn new words but also improve their overall communication and language skills.

Regarding teachers' responses to this question, three of them opined to consult dictionaries, books, movies, and reference sources.

In response to the question "What are the most challenging aspects of learning new vocabulary in English?" It was responded that almost the majority of the respondents, 13 out of the total respondents stated that they have challenges with pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and memorization. They also viewed that they have challenges in understanding meaning, confusing spelling collocation, and encountering frustrating words with correct meaning. These language hurdles can be quiet as they can hinder learners from conveying their thoughts and ideas efficiently. Additionally, three respondents expressed their challenges as a lack of motivation, peer pressure, and inadequate cooperation among their teachers and fellow students. Regarding teachers' responses to this question one opined accessibility to the use of social media and reference sources as a challenging aspect, and two of them opined spelling, pronunciation, and contextual meanings as the most challenging aspects of learning vocabulary.

In response to the question "What sources (e.g. textbook, dictionary, online resources, and media) do you typically use to learn new vocabulary?" it was responded that twelve students typically used textbooks as the main source of new vocabulary learning. Accompanying textbooks, they consulted dictionaries, word-translating apps, and online and offline sources. The rest of the students that is four respondents viewed that they consulted language vocabulary apps—websites, videos, articles media and social media movies, TV shows, etc

In the area of teachers' responses, regarding sources two of them instantly used a dictionary and online resources. In contrast, one teacher argued the use of textbooks, and mobile phones—newspapers as well as dictionaries as the main sources of learning vocabulary.

In response to the question "What challenges do you face in remembering and recalling vocabulary?" Six students mentioned difficulties related to spelling and pronunciation. This suggests that they struggle with correctly spelling words or pronouncing them, which can affect their ability to recall vocabulary accurately. Another six participants noted struggles with tough word structures, confusion between similar words, and difficulty selecting the appropriate words in different contexts. This indicates they have issues with understanding or using words correctly due to their complexity or similarity to other words. Four respondents highlighted issues with lack of practice, insufficient exposure to vocabulary, and difficulties in understanding words in context. This implies that these participants feel they need more exposure to words and contexts to remember and use vocabulary effectively.

Regarding the question of remembering and recalling vocabulary, teachers bear various challenges. One teacher pointed out that depending on the first language can be a hindrance, while another highlighted the difficulty of piloting excessive resources. Moreover, one teacher noted the challenge of not being able to hear or use contextual spelling and word class. These perceptions highlight the complex nature of vocabulary retention in educational areas.

In response to the question" What techniques have you found to be most effective for retaining new vocabulary?" it was found that four students consulted a dictionary, word practice, and games. Six students used the techniques of writing, quiz, conversation, repetition, and motivational speaking practice. Five students preferred to apply the techniques of visual images, flashcards, realia, and gestures. Additionally, one student responded to prefer for applying for the vocabulary test, group, and pair work sharing for the meaning of new words.

In the responses from the side of teachers to this question, two teachers opined to instant use of a dictionary, pictures, and authentic online resources whereas one teacher responded with regular practice of pronunciation, spelling, meaning, and use of words.

In response to the question "How does motivation affect your ability to learn vocabulary," it was found that five students responded that motivation inspires readiness for language acquisition, paying attention, and developing and influencing good attitudes toward learning vocabulary. six students stated that motivation develops positive attitudes, and increases ability, skills, and succession for learning vocabulary in language acquisition. Five students argued that motivation affects vocabulary memorization, excitement for learning vocabulary, and the development of a willingness to learn new vocabulary.

The selected teachers opined diverse on this question. Two of them regarded motivation as a key master to learning new vocabulary whereas one teacher opined motivation that can enhance our memory and retention.

In response to the question" In what ways do your peers or teachers support you in learning vocabulary?" It was found that six students responded that their peers supported them in learning vocabulary by speaking, reading, writing, conducting conversation, and dialogue.

Five students viewed that they took support by sharing and practicing among the students. Likewise, three respondents argued that they share their support by consulting materials, and doing communicative activities such as tests and quizzes. Additionally, two students take support among them correcting mistakes and collaborating. All the students are facilitated by teachers with guidance, feedback, and appropriate suggestions for learning vocabulary.

From the side of the teachers on this question, two of them responded that peers and teachers played a vital role in sharing, repeating, and collaborating whereas one teacher highlighted contextual word collocation, spelling, and pronunciation.

In response to the question "What strategies or tools would you suggest to improve the process of learning vocabulary in English? It was found that six students recommended using various materials such as flashcards, vocabulary apps, games, various books, magazines, newspapers, and dictionaries. Five students suggested consulting different sources such as movies, videos, different speaking and reading sources, and online sources. Three students stated to be exposed to new, complex, and root words to improve new vocabulary. Additionally, two respondents stated that applying to translate English into the first language and involving the learners in reading and writing practice.

Regarding this question, the selected teachers suggested diversity. One teacher suggested improving vocabulary with the implication of correct pronunciation. Another one suggested the contextual use of a dictionary, realia, pictures, mimes, and gestures, and additionally, one teacher suggested consulting authentic resources for word practice.

In response to the question "Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience learning vocabulary in English?" Different respondents argued diverse opinions. Nine students opined that more English word practice promotes learners' communicative understanding, power, and competency. Two students regarded learning new words as a great achievement and they also suggested to consult dictionaries, books, and newspapers. Two students recommended developing confidence in overcoming the challenges of learning vocabulary and sharing with peers and teachers. They also stated that learning new vocabulary assists in connecting people and cultures. Selected three teachers suggested that effective use of daily communication in language learning is significant. They also advised students to practice vocabulary as part of their daily learning routine.

The study found that learners make use of various genres such as stories, poems, novels, and dramas, as well as media sources like YouTube, Google search, and technology, including movies, online videos, magazines, newspapers, books, radio, articles, and television to expand their vocabulary. This helps them learn new words and stay informed about recent happenings and news. Learners also improve their skills by engaging in listening, speaking, contextual reading, conversations, playing word games, and using apps. These strategies help them learn new words and enhance their overall communication and language skills. The study identified challenges in learning new vocabulary including pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and memorization. Learners reported difficulties understanding meanings, confusing spelling collocations, and encountering words with multiple meanings. These language hurdles can be frustrating and hinder learners from expressing their thoughts and ideas effectively. The study revealed that students typically use textbooks as their main source of new vocabulary learning. In addition to textbooks, students also consult dictionaries, word-translating apps, and online and offline sources as well as social media, movies, and TV shows. To effectively retain new vocabulary, students employ techniques such as word practice, visual images, flashcards, realia, gestures, speaking, writing, repetition, as well as group and pair work. The study suggested a variety of challenges that participants face when it comes to remembering and recalling vocabulary, ranging from specific issues with spelling and pronunciation to broader challenges related to word complexity, confusion, and contextual understanding. Addressing these challenges may involve targeted strategies such as practicing pronunciation, expanding vocabulary exposure, and improving contextual comprehension through varied usage and examples the study explored the positive impact of motivation on learning new vocabulary. Peers' and teachers' support, collaboration, consultation, and feedback play a crucial role in learning new vocabulary. Exposure to new, complex, and root words is also important for improving vocabulary. Additionally, there is a need to involve learners in reading and writing practices, as well as promote more English word practice to enhance learners' communicative understanding, power, and competency. Developing confidence is also recommended to overcome the challenges of learning vocabulary. The finding of study is consistency with Celik and Toptas (2010); Farjami and Aidinlou (2013); Baniabdelrahman and Al-shumai Meri (2014); Siddiqua(2016); Afzal (2019); Raw,and Ismail, (2021); Komalasari(2022); Lutfiyan et al. (2022); Rosyada and Apoka(2023); Janggo and Yumelking (2024).

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive analysis of students' perceptions and strategies for learning vocabulary, numerous important perceptions developed. Overall, the research emphasized the importance of systematic instructional approaches for learners' diverse needs and preferences in English language education. Students had various experiences, with some finding vocabulary acquisition challenging and others effectively using different resources. Challenges recognized comprise pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and memorization, along with motivational factors and support from peers and teachers. The study emphasized the importance of various learning strategies such as reading, using technology, and engaging in language activities to improve vocabulary skills and overall language proficiency. Ultimately, the study offered comprehensive insights into the dynamic nature of vocabulary acquisition and stressed the necessity of structured instructional approaches tailored to English language learners' multifaceted needs and preferences.

Additionally, the findings supported the existing literature on vocabulary learning strategies, encouraging the relevance of several sources and interactive approaches. Implications included increasing exposure to diverse word contexts, promoting collaborative learning environments, and promoting intrinsic motivation among learners. These understandings contribute to deeper thoughts of effective pedagogical practices for improving vocabulary acquisition in English language education. In conclusion, the study highlights the dynamic nature of vocabulary learning and emphasizes the importance of systematic instructional approaches that provide to the diverse needs and preferences of learners.

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Demographic Factors Affecting University-Level Student's Online Shopping Behavior in Pokhara Valley

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Abstract

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Today people are doing business online which has made human life much easier. Online shopping is becoming an integral part of the economy and country and worldwide increasingly. The purpose of this study is to find out demographic factors affecting university-level students' online shopping behavior in Pokhara Valley. The study utilized quantitative research design, collecting data from 388 valid samples through a structured questionnaire. The data analysis involved descriptive and inferential analysis, including frequency analysis, mean difference test and chi square *test. Regarding online shopping behavior, a significant portion of respondents engage in online purchasing, primarily influenced by advertisements. However, online shoppers face problems such as poor product quality, product description discrepancies, and slow delivery services. Furthermore, education status emerged as significant determinants, while gender, marital status, ethnicity, family income and faculty showed no significant associations. The findings underscore the importance of addressing consumer concerns and tailoring strategies to diverse segments to enhance the online shopping experience.*

Keywords: *Demographic factors, online shopping behavior, Pokhara valley, university-level students.*

Introduction

Internet is changing the way customers shop for goods and services and has rapidly evolved into global event. It also provides consumers with more information and choices to compare product and price, more choice, convenience, easier to find anything online. Online shopping is a form of electronic commerce that enables consumers to purchase goods or services directly from retailers via the Internet using a web browser (Aldhmour & Sarayrah, 2016). Online shopping provides shoppers with the most convenient method purchase just about everything on their wish list without having to rush to physical stores. In fact, the use of this method prevents additional costs, such as transportation charge (including fuel, tolls, and parking) and provide convenience by not having to queue when paying or go through a throng of crowds. With just a click of a mouse button, the customer's desired item will be sent to his/her doorstep with only a minimum charge or some with even free shipping. Occasionally, there are some online retailers who offer free shipping of products and also cash-on-delivery facility (Kumar, 2016).

A highly demanding lifestyle is compelling consumers to adopt online shopping as an alternative to traditional retailing worldwide. In order to save time and money, people are motivated to purchase products and services online. Companies are investing intensely on technology to make the best use of internet as the shopping channel. There is hardly any product, service or commodity which is not being sold through internet. Online shopping is unanimously accepted and recognized as a cost effective, profitable and accessible medium to shop. Therefore, it becomes essential for online retailers to study online consumerism and how it is taking shape in today's era of rapid globalization.

Online shopping, characterized by its convenience, variety, and accessibility, has become a dominant trend worldwide. In developing countries like Nepal, the rise of e-commerce platforms and increasing internet penetration have brought about significant shifts in consumer behavior, particularly among the younger, tech-savvy population. Various factors influence the online shopping intentions of the buyers. The literature on online shopping behavior highlights various factors across diverse contexts. Awal et al. (2023) found that positive online shopping experiences significantly impacted customer satisfaction, trust, and purchase intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. Similarly, Odoom (2022) in Ghana identified ad personalization as a key determinant of online purchase intention, mediated by perceived relevance and intrusiveness. Ali et al. (2022) emphasized the role of brand trust, service quality, price, and perceived usefulness in shaping smartphone purchase intentions online.

Majali et al. (2022) in Jordan revealed that digital review credibility, influenced by argument quality and peripheral cues, strongly affected consumer buying decisions. Aloqool and Alsmairat (2022) underscored the impact of social commerce and trust in social networks on purchase intentions. Kumar and Maidullah (2022) highlighted the significance of effective managerial responses to negative reviews in fostering purchase intentions in China, while Tran and Nguyen (2022) demonstrated the role of security, reputation, and trust in shaping online purchase attitudes in Vietnam.

Studies such as Ho Nguyen et al. (2022) explored the mediating effects of attitudes towards advertising, with factors like entertainment and personalization influencing purchase intentions. Yin and Qiu (2021) emphasized AI's role in enhancing hedonic and utilitarian values, thereby driving purchase intentions. Silva et al. (2019) highlighted trust and security as critical in online shopping behavior, and Hong et al. (2019) identified privacy and delivery risks as key deterrents for Malaysian consumers.

Research grounded in theoretical models, such as Ha et al. (2019) using TAM and TPB in Vietnam, validated the influence of perceived usefulness, trust, and subjective norms on purchase intentions. Additional studies, including Ramayah et al. (2018) and Jordan et al. (2018), further explored the impact of functional and emotional values, and the role of perceived risk and identity theft concerns, respectively, on online purchase behavior. Together, these studies provide comprehensive insights into the multifaceted dynamics of online shopping across varying cultural and economic settings.

On the similar way some other studies have discussed on the role of demographic factors on online shopping. Dominici et. al. (2021) found the role of socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, household size, education and income in online food purchase in Italy. On their research marital status wasn't found significant but on another study by Tabinda, Omkar & Ahmad (2022) in India found that unmarried online shoppers have different shopping behavior compared to married ones. They also considered the role of age and education in online shopping behavior.

Contrasting to these studies, Saad and Mohaimen (2023) found that age isn't significant socio-demographic factor that influence in use of online food delivery apps in India but gender, monthly income and occupation plays influencing role. Furthermore, another studies from Turkey done by Akman and Rehan (2010) found that income is most important variable for e-commerce attitude rather than gender. Mehrotra et. al (2019) also concluded the same result from study in Bahrain that gender has less role than other variables such as education level, salary, income, ability to use internet etc. Similarly, the study of Mohan and Bhatt (2019) also aligns the result that demographic variables such as education and income per month has influence towards online shopping behavior but they found that other variables such as age, occupation, gender, marital status, location etc. hasn't significant association with the shopping behavior.

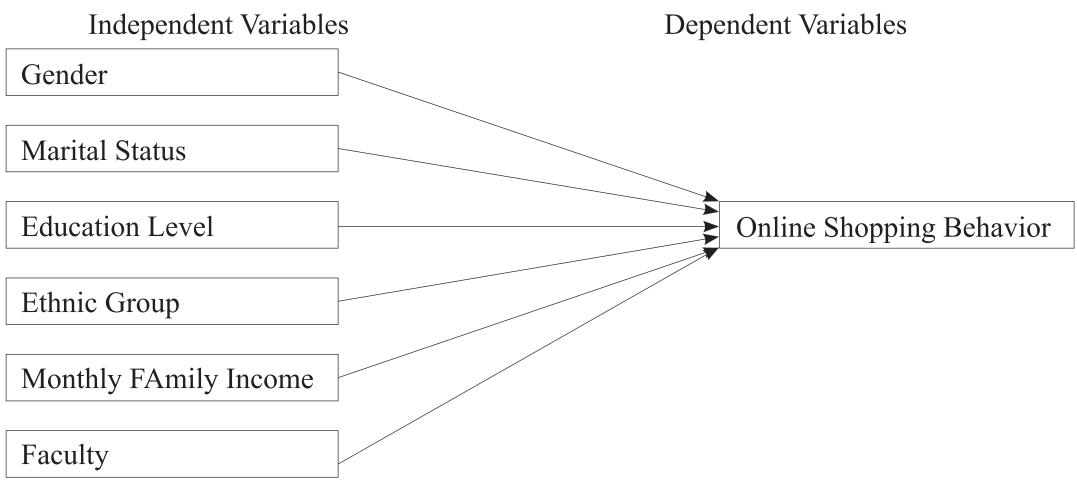
Based on various studies, most research on online shopping behavior has focused on behavioral factors. Some studies have examined socio-demographic factors, while others have considered both types of variables. However, in the case of Nepal, no study on socio-demographic factors has been conducted to date. To fill this gap, a study focusing on the impact of socio-demographic factors on online shopping behavior is essential.

University-level students, as active participants in digital environments, represent a unique demographic whose online shopping behaviors are influenced by a blend of socio-demographic, psychological, and economic factors. University students, often being early adopters of technology, are a crucial group for understanding how socio-demographic factors such as gender, education, income, marital status, and ethnicity shape purchasing decisions in the digital marketplace. Numerous studies have explored online shopping behavior globally but contextualizing these findings to Nepal's unique socio-economic and cultural dynamics is vital. In the context, this study seeks to analyse the association between various socio-demographic factors and online shopping behavior of university-level students in Pokhara Valley. The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in the context of a developing country and provide actionable insights for businesses looking to expand their reach in similar markets.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is quantitative in nature and follows a descriptive research design. All students from different universities in Pokhara Valley were considered population units for this study. In this study, the desired sample size was 385 participants, determined at a 5 percent margin of error, considering an unknown large population size. This study was primary in nature. For data collection, the researchers physically met the potential respondents and requested them to fill up the printed questionnaire. The researcher distributed a total of 450 printed questionnaires to potential respondents and received 406 complete responses. Eighteen questionnaires were found incomplete or improperly filled out. As a result, the final dataset for analysis consisted of 388 valid samples. The data was collected from April 2023 to May 2023. The required data was collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of socio-demographic information and different Likert scale statements were used to measure the independent and dependent variables. The research used both descriptive and inferential analysis including frequency analysis, mean difference test and chi square test to fulfill the objectives of this study. The following conceptual framework is being examined for this study based on a survey of the literature.

Figure 1



In this study, various socio-demographic variables were considered as independent variables, while perception toward online shopping behavior was treated as the dependent variable. The study examined the association between gender, marital status, education, ethnic group, income, and faculty with online shopping behavior. However, study area and age were not considered as independent variables, as a single study area was chosen, and the respondents belonged to a similar age group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Demographic Profile

The gender, marital status, ethnic group, education status, faculty, and monthly income of the family of the respondents is presented in Table 1

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Profile

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	137	35.31
	Female	251	64.69
Marital status	Married	36	9.28
	Unmarried	352	90.70
Ethnic group	Brahmin	214	55.15
	Chhetri	64	16.49
	Janajati	68	17.53
	Others	42	10.82
Education status	Bachelors	352	90.72
	Masters and above	36	9.28
Faculty	Management	154	39.7
	Humanities	48	12.4
	Health and allied sciences	56	14.4
	Science and technology	43	11.1
	Others	87	22.2
Monthly income of family	Up to Rs. 25,000	60	15.5
	Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000	146	37.6
	Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 75,000	85	21.9
	Above Rs. 75,000	97	25.0

Table 1 reveals that majority of participants were female (64.69 %) and unmarried (90.70 %), with Brahmins (55.15 %) representing the largest ethnic group, followed by Janajati (17.53 %), Chhetri (16.49 %), and others (10.82 %). Education levels were predominantly bachelor's degree holders (90.72 %), while master's degree and above constituted 9.28 percent. Faculty representation revealed a strong presence in management studies (39.7 %), with smaller groups from humanities (12.4 %), health and allied sciences (14.4 %), science and technology (11.1 %), and other disciplines (22.2 %) including forestry, law, sports management etc. Family income distribution showed a concentration in the Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000 range (37.6 %), followed by higher income brackets above Rs. 75,000 (25.0 %) and Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 75,000

(21.9 %), with the lowest income group (up to Rs. 25,000) comprising 15.5 percent. This demographic profile underscores the diverse yet economically moderate background of the respondents, offering a robust foundation for the study's analysis.

Basic Information Related to Online Shopping

This section includes the information related to online purchase, source of online purchase information, items purchased online, device used for online purchases, payment mode, and problems faced with online purchases by the respondents.

Table 2

Purchase Online

Purchase online	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	278	71.6
No	110	28.4
Total	388	100.0

According to Table 2, out of the 388 individuals surveyed, 278 of them (71.6 percent) responded that they purchase online, while 110 (28.4 percent) responded that they do not purchase online. This suggests that a significant portion of the sample population engages in online purchasing.

Table 3

Information about Online Purchase

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Through Advertisement	203	73.0
Through family members	20	7.2
Through friends	61	21.9
Other sources	21	7.6
Total	278	100.0

Table 3 represents the sources from which individuals in a sample population learned about a certain product or service. According to this table, out of the 278 individuals surveyed, the majority, 203 (73.0 percent), learned about the product or service through advertisement. A smaller portion, 61 (21.9 percent), learned about it through friends, while 20 (7.2 percent) learned about it through family members. Additionally, 21 (7.6 percent) individuals reported learning about the product or service through other sources.

Table 4

Items Purchased Online

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Food/Beverage	81	29.1
Clothing/Accessory/Shoes	239	86.0
Toys and games	12	4.3
Book/DVD/CD	26	9.4
Computer/Electronics Appliances	63	22.7
Air ticket, Movie ticket	115	41.4
Furniture and Housewares	22	7.9
Others	18	6.5
Total	278	100.0

Table 4 presents the different categories of products that were purchased by the individuals online. It is categorized into eight categories - food/beverage, clothing/accessory/shoes, toys and games, book/DVD/CD, computer/electronics appliances, air ticket, movie ticket, furniture and housewares, and others. According to this table, the most purchased product category among the surveyed individuals was Clothing/Accessory/Shoes, with 239 (86.0 percent) individuals reported purchasing products in this category. This was followed by Air ticket, Movie ticket, which was reported by 115 (41.4 percent) individuals, and Computer/Electronics Appliances, which was reported by 63 (22.7 percent) individuals. The least commonly purchased product categories were Toys and games (4.3 percent) and Furniture and Housewares (7.9 percent).

Table 5

Device Used for Online Purchase

Device	Frequency	Percentage
Computer/Laptop	68	24.5
Tablets	6	2.2
Mobile	259	93.2
Total	278	100.0

Table 5 provides information about the devices used by the respondents to make online purchases where the respondents could select more than one device. The table shows that out of 278 respondents, the majority (259) used a mobile device to make online purchases, which represents 93.2 percent of the sample. Only 68 respondents (24.5 percent) used a computer or laptop, while only 6 (2.2 percent) used a tablet.

Table 6

Mode of Payments

Payment Methods	Frequency	Percentage
Debit and Credit Cards	15	5.4
Bank transfers	123	44.2
Cash on delivery	149	53.6
Wallet (e.g., e-Sewa, Khali, IME pay, etc.)	171	61.5
Total	278	100.0

Table 6 shows the different payment methods used by the respondents for online shopping where the respondents could select multiple options. Out of the 278 respondents, 53.6 percent preferred to pay using cash on delivery, while 44.2 percent preferred bank transfers. Wallets such as e-Sewa, Khali, IME pay, etc. were used by 61.5 percent of the respondents, while debit and credit cards were used by only 5.4 percent.

Table 7

Problems Experienced While Shopping Online

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Poor product quality	132	47.5
Products differ from the description	99	35.6
Payment problem	29	10.4
Slow delivery services	103	37.1
Poor after-sales services	22	7.9
Poor customer services	41	14.7
Others	8	2.9
Total	278	100.0

Table 7 shows the problems faced by respondents during online shopping where the respondents were allowed to choose multiple options. Out of a total of 278 respondents who do online shopping, 47.5 percent of the respondents faced poor product quality, while 35.6 percent of the respondents' faced issues where the product differed from the description. 37.1 percent of the respondents faced slow delivery services, and 14.7 percent of the respondents faced poor customer services. 10.4 percent of the respondents faced payment problems, and 7.9 percent of the respondents' faced poor after-sales services. Additionally, 2.9 percent of the respondents faced other problems which include brand problems, product different than in photo, product being out of stock, scammed, size problem etc.

Table 8

Difference in Opinion by Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Sig.
Security and privacy	Male	137	2.749	.000*
	Female	251	3.100	
Effort expectancy	Male	137	3.575	.315
	Female	251	3.661	
Price expectancy	Male	137	3.676	.018*
	Female	251	3.858	
Social influence	Male	137	3.073	.009*
	Female	251	3.272	
Facilitating condition	Male	137	3.470	.166
	Female	251	3.587	
Online purchase intention	Male	137	3.239	.030*
	Female	251	3.442	

Table 8 displays the results of a study that analyzed the differences in mean scores between male and female participants for various variables related to online purchasing. Based on the table, there is a statistically significant difference between males and females in their mean scores for security and privacy (Sig. = 0.000), price expectancy (Sig. = 0.018), and social influence (Sig. = 0.009) at 5 percent level of significance. This means that males and females have different perceptions of these variables in relation to online purchase intention. Similarly, there is a statistically significant difference between males and females in their mean scores for online purchase intention (Sig. = 0.030). This suggests that there may be a difference in the likelihood of males and females to make online purchases. Specifically, female participants reported higher mean scores than male participants for security and privacy, price expectancy, social influence, and online purchase intention.

On the other hand, there is no statistically significant difference between males and females in their mean scores for effort expectancy (Sig. = 0.315) and facilitating condition (Sig. = 0.166). The p-value of more than 5 percent level of significance justifies it. This means that males and females have similar perceptions of these variables in relation to online purchase intention.

Table 9

Difference in Opinion by Marital Status

Variables	Marital status	N	Mean	Sig.
Security and privacy	Married	36	3.156	.149
	Unmarried	351	2.962	
Effort expectancy	Married	36	3.722	.486
	Unmarried	351	3.625	
Price expectancy	Married	36	3.844	.668
	Unmarried	351	3.790	
Social influence	Married	36	3.250	.677
	Unmarried	351	3.197	
Facilitating condition	Married	36	3.606	.635
	Unmarried	351	3.540	
Online purchase intention	Married	36	3.389	.890
	Unmarried	351	3.368	

Table 9 shows the mean values of various factors related to online purchasing for two groups of individuals based on their marital status: married and unmarried. The table reveals that the p-values of all factors are more than 0.05. Thus, there is no significant difference in the mean scores of various factors related to online purchasing between married and unmarried individuals at the 5 percent level of significance.

Table 10

Difference in Opinion by Education Status

Variables	Education status	N	Mean	Sig.
Security and privacy	Bachelors	352	2.972	.741
	Masters and above	36	3.017	
Effort expectancy	Bachelors	352	3.613	.181
	Masters and above	36	3.800	
Price expectancy	Bachelors	352	3.782	.334
	Masters and above	36	3.906	
Social influence	Bachelors	352	3.188	.237
	Masters and above	36	3.338	
Facilitating condition	Bachelors	352	3.511	.008*
	Masters and above	36	3.878	
Online purchase intention	Bachelors	352	3.357	.355
	Masters and above	36	3.500	

Table 10 shows the mean scores for various factors related to online purchase intention based on the education status of the participants. It compares the means for two groups: participants who have completed a bachelor's degree and participants who have completed a master's degree or higher. For the factor of facilitating condition, the mean score for participants with a bachelor's degree is 3.511, and for participants with a master's degree or higher, it is 3.878. The difference in means is statistically significant at 5 percent level of significance ($p = 0.008$). However, the education status of the participants has no significant effect on the facilitating condition on the other factors ($p > 0.05$).

For security and privacy, the mean score for participants with a bachelor's degree is 2.972, and for participants with a master's degree or higher, it is 3.017. The difference in means is not statistically significant ($p = 0.741$). For effort expectancy, the mean score for participants with a bachelor's degree is 3.613, and for participants with a master's degree or higher, it is 3.800. The difference in means is not statistically significant ($p = 0.181$). Similarly, for price expectancy, the mean score for participants with a bachelor's degree is 3.782, and for participants with a master's degree or higher, it is 3.906. The difference in means is not statistically significant ($p = 0.334$). For social influence, the mean score for participants with a bachelor's degree is 3.188, and for participants with a master's degree or higher, it is 3.338. The difference in means is not statistically significant ($p = 0.237$). Likewise, for online purchase intention, the mean score for participants with a bachelor's degree is 3.357, and for participants with a master's degree or higher, it is 3.500. The difference in means is not statistically significant ($p = 0.355$).

Table 11

One Way ANOVA by Ethnic Group

Variables	Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Security and privacy	Between Groups	3.70	3	1.232	2.103	.099
	Within Groups	224.97	384	.586		
	Total	228.66	387			
Effort expectancy	Between Groups	0.99	3	.331	0.517	.671
	Within Groups	245.89	384	.640		
	Total	246.88	387			
Price expectancy	Between Groups	1.43	3	.476	0.898	.442
	Within Groups	203.36	384	.530		
	Total	204.79	387			
Social influence	Between Groups	1.80	3	.598	1.144	.331
	Within Groups	200.83	384	.523		
	Total	202.63	387			
Facilitating condition	Between Groups	1.64	3	.547	0.872	.456
	Within Groups	240.64	384	.627		
	Total	242.28	387			

Online purchase intention	Between Groups	2.39	3	.796	1.025	.381
	Within Groups	298.04	384	.776		
	Total	300.43	387			

Table 11 shows the results of a one-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) conducted to compare the means of different variables among different ethnic groups. The variables tested are security and privacy, effort expectancy, price expectancy, social influence, facilitating condition, and online purchase intention. The table reveals that all the variables have p-values greater than 0.05, indicating that there is no significant difference in opinion between the ethnic groups for these variables.

Table 12

One Way ANOVA by Faculty

Variables	Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Security and privacy	Between Groups	7.16	5	1.431	2.469	.032*
	Within Groups	221.50	382	.580		
	Total	228.66	387			
Effort expectancy	Between Groups	5.36	5	1.071	1.694	.135
	Within Groups	241.52	382	.632		
	Total	246.88	387			
Price expectancy	Between Groups	1.89	5	.378	0.712	.615
	Within Groups	202.89	382	.531		
	Total	204.79	387			
Social influence	Between Groups	0.84	5	.167	0.317	.903
	Within Groups	201.79	382	.528		
	Total	202.63	387			
Facilitating condition	Between Groups	3.21	5	.641	1.024	.403
	Within Groups	239.08	382	.626		
	Total	242.28	387			
Online purchase intention	Between Groups	2.41	5	.482	0.618	.686
	Within Groups	298.02	382	.780		
	Total	300.43	387			

Table 12 shows the results of a one-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) conducted to compare the means of different variables among respondents of various faculty. The table reveals that there is significant difference in opinion regarding security and privacy among the respondents of different faculty as p-value is less than 0.05 (p = 0.032). However, for all other variables, the p-values are greater than 0.05, indicating that there is no significant difference in opinion between the respondents of different faculty for these variables.

Table 13

One Way ANOVA by Monthly Income

Variables	Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Security and privacy	Between Groups	3.94	3	1.312	2.242	.083
	Within Groups	224.72	384	.585		
	Total	228.66	387			
Effort expectancy	Between Groups	9.56	3	3.187	5.157	.002*
	Within Groups	237.32	384	.618		
	Total	246.88	387			
Price expectancy	Between Groups	8.29	3	2.764	5.401	.001*
	Within Groups	196.49	384	.512		
	Total	204.79	387			
Social influence	Between Groups	3.39	3	1.130	2.179	.090
	Within Groups	199.24	384	.519		
	Total	202.63	387			
Facilitating condition	Between Groups	7.01	3	2.336	3.813	.010*
	Within Groups	235.27	384	.613		
	Total	242.28	387			
Online purchase intention	Between Groups	5.86	3	1.955	2.549	.056
	Within Groups	294.56	384	.767		
	Total	300.43	387			

Table 13 shows the results of a one-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) performed on different variables (security and privacy, effort expectancy, price expectancy, social influence, facilitating condition, and online purchase intention) based on the monthly income of participants. In this table, there are significant differences in mean score of effort expectancy across different income groups ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, there are significant differences in mean score across income groups for price expectancy and facilitating condition ($p < 0.05$). But for other variables such as security and privacy, social influence, and online purchase intention, there is no significant difference in mean score ($p > 0.05$).

Association between demographic variables and online purchase

This section shows the relationship between demographic variables and online purchase behavior. It includes the cross tabulation between the demographic variables and online purchase behavior as well as Chi-square test.

Table 14

Cross Tabulation Between Gender and Online Purchase

			Purchase online		Total
			Yes	No	
Gender of respondents	Male	Freq.	91	46	137
		Percent	66.4	33.6	100.0
	Female	Freq.	187	64	251
		Percent	74.5	25.5	100.0
	Total	Freq.	278	110	388
		Percent	71.6	28.4	100.0

Chi-square value = 2.848, Sig. = 0.0915

Table 14 shows the association between gender of respondents and their online purchase behavior. Out of the total 388 respondents, 137 were male and 251 were female. Among the male respondents, 66.4 percent purchased online, and 33.6 percent did not purchase online. Among the female respondents, 74.5 percent purchased online, and 25.5 percent did not purchase online. The chi-square value of 2.848 with a p-value of 0.0915 indicates that there is no significant association between gender and online purchase behavior at a 5 percent level of significance. This means that gender is not a significant predictor of whether or not someone makes online purchases.

Table 15

Cross Tabulation Between Marital Status and Online Purchase

			Purchase online		Total
			Yes	No	
Marital status	Married	Freq.	26	10	36
		Percent	72.2	27.8	100.0
	Unmarried	Freq.	252	100	351
		Percent	71.8	28.2	100.0
	Total	Freq.	278	110	388
		Percent	71.6	28.4	100.0

Chi-square value = 2.537, Sig. = 0.281

Table 15 shows the association between marital status and online purchase among the respondents. Out of the total 388 respondents, 36 were married and 351 were unmarried. Among the married respondents, 72.2 percent purchased online, and 27.8 percent did not purchase online. Among the unmarried respondents, 71.8 percent purchased online, and 28.2 percent did not purchase online. The chi-square value is 2.537 and the p-value is 0.281, which indicates that there is no significant association between marital status and online purchase at the 5 percent level of significance. Therefore, there is no association between marital status and online purchase among the respondents.

Table 16

Cross Tabulation Between Education Status and Online Purchase

			Purchase online		Total
			Yes	No	
Education status	Bachelors	Freq.	247	105	352
		Percent	70.2	29.8	100.0
	Masters and above	Freq.	31	5	36
		Percent	86.1	13.9	100.0
	Total	Freq.	278	110	388
		Percent	71.6	28.4	100.0

*Chi-square value = 4.086, Sig. = 0.043**

Table 16 shows the association between education status and online purchase. Out of the total sample of 388 respondents, 352 have a bachelor's degree, and 70.2 percent of them purchase online, while 29.8 percent do not purchase online. Similarly, 36 respondents have a master's degree or above, out of which 86.1 percent purchase online, and 13.9 percent do not purchase online. The chi-square value is 4.086, and the p-value is 0.043, which is less than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that there is a statistically significant association between education status and online purchase. Specifically, the data suggests that those with a master's degree or above are more likely to purchase online than those with only a bachelor's degree.

Table 17

Cross Tabulation Between Ethnic Group and Online Purchase

			Purchase online		Total
			Yes	No	
Ethnic group	Brahmin	Freq.	152	62	214
		Percent	71.0	29.0	100.0
	Chhetri	Freq.	44	20	64
		Percent	68.8	31.3	100.0
	Janajati	Freq.	53	15	68
		Percent	77.9	22.1	100.0
	Others	Freq.	29	13	42
		Percent	69.0	31.0	100.0
	Total	Freq.	278	110	388
		Percent	71.6	28.4	100.0

Chi-square value = 1.771, Sig. = 0.621

Table 17 shows the association between ethnic groups and online purchase. The frequencies and percentages are given for each ethnic group and for those who purchase online and those who do not. The chi-square value is 1.771 with a p-value of 0.621. At a 5 percent level of significance, since the p-value (0.621) is greater than 0.05, we do not have enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no association between ethnic groups and online purchase. Thus, we can conclude that there is no significant relationship between ethnic group and online purchase among the respondents.

Table 18

Cross Tabulation Between Monthly Income and Online Purchase

			PURCHASE ONLINE		TOTAL
			YES	NO	
MONTHLY INCOME	UP TO RS. 25,000	FREQ.	39	21	60
		PERCENT	65	35	100.0
	RS. 25,000 TO RS. 50,000	FREQ.	101	45	146
		PERCENT	69.2	30.8	100.0
	RS. 50,000 TO RS. 75,000	FREQ.	64	21	85
		PERCENT	75.3	24.7	100.0
	ABOVE RS. 75,000	FREQ.	74	23	97
		PERCENT	76.3	23.7	100.0
	TOTAL	FREQ.	278	110	388
		PERCENT	71.6	28.4	100.0

Chi-square value = 3.293, Sig. = 0.349

Table 18 shows that there is no statistically significant association between monthly income and online purchase. Out of the total sample of 388 respondents, 60 are from income level up to Rs. 25,000 out of which 65 purchase online. Similarly, 146 respondents earn Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000 out of which 69.2 percent purchase online, and 30.8 percent do not purchase online. On the same way, 85 of the respondent represent income level of Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 75,000 out of which 75.3 percent buy online. Similarly, out of 97 respondents having monthly income more than Rs. 75,000, 76.3 percent purchase online. The chi-square value is 3.293, and the p-value is 0.349, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05, indicating monthly income isn’t statistically associated with online purchase. This provide the fact that monthly income hasn’t impact on increasing online purchase.

Table 19

Cross Tabulation Between Faculty of Students and Online Purchase

			Purchase online		Total
			Yes	No	
Faculty of student	Management	Freq.	108	46	154
		Percent	70.1	29.9	100.0
	Humanities	Freq.	37	11	48
		Percent	77.1	22.9	100.0
	Education	Freq.	1	0	1
		Percent	100.0	0.0	100.0
	Health and allied sciences	Freq.	42	14	56
		Percent	75.0	25.0	100.0
	Science and technology	Freq.	34	9	43
		Percent	79.1	20.9	100.0
	Others	Freq.	56	30	86
		Percent	65.1	34.9	100.0
	Total	Freq.	278	110	388
		Percent	71.6	28.4	100.0

Chi-square value = 4.551, Sig. = 0.473

Table 19 presents the association between the faculty of the student and their online purchase behavior. The table shows the frequency and percentage of students who purchase online and those who do not in each faculty. The chi-square test shows a chi-square value of 4.551 with a p-value of 0.473, which suggests that there is no significant association between the faculty of the students and their online purchase behaviors at a 5 percent level of significance. This means that there is not enough evidence to suggest that the faculty of the students has an impact on whether they purchase online or not.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into purchase behavior and the socio-demographic factors influencing online purchasing behavior among university level students. This study concluded that online purchasing is gaining popularity among university students. However, a significant proportion of online buyers reported facing problems, including poor product quality, discrepancies between product descriptions and actual products, and slow delivery services. Similarly, this study also established the variation in perceptions of security, privacy, price expectancy, and social influence between males and females but these differences did not translate into significant associations with overall purchasing behavior as gender has no significant association with online purchase behavior. Furthermore, the study also established significant differences in effort expectancy, price expectancy, and facilitating conditions across different income groups, highlighting the importance of financial capability and convenience in shaping online shopping decisions. Finally, this study concludes that education status plays a crucial role in shaping online purchasing behavior among university students. Higher education levels may be linked to greater digital literacy, financial independence, and trust in online transactions, making students pursuing advanced degrees more likely to shop online. Furthermore, other demographic variables show no significant association with the online purchasing behavior in Pokhara, Nepal. These findings can provide a foundation for online businesses to tailor strategies aimed at diverse consumer segments.

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Women-led Enterprises for Poverty Reduction in Pokhara

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Abstract

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This study explores the role of women-led enterprises in poverty reduction, focusing on their socio-economic impact, challenges, and success factors. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research integrates qualitative interviews with women entrepreneurs and quantitative data analysis of various enterprises. The study investigates the types of businesses women run, such as handicrafts, animal keeping, tea shops, vegetable and fruit stalls, sewing and cutting, and beauty parlors, and their impact on social mobility and economic empowerment. Findings reveal that these enterprises significantly contribute to poverty alleviation by fostering economic empowerment, improving household income, and enhancing social inclusion. Despite facing challenges such as limited access to capital, training, and networks, women entrepreneurs manage to achieve consistent profits with relatively small investments. Key success factors identified include resilience, community support, and adaptability, while common challenges include cultural norms, gender-based discrimination, and lack of financial resources. The research further examines the implications of these findings for policy development and support mechanisms aimed at creating a more enabling environment for women entrepreneurs. By highlighting the experiences of women-led businesses, this study contributes to the broader discourse on the intersection of gender, entrepreneurship, and poverty alleviation.

Keywords: *Poverty, Poverty alleviation, Social entrepreneur, Sustainable development goal(SDG), Vulnerable Household, Women empowerment.*

Introduction

In recent years, the role of women entrepreneurs in fostering economic growth and reducing poverty has attracted increasing attention across both developed and developing economies. In developing countries, such as Nepal, women entrepreneurs face significant barriers that hinder their potential to contribute fully to economic development. These barriers include limited access to financial resources, cultural restrictions, and insufficient opportunities for education and business training (Sharma, 2020). Despite these challenges, women-led enterprises have been shown to contribute to household income, job creation, and local economic development, thus holding considerable potential for poverty alleviation and the empowerment of marginalized communities (UN Women, 2022).

Pokhara, one of the Nepal's major cities, presents a compelling case for studying the intersection between women's entrepreneurship and poverty reduction. The city, known for its thriving tourism sector, has seen a significant rise in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) led by women, particularly in the hospitality, handicraft, beauty parlor and manifold retail sectors (Bhattarai, 2023). Although these enterprises have shown promise in improving women's economic standing, there is a lack of research into the direct link between women-led businesses and poverty alleviation. Given Pokhara's dynamic economic landscape and its rapid urbanization, it has offered an ideal setting to examine how women's businesses can contribute to reducing poverty, especially in the context of growing socio-economic disparities.

The role of women entrepreneurs in poverty alleviation, particularly in urban and semi urban contexts such as Pokhara, remains an under-researched area in Nepal. While numerous studies have explored women's entrepreneurship in South Asia, research focused on the impact of women-led businesses on poverty reduction in Nepal is sparse (Bhandari & Neupane, 2021). Much of the existing literature has concentrated on macroeconomic factors affecting women's entrepreneurship, such as access to finance or political will, with less attention given to the micro-level impacts on families, communities, and women themselves (Shrestha, 2018). Moreover, while governmental and non-governmental organizations have introduced programs aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship, evidence regarding the direct outcomes of these initiatives in terms of poverty reduction, particularly in urban areas like Pokhara, is limited.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to fill this gap by providing an in-depth examination of the socio-economic contributions of women-led enterprises in Pokhara. By evaluating the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges, the research has dealt to offer valuable insights into how such enterprises influence poverty reduction at both individual and community levels. This is particularly useful for policymakers, development practitioners, and NGOs who are designing interventions aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs and enhancing their contributions to poverty alleviation in Nepal.

This study has focused on understanding how women-led enterprises in Pokhara can contribute to poverty reduction at both micro and macro levels. Specifically, the research has explored the economic and social benefits that these businesses bring to women-led households and local communities. The study has delved into the challenges these women face, such as limited access to capital, networks, and business training, and explore how they navigate these barriers to ensure the sustainability of their enterprises. In addition to economic outcomes, the research has investigated the social impact of women's entrepreneurship, including changes in household income, women's decision-making power, and their involvement in community development.

The theoretical framework for this study is drawn upon the Gender and Development (GAD) theory, which emphasizes the need to address gender inequalities in development policies. GAD asserts that women's participation in economic activities not only enhances their own status but also lead to broader social and economic benefits for families and communities (Kabeer, 2020). Additionally, the study employs Social Capital Theory, which explores how networks, trust, and social relationships among women entrepreneurs can help overcome barriers to business success and contribute to poverty reduction (Putnam, 2021). These theoretical lenses guide the analysis of the intersections between gender, entrepreneurship, and poverty in the context of Pokhara.

Literature on women's entrepreneurship in Nepal suggests that while women are increasingly entering the business sphere, they face numerous challenges, such as restrictive cultural norms, limited access to finance, and insufficient business knowledge (Paudel & Acharya, 2022). Despite these obstacles, studies have shown that when women have access to adequate resources and support, they can make significant contributions to their families and communities (Subedi, 2021). However, there is a lack of research explicitly linking women's entrepreneurship to tangible poverty reduction outcomes, particularly in semi urban areas of Pokhara, where the dynamics of economic and social development differ from those in rural settings (Rai, 2022). This research has attempted to bridge this gap by providing empirical data on how women-led enterprises in Pokhara can contribute to poverty alleviation, thus enriching the broader discourse on women's entrepreneurship and development.

The findings of this research are not only to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on women's entrepreneurship but also provide actionable insights for policymakers, development agencies, and local governments. In particular, the study underscores the importance of targeted interventions that address the specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Pokhara, such as improving access to financial services, business training, and professional networks. Strengthening the capacity of women entrepreneurs could amplify their impact on poverty reduction, fostering more sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the region.

The primary objective of the Study is to explore the role of Women-Led enterprises in poverty reduction and economic empowerment, focusing on the challenges, opportunities, and support mechanisms for unskilled migrant women and local women entrepreneurs.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

This research aimed to analyze the impact of women-led enterprises on poverty reduction, specifically focusing on how these enterprises contribute to improving the economic status of women in semi-urban settings. The study adopted an empirical, quantitative approach to explore various aspects of women's involvement in enterprises, the challenges they face, and the outcomes of their efforts. A survey design was used to gather data, enabling the researcher to obtain systematic, quantifiable information on the types, characteristics, and impacts of these enterprises.

The study was conducted in Ward No. 27 of Pokhara Metropolitan City, an area with both urban and rural characteristics influencing local enterprises. A purposive sampling method was employed to select all 35 legally registered women entrepreneurs from 22 Tole development units within the ward. This sample was considered sufficient to capture relevant data on the types of women-led enterprises and their socio-economic impact. Primary data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire, which included both closed and open-ended questions to gather quantitative and qualitative data on the nature of businesses, factors influencing engagement, the impact on poverty reduction, and the challenges faced by entrepreneurs.

Key variables identified for analysis included the types of enterprises (economic gain vs. social impact), entrepreneurial characteristics (ethnicity, education, experience), economic impact (income generation, employment, poverty alleviation), and challenges/opportunities (finance, training, local support). The data collected through the questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistics, with measurements such as frequencies, percentages, and averages summarizing the data. Cross-tabulations were used to analyze relationships between different variables, such as ethnicity and education level, and the nature of businesses.

Despite using MS Excel for data analysis, the study acknowledged limitations, including potential biases from self-administered questionnaires and the inability to produce complex statistical results. Manual cross-checking was performed to ensure accuracy. The research primarily focused on the economic and social aspects of women-led enterprises and did not delve into broader issues such as political factors or long-term poverty reduction impacts. The findings suggest that women-led enterprises can be a significant driver of poverty alleviation in semi-urban areas like Pokhara.

Results and Discussion

This results and discussion section includes the data based on ethnicity, education level, types of social enterprises, level of happiness, investment and profit, social mobility and employment which are presented in number, percentage with the help of tables and charts.

Different variables of ethnicity, education, social enterprises, happiness, investment and profit, social mobility and employment are analyzed in this section as follows.

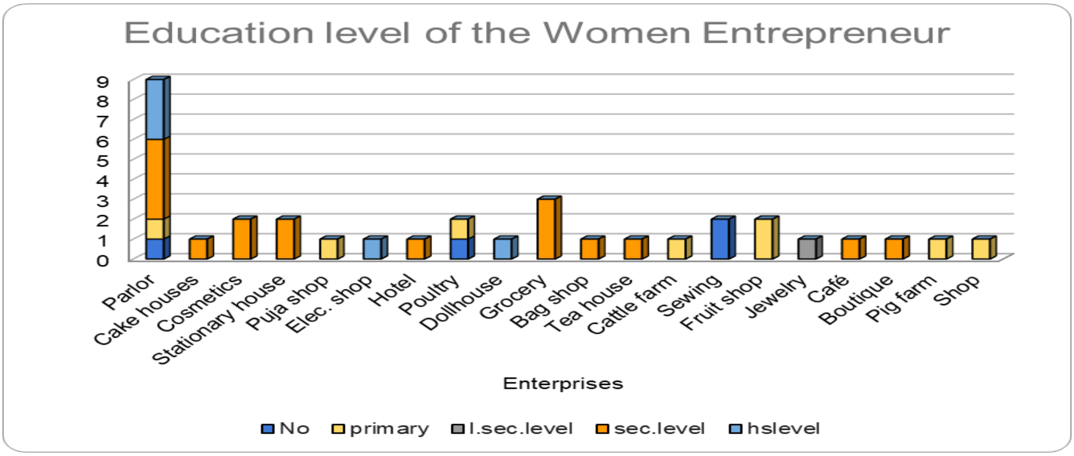
Education Level of the Respondents:

Education level is denoted with five categories: no education, primary level, lower secondary level, secondary level and higher education.

Figure 1 shows that most business were owned by 17 women with **secondary level** education followed by eight women with **primary level** education, five women with higher secondary level , even four illiterate women were in the enterprises and only a owner was with lower secondary level . Notably, businesses like **parlor** and **grocery** involved women across various education levels, while sectors like beckary and **cosmetic shop** showed more limited educational representation. Overall, the data indicated that **Secondary** and **Primary Level** education were the most common among enterprises owners, suggesting that higher formal education was not always a prerequisite for entrepreneurship in these sectors.

Figure 1

Education level of the women entrepreneurs by type of enterprises



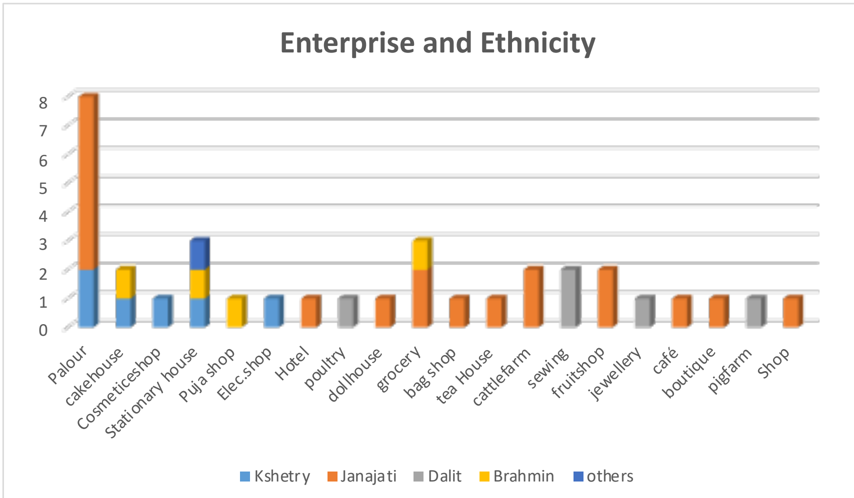
Source: Author's Creation (2024)

Enterprise and Ethnicity: The choice of the respondents for the enterprises on the ground of their ethnicity was cross checked**.**

Figure 2. reveals a diverse distribution of business types across various social groups, with notable trends in participation. The Parlor stood out, having the highest involvement, particularly from the Janajaty group (6 individuals). Businesses like Grocery, Cattle Farm, and Fruit Shop showed a broader engagement from multiple groups, including Kshetry, Janajaty, and Dalit. Certain sectors, such as Puja Shop and Hotel, showed limited participation from specific groups, while businesses like Sewing, Poultry, and Pig Farm were mainly associated with Dalit and Janajaty individuals. Overall, the findings highlighted both the diversity and concentration of business ownership across different social groups, with certain businesses having more widespread representation than others.

Figure 2

Enterprise and ethnicity



Source: Author's Creation (2024)

Employment level: After the different women-led enterprises forms established in this ward the job opportunity was observed categorically,

Table 1 shows that the types of enterprises and their respective staff numbers per year showed varied distribution across different business forms. The largest proportion of staff was in Parlor (11.4%) with 228 staff, followed by Bakery house (6%) and Cattle farm (6%). Smaller enterprises like Puja house, Bag shop, and Doll house have 12 staff each, making up 2.3% of the total for each category. Additionally, Poultry and Pig farm had 60 staff each, contributing 4.5% of the total staff count. Other categories like Cosmetic shop,Stationary,Restaurant, and Grocery generally had fewer staff (12–36), comprising the remainder. There were 20 different types of enterprises in total.

Table 1

Employment opportunity in different forms

Enterprises	Employment opportunity Cummulative Frequency	Percent
Parlor(single/joint)	228	24.1
Cake house	120	12.7
Cattle farm (joint)	120	12.7

Pig farm(joint)	60	6.3
Poultry (single/joint)	60	6.3
Cosmetic shop(single/joint)	36	3.8
Restrurent	36	3.8
Jewelary	36	3.8
Grocery(single/joint)	36	3.8
Fruit shop	36	3.8
Sewing	36	3.8
Stationary	24	2.5
Elec.shop	24	2.5
Boutique	24	2.5
Puja house	12	1.3
Bag shop	12	1.3
Tea house	12	1.3
Coffee shop	12	1.3
Doll house	12	1.3
Small shop	12	1.3
Total	948	100.0

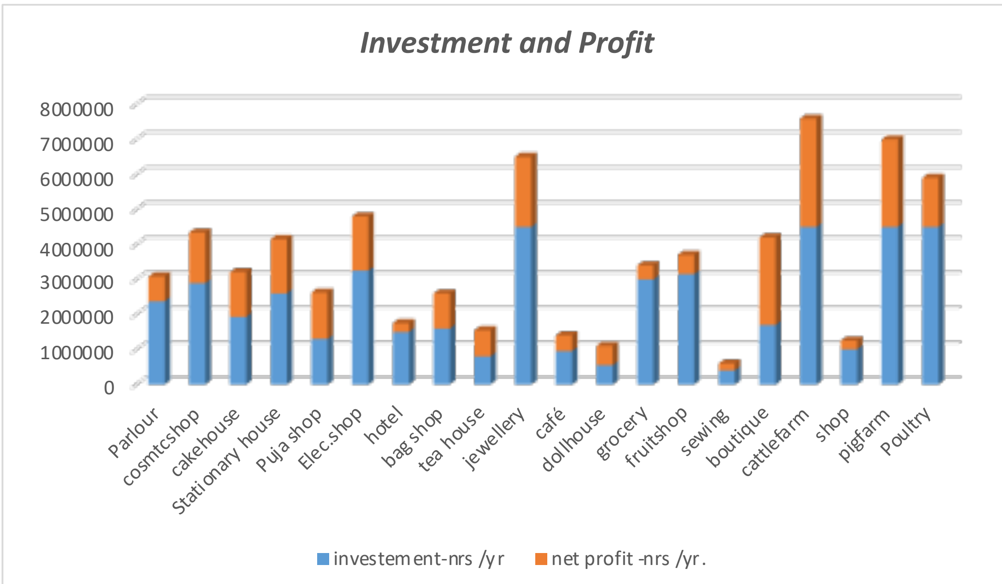
Source: Author's Creation (2024)

Investment and profit: Different Social Enterprises forms need differently the amount of investment annually to run them smoothly. What profit was bounced back by them in each year was comparatively cross checked.

Figure 3 reveals that businesses like Grocery (3,000,000 NRS investment, 400,000 NRS profit), Fruit Shop (3,150,000 NRS investment, 550,000 NRS profit), and Hotel (1,500,000 NRS investment, 250,000 NRS profit) required significant investments but yield relatively low profits, suggesting they might be riskier or in need of operational adjustments to improve profitability. On the other hand, businesses such as the Puja Shop (1,300,000 NRS investment, 1,323,000 NRS profit), Dollhouse (550,000 NRS investment, 550,000 NRS profit), and Boutique (1,700,000 NRS investment, 2,500,000 NRS profit) were more efficient, with lower investment-to-profit ratios of 0.98, 1.00, and 0.68 respectively, indicating they could generate higher profits with less capital. Strong performers like Cattle Farm (4,500,000 NRS investment, 3,092,000 NRS profit), Cosmetic shop (2,890,000 NRS investment, 1,447,800 NRS profit), and Jewelary (4,500,000 NRS investment, 2,000,000 NRS profit) showed high net profits but varied in investment levels, highlighting the potential for substantial returns despite higher capital requirements. Overall, the figure emphasized that profitability and investment efficiency did not always align, and strategic choices would depend on the business's risk appetite and long-term goals.

Figure 3

Investment and profit by types of enterprises



Source: Author's Creation (2024)

Table No. 2

Correlation between investment and profit

		Investment	profit
Investement-nrs/Yr.	Pearson Correlation	1	0.485**
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	35	0.003
			35
profit -Nrs /yr.	Pearson Correlation	.485**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	
	N	35	35

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed).

Table 2 shows that there was a positive correlation in between investment and profit in all enterprises forms. It proved that "Higher the increment in the investment in the forms the higher the amount of profit."

Problems and Challenges:

The types of problems which were unavoidable and were facing by the entrepreneurs were entitled categorically only with four titles as in Market, Raw material, Transportation and Legal/Policy. Most of their practical problems were managed within these categories and the unrelated problems were just heard but could not incorporated as the potential data of this study.

Table No. 3 reveals that marketing and legal policies/other issues were the most prominent, each comprising 32.35% of the challenges (33 instances). Raw materials followed at 25.49% (26 instances), while transportation-related challenges were the least frequent at 9.80% (10 instances). Marketing challenges appeared across nearly all types of businesses, with “Parlor” and “Grocery” being the highest contributors. Legal and policy challenges were also widespread, affecting businesses such as “Cattle farm,” “Sewing,” and “Pig farm.” The overall distribution showed that marketing and legal issues are the primary concerns for most businesses, while raw materials and transportation concerns were more limited in scope.

Table 3

Problems and challenges

Enterprises	Marketing	Raw Materials	Transportation	Legal Policy/Other
Parlor	8	9		9
Cake house	2	2		2
Cosmetic shop	1	1		1
Stationary house	2	2	2	2
Puja shop	1	1		
Elec. shop	1		1	1
Hotel	1	1		1
Poultry	1		1	1
Dollhouse	1			1
Grocery	3	3		3
Bag shop	1		1	1
Tea House	1	1		1
Cattle farm	2		2	2
Sewing	1	1		2
Fruit shop	2	2	1	2
Jewelary	1	1		1
Café	1	1		
Boutique	1	1		1

Pig farm	1		1	1
Shop	1		1	1
Total	33	26	10	33
Percentage	32.35%	25.49%	9.80%	32.35%

Source: Author's Creation (2024)

Discussion

The findings of this study has revealed the significant challenges that women face in a patriarchal society, where early marriage and limited educational opportunities restrict their social and economic mobility. These issues, deeply rooted in gender inequality, have long been recognized as barriers to women's empowerment in Nepal (Bhandari & Neupane, 2021). The study has highlighted that despite these social suppressions, women in Ward 27 had managed to break through traditional gender roles by engaging in entrepreneurial activities, thereby changing their social and economic standing within the community.

The rise of Women-Led enterprises in Ward 27 could be attributed to initiatives like the Tole Development Unit, which provided essential financial resources and support. These initiatives allowed women to establish businesses across various sectors, such as beauty parlors and organic grocery shops. Such enterprises were not only economically significant but also socially transformative. As noted by Paudel and Acharya (2022), access to credit and entrepreneurship training has proven crucial in helping women overcome economic barriers, providing them with the means to become self-sufficient and economically independent. This, in turn, found empowering women by enhancing their decision-making power and improving their status in the community.

The economic independence gained through entrepreneurship had broader implications for the community as a whole. By participating in business ventures, women contributed to poverty reduction and community development. This aligned with the findings of Rai (2022), who discussed how women's entrepreneurial activities could stimulate local economic growth. In Ward 27, the establishment of women-led businesses created employment opportunities, boosted local trade, and contributed to an overall improvement in the local economy. Moreover, these businesses provided an avenue for women to engage in social and economic decision-making, which was historically limited due to patriarchal norms. According to Shrestha (2018), women entrepreneurs played a pivotal role in sustainable development by breaking the cycle of poverty and enhancing the resilience of their communities.

However, despite these successes, women entrepreneurs in Ward 27 continued to face substantial challenges. Policy barriers and taxation issues remained significant obstacles to their growth. As highlighted by Sharma (2020), the regulatory environment in Nepal often failed to provide sufficient support to women entrepreneurs, particularly in terms of access to capital, tax benefits, and business development services. These barriers hindered the ability of women to expand their businesses and reduced their potential for sustained economic growth. If not addressed, these systemic challenges could undermine the progress made by women entrepreneurs in the region.

Furthermore, while local initiatives like the Tole Development Unit had been instrumental in providing financial support, broader policy changes were needed to create an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship. Subedi (2021) argued that a comprehensive approach, including access to affordable credit, reduced taxes, and more inclusive business policies, felt essential for ensuring that women-led enterprises could thrive. It was also necessary to address cultural attitudes toward women in business, which could still be restrictive in many parts of Nepal. By creating more supportive frameworks for women entrepreneurs, it could possible to sustain the positive impact these businesses had on both individual women and their communities.

In conclusion, the success of women-led enterprises in Ward 27 represented a positive shift toward gender equality and empowerment. These women were not only challenging traditional norms but also driving local economic development. However, to ensure the sustainability and growth of these businesses, further efforts were needed to address policy hurdles, taxation issues, and cultural barriers. If these challenges could be overcomed, women's entrepreneurship would be the potential sectors to play a crucial role in broader socioeconomic transformation in Nepal.

Conclusion

The study conducted in Ward 27 of Pokhara sheds light on the universal social suppression faced by women within patriarchal structures, particularly through early marriage and limited educational opportunities. Despite these challenges, the emergence of Women-Led enterprises has proven transformative. Empowered by initiatives like the Tole Development Unit, women are accessing funding and establishing successful ventures, ranging from beauty parlors to organic grocery shops. This economic independence not only elevates their status in society but also contributes significantly to poverty reduction and community development. However, persistent issues such as policy hurdles and taxation demand attention for sustained growth. Nonetheless, the success stories emerging from Ward 27 exemplify the potential of women's entrepreneurship to challenge traditional norms and drive positive change

This research on "Women-Led enterprises for Poverty reduction in Pokhara" reveals that these enterprises play a crucial role in alleviating poverty by creating employment opportunities and generating income. Women-Led businesses not only provide jobs for the entrepreneurs themselves but also for others in the community, fostering economic growth and reducing job scarcity. Increased household income from these enterprises improves living standards, access to education, and healthcare, creating a positive cycle of reinvestment that benefits families and communities. Additionally, women entrepreneurs contribute to economic diversification, making the local economy more resilient. Socially, these enterprises empower women, enhance their decision-making roles, and challenge traditional gender norms, promoting greater equality. The findings highlight the need for support systems like microfinance, training programs, and networking opportunities to ensure the success of women-led businesses. Overall, investing in women's entrepreneurship is a powerful strategy to reduce poverty, drive sustainable development, and foster social equity in Pokhara.

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A Systematic Literature Review of Local Food, Local Product, and Community Engagement in Rural Tourism

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Abstract

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This systematic literature review aims to assess the current state of knowledge in rural homestays in terms of the use of local product, especially local food and community engagement in tourism academic literature. With reference to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart, the researcher reviewed 25 studies published in the selected journals from 2008 to 2023. The review explores how sustainable rural homestays have been previously researched in terms of local food, local product, and community engagement. The review sheds light on sustainability and rural homestay tourism from the perspective of use of typical products along with contents addressed by authors suggesting future research directions. All the reviewed papers have highlighted the significance of local food in the homestays considering its association with the tourist satisfaction, destination memory, and sustainable tourism practices. The entrepreneurial aspects of rural tourism, the utilization of modern tools and technology to enhance tourism practices and attract tourists, and the incorporation of locally available crops into the menus of local homestay projects are key areas that have been overlooked in the studies reviewed.

Keywords: *Community involvement, homestays, local food, rural tourism.*

Introduction

Rural Tourism, especially homestay tourism has gained popularity in recent years. Many urban dwellers are looking for opportunities to escape the fast-paced and high-pressure city life, seeking a gateway in rural areas. Homestays, a key component of rural tourism, offer visitors the chance to experience a non-commercial, homelike environment while enjoying local cuisine and engaging with the local community. However, for rural homestays to be successful and sustainable, it is important to consider factors such as food sustainability and community engagement. Food sustainability plays a crucial role in the success of rural homestays. Not only does it ensure the availability of fresh and nutritious food for the guests, but it also promotes local agricultural production and supports the local economy. "Homestays are tools for strengthening social and economic capacities" (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013)homestays are an attractive alternative tourism product. This paper discusses a case study of Barpak, located in the Gorkha District of Western Nepal. The study suggests homestays are congruent with Nepal's destination image. The essence of Nepalese tourism lies in naturally beautiful rural hills and mountains and its indigenous communities with their mystical lifestyle and culture. These natural and cultural attributes can be showcased best through homestays. This paper proposes homestays as a pro-women tourism opportunity that promotes sustainable community development by fostering gender equality. Female ownership of homestay businesses secures women's avenues for income generation and involves them in mainstream development. The study's indicators of development are based on the well-being achieved by the Barpaki community, with a focus on three essential aspects of sustainable development, namely economic, environmental and social. The author's (BPA. Rural homestays need to engage with the local community to create an authentic and immersive experience for visitors.

In the context of the rural population leaving their place of origin for more opportunities for education and employment in cities, the rural ecosystems become unmanageable and their contribution to the national and local economy falls. Bawa and Gadgil (1997) opt for the need to develop systems that provide economic incentives for the preservation of biodiversity in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries through eco-tourism. For that purpose, these "ecosystem people" can be the most effective stewards of ecosystem diversity and because of "being relatively poor, these people would be willing to take on the task of maintaining and restoring local biodiversity for low levels of compensation."

In recent years, new tourist destinations have been explored in the rural areas in the developing countries. In Nepal, for example, rural tourism has been promoted through various programs. One such program, the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP) was initiated and completed from 2002 to 2007 with pilot projects in 48 rural villages of six districts. In the program jointly undertaken by the Government of Nepal, the UNDP, DFID, and Netherlands Development Organization (SNV-Nepal) focused on pro-environment- and pro-community-based initiatives (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013)homestays are an attractive alternative tourism product. This paper discusses a case study of Barpak, located in the Gorkha District of Western Nepal. The study suggests homestays are congruent with Nepal's destination image. The essence of Nepalese tourism lies in naturally beautiful rural hills and mountains and its indigenous communities with their mystical lifestyle and culture. These natural and cultural attributes can be showcased best through homestays. This paper proposes homestays as a pro-women tourism opportunity that promotes sustainable community development by fostering gender equality. Female ownership of homestay businesses secures women's avenues for income generation and involves them in mainstream development. The study's indicators of development are based on the well-being achieved by the Barpaki community, with a focus on three essential aspects of sustainable development, namely economic, environmental and social. The author's (BPA. There have been many other programs and projects running in the country. Similar situations can be found in many other developing countries like Ghana (Adu-Ampong, 2018), Bhutan (Dorji, 2017), Pakistan (Ullah et al., 2021; Mangan & Lohano, 2015), etc.

Following the practices of rural tourism, there have been many researches in the field. Several systematic reviews on homestay and sustainability (Janjua et al., 2021), the role of women in tourism (Tristanti et al., 2022), the development of rural tourism (Mulyaningsih, 2023), and local food (Jørstad et al., 2020) have been conducted. However, a combined systematic literature review on local food and the sustainability of local tourism seems lacking. To understand the current state of homestays, food sustainability, and community engagement in rural tourism, a systematic literature review was conducted. This systematic literature will contribute to the body of knowledge on rural tourism and the role of local food in substantially sustaining local tourism by addressing the knowledge gap, searching for significant insights, and directing future research in the rural tourism sector.

This review also addresses the increasing importance of homestays as a sustainable rural tourism product. Therefore, the objectives of this article are: (a) to analyze, synthesize, and summarize the existing literature on the impact and association of local food and products in rural tourism in the first decade of the twenty-first century; (b) to identify the status of research for sustainable rural tourism based on local food and products; (c) to do a content analysis of selected studies; and (d) to recommend direction for future research. The purpose of the review is to project-specific research in rural tourism, homestays, food sustainability, and community engagement from multi- and interdisciplinary hospitality and tourism literature. Many researchers highlighted the importance of SLR in tourism and hospitality, but SLR in food sustainability and rural community engagement through homestays are the topics somehow not addressed by researchers. Therefore, this review will address food sustainability and rural community engagement through homestays.

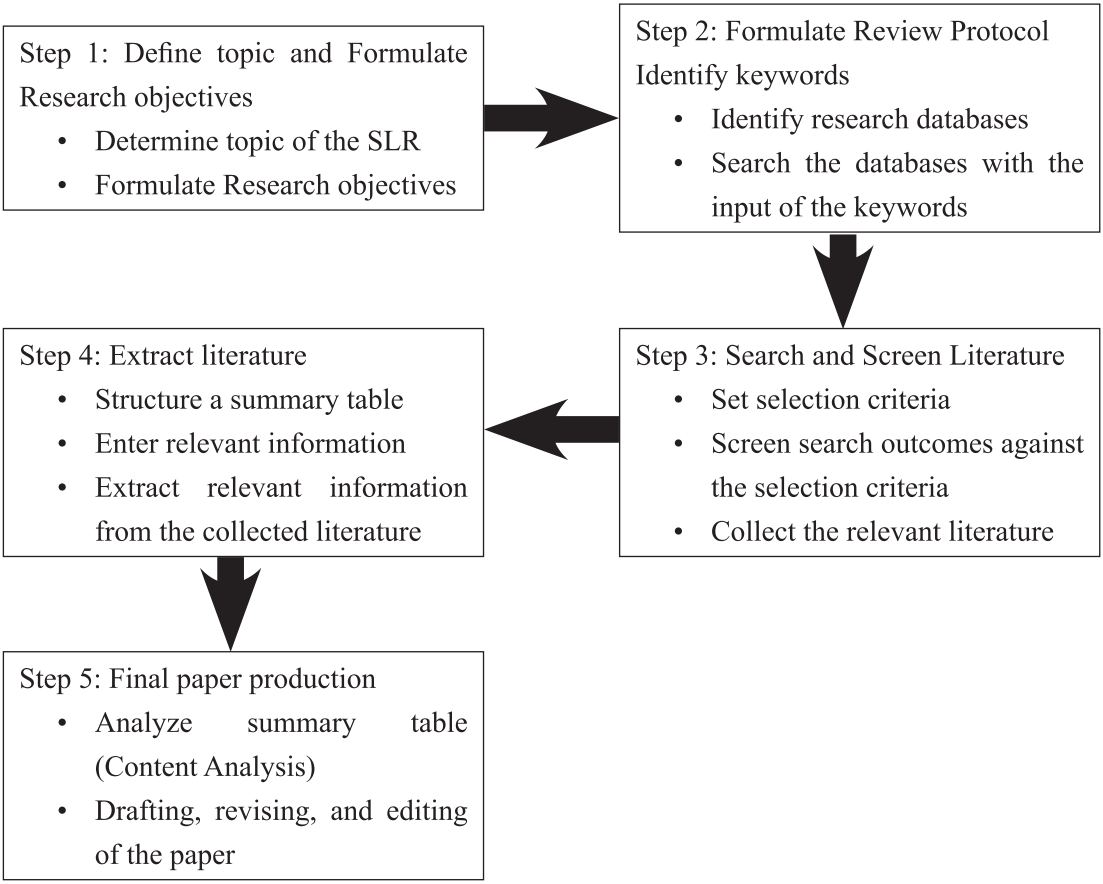
Method of Data collection and Analysis

Systematic Literature Reviews are aimed to produce practical, reliable, and objective discussions and findings in the given area of research providing a significant opportunity for scholars and practitioners to apply existing knowledge for future research and policymaking (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019).

In the current systematic literature review, five steps are undertaken, adapted from Pickering and Byrne (2014). In step 1, the topic was defined and research objectives were formulated; in step 2, the review protocol was formulated by identifying keywords and research databases, the paper used the databases JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Dimensions databases. Then, in step 3, the articles searched were screened against selection criteria. In step 4, all relevant information was extracted and condensed into a summary table. Finally, in step 5, drafting, revising, and editing of the final paper was carried out analyzing the summary table produced so far. All steps are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Systematic Literature Process



Source. Adapted from Pickering & Byrne (2014)

Define topic and Formulate Research objectives

This systematic literature review explores the use of local food and products for the sustainability of rural tourism and how the production and inclusion of local food in tourism practices have been researched earlier. This review aims to research the previous literature in terms of the research topic, context, method, and theoretical framework. The systematic literature review was initiated by setting the review aims as detailed in the previous section. This literature review meets the following research objectives:

- to analyze, synthesize, and summarize the existing literature on the impact and association of local food and products in rural tourism in the first decade of the twenty-first century;
- to identify the status of research for sustainable rural tourism based on local food and products;

- to do a content analysis of selected studies; and
- to recommend direction for future research.

Formulate Review Protocol

Keeping the review objectives and research questions in mind, a literature review protocol was developed. The protocol determined the databases to search the articles, search terms were decided, and a literature selection criterion was set. The reviewer has used three databases namely JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Dimensions Database to search the keywords, "Sustainability" OR "Food sustainability" AND "Rural tourism", "Sustainability of rural tourism" AND "Local food" OR "Local foods and goods" AND "Community engagement", and "Sustainable rural tourism through local food and products".

The databases the reviewers have used are known to have a wide range of literature on any given topic. The search items were looked for in the literature title, keywords, abstract, and the text itself. The time frames for the journals were kept between 2008 to 2023. (Table 1)

Table 1

Number of publications year-wise

Year of Publication	Frequency
2008	1
2011	1
2012	1
2013	1
2015	4
2016	6
2017	3
2019	2
2021	1
2022	2
2023	3

Search, Screen Literature, and Extraction of Articles

The literature screening was done by using the PRISMA methodology. The PRISMA checklist (Page et al., 2021) was used to set steps to carry out the review. PRISMA was used because it is a universally used tool for systematic reviews and is widely accepted to generate trustworthy data. The PRISMA model has been used in many other systematic reviews.

In the opinion of Pratisto et al. (2022), Hosany et al. (2022), Stone & Duffy (2015), and Snyder (2019); PRISMA is one of the standard guidelines that explicitly addresses how literature reviews should be reported and instructed. Moher et al. (2009) prefer PRISMA to other several approaches of systematic reviews as topics and concepts in PRISMA are all relevant to any systematic review; however, some adaptations are always necessary for circumstances.

The search for the keywords produced 3583 literature headings, 3230 from JSTOR, 200 from Google Scholar, and 153 from Dimensions Database. The works of literature were further screened based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) flowchart adapted for this review which is presented in Figure 2. (Page et al., 2021) As the databases used here are secondary databases, they have produced results from commonly used databases like SAGE, WILEY, ELSEVIER, EMERALD, MDPI, and Tylor and Francis. In the first stage of the screening process, 905 headings were excluded because of being duplicates in different databases (12), for not being journal articles (856), and for being either not published in English or published in substandard journals (37). The remaining 2678 journal articles matched the basic selection criteria. These articles were further screened with certain keywords like sustainability, rural tourism, local food, local goods, participatory involvement, and Nepal. A total of 2605 articles were screened out in this second stage, leaving 73 articles; 23 from JSTOR, 11 from Google Scholar, and 39 from Dimensions Database (Table 2 and 3). From that selection, three records were not retrieved from any source available to the reviewer, which were later excluded.

Table 2

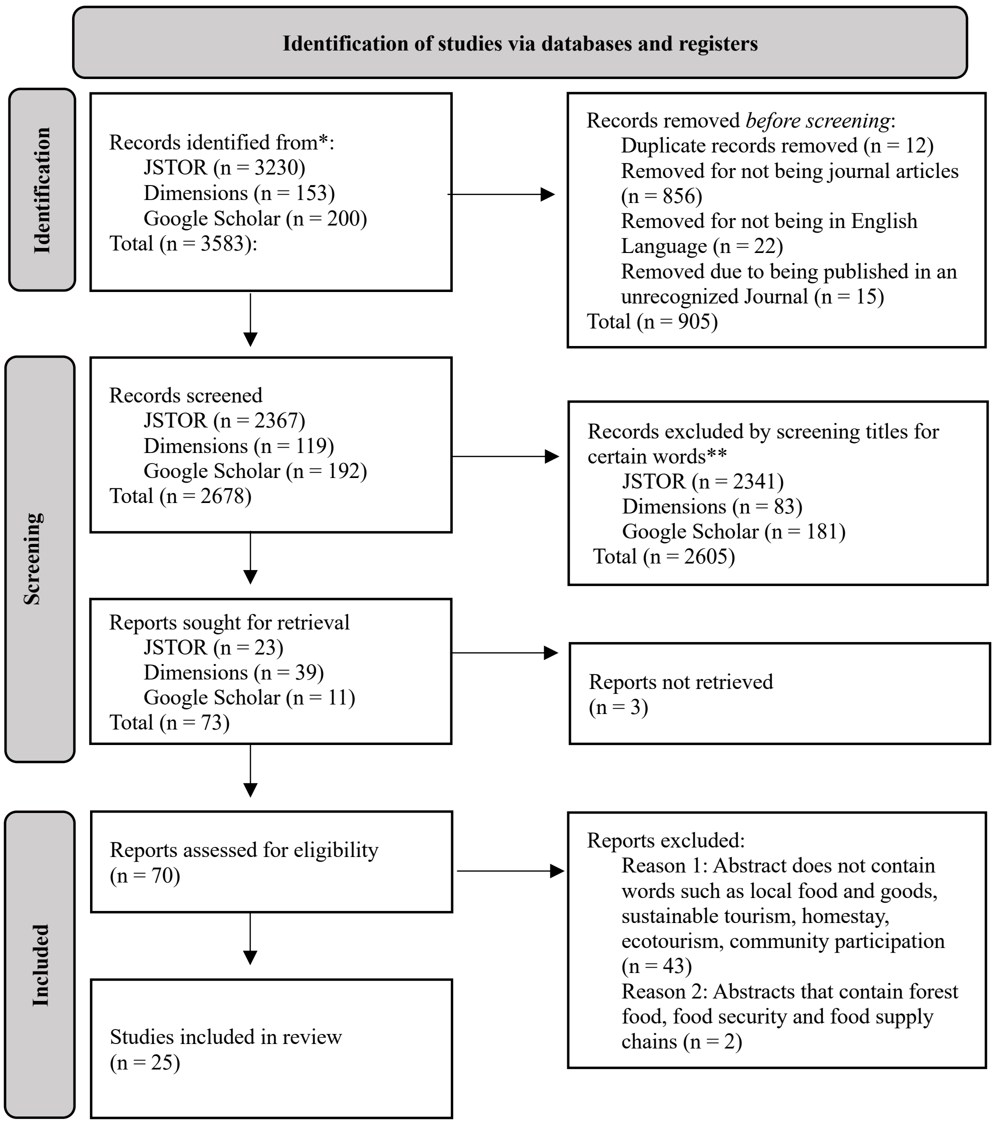
Database-wise article extraction

Database	Frequency
Google Scholar	9
JSTOR	2
Dimensions	14

For the final selection eligibility, the reviewer scrutinized the abstracts of all selected 70 articles after managing them in the Zotero reference manager. 43 articles were screened out for not containing the words local food and/or goods, sustainable tourism, homestay, ecotourism, community participation, and the like. Two articles were screened out because of containing forest food, food security, and food supply chains as these were not supposed by the reviewer as necessary elements for the study. This stage was closely examined by the reviewer with a keen focus on all the abstracts. After this stage 25 journal articles were selected for the content analysis. The screening process is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

A PRISMA flowchart for the literature screening process



** when searching for "sustainability of rural tourism through local foods and goods".*

*** sustainability, rural tourism, local food, local goods, participatory involvement, Nepal.*

Source. Adapted from Page et al. (2021)

Results and Discussions

The results section deals with the general overview of the literature related to rural tourism and the content analysis of the selected texts. Generally, this section discusses the presence of the topic in the body of knowledge in the years of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The reviewer then focuses on the content analysis where the articles are examined in terms of subject themes, geographical locations, research methods, and theories used in conducting the research, if any.

General Overview

Although the history of homestays dates back to the Iron Age, modern homestays came into being after the emerging neo-populist approaches of the 1970s, which brought forward community-owned/or managed tourism businesses as the idea of sustainable tourism (Yasami et al., 2017). The early forms of homestay were mainly concerned with religious beliefs; however, the modern form is more commercialized. The studies of rural tourism date back to the 1980s, when American scholar Hector Ceballos–Lascurain coined the term 'eco-tourism' in 1983 (Tang, 2017). In this review, the articles are selected from between 2008 and 2023, covering one and a half decades earlier than the review. Table 1 presents the yearly distribution of the articles. The greatest number of articles for the single year in this selection is from the year 2016 with six articles. Four articles are selected from the year 2015; three from 2023; two from 2019 and 2022; and one article each from other five years, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2013, and 2021. There are no articles selected from the years 2009, 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2020. The cause of not selecting the articles is not because there were no articles written, but because they might have been excluded from the PRISMA selection criteria due to not meeting certain keywords and key concepts. Table 2 demonstrates the databases from which the articles were selected. The largest portion of articles, 56%, were fetched from the Dimensions database, 36% and 8% were fetched from Google Scholar and JSTOR respectively. Table 3 deals with the publication authorities that published the articles. Articles from the six most reputable e-databases were collected. ELSVIER was the first major e-database that contributed to the collection with eight articles published. Second and third the greatest number of articles were published in Tylor and Francis with six articles, and MDPI with five articles respectively. EMERALD and WILEY published two articles each in the selection. SAGE contributed to one article. Table 4 depicts the geographical area of the research. Almost half of the articles were from Europe, almost a quarter from Asia, and others.

Table 3

Publication-wise article details

Publication	Frequency
Elsevier	8
Emerald	2
MDPI	5
Sage	1
Tylor & Francis	6
Wiley	2
Others	1

Table 4

Main geographical location of the research (in percent)

Geographical Locations	Frequency	Percent
Asia	6	24
Europe	12	48
North America	4	16
South America	1	4
Africa	1	4
Not Specified	1	4

Content Analysis

Tables 5 to 8 in the annexes present the content analysis of the selected papers in a summary format. The papers have been analyzed according to the following characteristics: (a) Food significance in rural tourism and subject themes of the research; (b) author(s), publication year, and geographical area of study; (c) target population; (d) research design and theory(s) applied in the research. The review outcomes are founded on these characteristics. The information mined from the selected papers with the given characteristics is analyzed to understand the significance of local food and goods and community involvement in the sustainability of rural tourism.

Food significance in rural tourism: The papers have gone through a substantial inclusion and exclusion protocol. So, all the papers deal with the local food consumption. However, seven of the papers used the concept of specific food items like traditional soup, beer/wine, locally grown and extracted olive oil, and other local foods with their role in uplifting rural tourism. Six of the papers deal with the cultural association of local food. Eleven papers focus on the authenticity of food having a strong connection to registering the 'taste of place' in the tourists. Out of these papers, four papers greatly focus on tourists' creating a strong emotional connection to the tourist destination through local food. Five articles deal with local food as a marketing and/or branding component. Though almost all papers deal with the link of local food with tourist satisfaction, three of them specifically state that in their objectives, three direct their research towards the potentiality of repeat and recommend the tourist destination for the future. Many papers find the existing relationship between food and tourism; however, five papers precisely discuss the necessity of focusing on gastronomy for sustainable rural tourism.

Four papers focus more on local tourism products other than food. The intermingling of tourists in host culture through different practices like fishing and farming are discussed as great practices to establish a strong link between the tourists and the host culture. Community participation is given more stress in four of the papers suggesting that the involvement of all members of the community supports not only the smooth operation of the homestays but also the employment creation for the youths in the villages to retain the rural population in the villages. Not specifically so, but some papers deal with food behavior, health and nutrition factors of local food, food supply chains, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the studies in the selection deal with two or more concepts of rural tourism and local food.

Author(s), publication year, and geographical location: A total of 75 authors are involved in writing these 25 articles; no author has been repeated in the publications. The articles were published in 16 different journals. The articles are dated from 2008 to 2023. Twelve articles present the studies done in Europe, six in Asia, four in North America, and one each in South America and Africa. No articles have been selected from Australia; however, one article is studied without considering location.

Research design, target population, and theories involved in studies: Among the selected papers, eight papers exclusively limit their study to qualitative study collecting the data from in-depth and semi-structured interviews, involving in-person and telephone interviews, focused group discussions, and ethnographic data collection; ten papers conducted the research in quantitative research methods, most of which contain the quantified scale data used for the study. A mixed-method research design is used in five papers which contain the Delphi method, mixed-type data collection from different population groups, integration of secondary research with quantitative research methods, and content analysis methods. Finally, two of the studies have used library research completely to conclude the findings.

Mostly, the target population for the collection of data in the studies was the tourists, homestay owners, and other stakeholders of rural tourism. Studies with tourists only as the target of data collection are twelve. Seven studies selected the stakeholders who associated themselves with food production and distribution as the target population for the studies. experts in tourism, and gastronomy, government officials, and ethnic leaders are the target population in three of the research. Other than these, the studies selected mixed type population, ethnographic components, and secondary data for the research.

Most of the studies did not mention the theories mentioned in the research. However, the reviewer found some implications of theories in them. Only seven articles explicitly based their studies on popular theories and models related to tourism like consumer satisfaction, quality-satisfaction-loyalty model, constructivism, and grounded theories. In about eight papers, the reviewer found the implications of theories like planned behavior, economic value creation, functional structuralism, reasoned action, etc. Tables 5 to 8 in the Annexation have detailed the findings of the papers.

Discussion

The significance of local food has been highlighted in all the papers in the collection. Here local food consumption has been associated with destination identity, cultural understanding, destination memory for revisit and recommendation, tourist satisfaction, and sustainable tourism practices. The role of food in the promotion of tourism was studied in almost all the papers; however, five of them specifically focused on gastronomy, the food tourism. The authors in the papers are found to be concerned that food behavior can change the environment of tourism in a better way. In addition to '4s' (sun, sea, sand, and sex) the international tourist attraction has also been altracting to ‘4N’ (nature, nostalgia, Nirvana, and native), more recently people have relocated their pleasure in spiritual green locations from traditional sensual locations (Tang, 2017). Not only on local food but local tourism is also seen to depend on other local tourism products like souvenirs and cultural practices like fishing and farming as this can register strong memory in the tourist and that can help for more visits by the same tourists and/ or recommendations to the new visitors, ensuring the sustainability of tourism. Food sustainability and community involvement ensures the transparency and good management of the destination, hence, making the memories even more rigid.

The reviewer reviewed the literature systematically to determine the significance of local food practices by examining the subject themes of the papers, study subjects, and theoretical contexts. It is found that the greatest number of studies are conducted in Europe. Nonetheless, the researchers of developing countries are also entering the body of knowledge with their local practices like fishery, forestry, and agriculture.

While it is challenging to identify the very first homestay in the world, the modern incarnation of this mythical practice has evolved with more commercial elements like income expenditure rates, branding, marketing, loyalty, bookings, products, etc. The papers of this review collection have not missed this point in the studies. At least half of the studies specifically focus on the economic benefit of rural tourism.

With the growing tourist attraction to nature, the new geographical locations from the developing countries are found to have more potential for future tourism practices. It is then quite important that the stakeholders of tourism in these locations become more aware of the good practices of tourism. The good practices found in this review do not seem to be very popular in these locations taking some of the places as an example. The reviewer has many personal experiences that the domestic tourists and the homestay owners are not very focused on promoting the local food even though they suppose that the food is the most important element to attract the tourists second and more times. These people do not seem to be concerned about enhancing their destination with the help of local food and practices. Rather, the owners are found to be using their homestays merely as another place for hangouts for the city dwellers. The reviewer finds that the utilization of destinations only for retreat centers cannot be sustainable as when there is no memory of the destinations attached to the tourists, they will easily switch tourism locations in their closer vicinity which can be at the outskirts of the urban areas. This can be seriously hampering the real essence of rural tourism. The review results demonstrate that all over the world, tourism practitioners are putting effort into registering memory of the tourist destinations for their revisits and new recommendations.

The outcome of this systematic review will help researchers and rural tourism stakeholders to have easy access to publications on the significance of local food, local goods, and community involvement in rural tourism, thereby contributing to fulfilling the knowledge gap in this sector. This review can be helpful to rural tourism practitioners to realize the importance of local foods and products for future tourism businesses.

Conclusion

This review has concluded that local food consumption in the homestays and other rural tourism helps register memory in the tourists so that they can reconsider visiting the same place in the future and it is equally notable that the one-time tourists will recommend the destinations if they have any component that memorize the place to them, be that any physical souvenirs, or the taste of the food that stays in their memory. The ideas of branding, loyalty, satisfaction, cultural exchange, and gastronomy are much associated in the papers; however, the papers lack many references from Asian and African contexts, which are now rising at their best in rural tourism practices. Even though the local foods have been discussed exclusively, the literature very sporadically discusses the benefits of community involvement in rural tourism. When comparing the research findings to the local contexts of rural tourism in Asia, especially the Nepali context, the tourism stakeholders do not seem to be concerned about the registration of taste memory. The easy and comfortable practices of serving processed food in homestays are found to be preferable for both tourists and homestay owners. Rural communities lack marketing skills, homestay branding is mostly ignored. This review can provide significant knowledge to the rural tourism stakeholders and visitors as well the best practices of authentic rural tourism. After the essential knowledge, it can be anticipated that rural tourism practices will be more sustainable and beneficial to the local people and the nations on a bigger scale. The entrepreneurial aspects of rural tourism, the use of modern tools and technology in expanding the horizons of not only the tourism practices but also the reaching out to tourists, and the production and distribution of locally available species of crops with their integration into the menu of the local homestay projects are some of the areas the studies in this review lack. Besides, this review accepts that there are some important implications of local food in the health of the tourists, food behavior, quality food chain, and the effect of pandemics on the tourism sector; however, these have not been investigated in detail.

Systematic reviews can provide very limited explanations of practical issues (Tölkes, 2018), so future research needs to follow other review protocols to create a better and more enhanced knowledge base that can benefit researchers and tourism practitioners. The context of Nepali villages where there used to be very good homestays can be a lesson to many because as Ye et al. (2018) opine, as homestays' commercial aspect grows, the authenticity of the rural tourism practices declines. So, the rural tourism stakeholders need to fully understand the local cultural value associated with local food consumption, tourist satisfaction, and willingness to revisit and recommend. In addition, future researchers need to address the impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic which has changed the course of tourism practices abruptly. The economic crisis caused by various global factors like the Russia-Ukraine war, the risk of future pandemic outbreaks, and many other issues are there that must be comprehended for the study of tourism, specifically rural tourism practices.

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Anex 1

Table 5. Content Analysis of All Selected Qualitative Studies (n=8)

S.N.	Food significance in rural tourism	Author(s) (Year) Country	The theme of the Research	Targets of Data Collection (Tools of data collection)	Theory/Model/ Framework Applied
1	Local Food Consumption in cross-cultural Tourism and Health	Lin et al., (2022) Spain	How do psychology, dietary habits, and cultural beliefs interconnect with food? Neophobic and Neophiliac food habits, people choose or avoid local food according to their nature.	Chinese tourists in Spain, Convenient Sample	Constructivist paradigm
2	Memorable food experiences of the tourists	Sthapit, (2017) Finland	Memorable tourism experience and food consumption, Food souvenirs	Tourists (Interviews)	Grounded Theory
3	Feeding the locals and selling the locale	Eaton, (2008) Canada	Provincial government's attempt to foster local, sustainable food projects in two different steps, a) time of social democratic government support, b) market-led, elitist forms of local food	People involved in various urban and rural food projects	Grounded Theory (Implied)
4	Food and tourism partnership	Everett & Slocum, (2013) UK	role of food tourism in developing sustainable agendas (Knowledge exchange, the supply chain, fear of change, regionalization, marketing)	Stakeholders of food industry in the UK (In-depth telephone interviews)	N/A
5	Local food value chain	Thomas-Francois et al., (2017) Grenada	Service-oriented, sustainable, local food value chain as a new model for strengthening inter-sectorial linkages between agriculture and the hotel industry, desire of guests to experience a "taste of place"	key stakeholders involved in the local food hotel supply chain -individuals from agriculture, hotel industry, government sectors (interviews)	Not explicit, but concepts like economic development, sustainability, and value co-creation in the context of the local food
6	Ethnic soups as resources for sustainable local development	Borcoman & Sorea, (2023) Romania	traditional ethnic cuisines, specifically the soups of the Romanian, Saxon, Magyar, and Roma ethnic groups; serving soups of all ethnic groups as a common touristic package contributes to tourism sustainability and strengthens local identity	individuals from the four ethnic groups living in the Rupea area of Romania: Romanians, Saxons, Magyars, and Roma people. (Semi-structured interviews)	Doublets of gustemes, based on Claude Lévi-Strauss' model,

7	Involving rural youth in food system transformation and promoting community-based agri-ecotourism	Rana & Bisht, (2023) India	food system transformation and promoting community-based agri-ecotourism, improving the production and consumption aspects of local food for the benefit of local communities and the economy, culinary travel opportunities in homestays	Rural youth, farmers, policymakers, planners (FGD in 100 villages)	NA
8	The authentic value of real food	Weiss, (2012) USA	Farm-to-fork local food movements, food in totalities	Menus, cookbooks, food blogs (Ethnography)	Ethnography, Durkheimian sociology, British functional structuralism, and Gestalt psychology

Annex 2:

Table 6. Content Analysis of All Selected Quantitative Studies (n=10)

S.N.	Food significance in rural tourism	Author(s) (Year) Country	The theme of the Research	Targets of Data Collection (Tools of Data Collection)	Theory/Model/ Framework Applied
1	Local food and sustainable tourism experience	Zhang et al., (2019) China	Authenticity in food enhance tourist satisfaction and loyalty to tourist destination	Tourists	quality-Satisfaction-Loyalty Framework
2	Rural tourism and the craft beer experience	Murray & Kline, (2015) USA	Culinary tourism, connection with community, authentic experience, and local food bring tourists closer to host culture, brand loyalty	Travelers in Rural areas	Theory of Planned Behaviour, Theory of Reasoned Action, Loyalty Ladder Model
3	Local food for memorable tourist experiences and place attachment	Tsai, (2016) Taiwan	Local cuisine creates unforgettable memories, place attachment, and emotional connection to the destination	tourists on the final day of their trip to Taiwan (Likert Scale)	N/A
4	Local food for destination attraction	Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, (2016) Finland	Food-related behaviour, and food experience food as essential to destination choice	Attendees of a travel fair	N/A
5	Sustainable tourist experience and local tourism product	Lai et al., (2016) Italy	Fishing with local fishermen, willingness to repeat, influence of cultural experience on tourism	pescatourists in Sardinia	Customer Satisfaction

6	Promoting local quality food products	Folgado-Fernández et al., (2019) Spain	olive oil tourism, a link between olive oil tourism and gastronomy, heritage, and cultural traditions	tourists who visited the district of La Serena in Extremadura, Spain	Local food, tourism and identity of the country, Experiences and olive oil tourism
7	Sustainable strategies for local food supply	Minier et al., (2023) France	Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on roadside sales activities, Comparison of roadside sales activities before, during, and after the pandemic	Roadside sellers in Bora-Bora Island	-
8	Food experience and tourist satisfaction	Babolian Hendijani, (2016) Indonesia	The effect of food experience on tourist satisfaction, actors that contribute to a pleasant food experience for international tourists	International tourists visiting Indonesia	-
9	Local food specialties on the decision to (re)visit a tourist destination	Alderighi et al., (2016) Italy	Local food specialties affect the attractiveness of tourist destinations, Factors affecting the intention to (re)visit a destination, Gastronomy as a Reason for Travel	Resident Italians who intend to visit or revisit popular mountain resorts	The Multivariate Probit Model
10	Recommending destinations due to local cuisines	Adongo et al., (2015) Ghana	International tourists' experiences regarding local foods, Five main categories of local food experiences and adverse experiences, willingness to recommend	International tourists visiting Ghana	-

Annex 3:

Table 7: Content Analysis of All Selected Mixed Method Studies (n=5)

S.N.	**Food significance in rural tourism**	**Author(s) (Year) Country**	**The theme of the Research**	**Targets of Data Collection**	**Theory/Model/ Framework Applied**
1	Sustainability through food and wine	Serra et al., (2021) Portugal	Gastronomic tourism and its association with regional food and wine pairing,	experts in the field of gastronomy, wine, and tourism (Real-Time Delphi Questionnaires)	N/A

2	Traditional food and tourist destinations	Mo et al., (2022) China	evolution process of local traditional diet and its influence on the construction of gourmet tourism destinations, communication with tourists to help them appreciate and accept local tastes, a “supportive experience” to “peak experience”, dismantling the wall between backstage/ frontstage in rural tourism	business operators (Questionnaires), cooks, and other stakeholders including local residents (interviews) in Hongcun	Theory of Dramaturgy (the concept of ‘life as theatre’: frontstage, middle stage and backstage)
3	Food as a form of destination identity	Food as a form of destination brand identity and its role in building a destination brand,	Tourism stakeholders including tourism officers and chairmen or managers from the hospitality industries (analysis of secondary sources like brochures and websites and questionnaires filled by stakeholders)	N/A	

4	Food and products for memories and culture	Lin & Mao, (2015)the critical attributes of award winning food specialties and the connections with requirements for food specialty souvenirs. A content analysis research approach was adopted in the current study. Research samples were selected from a professional food specialty institution (National Association for the Specialty Food Trade, NASFT USA	development of food souvenirs, Sensory dimension of food souvenirs, Potential of locally developed food products to attract tourists, promote a destination, and increase consumption	Samples were selected from a professional food specialty institution, NASFT - food manufacturers, food retailers, and wholesalers (Quantitative: content analysis research approach; qualitative: generalizations)	content analysis research approach
5	Tourists' consumption of local food	Frisvoll et al., (2016) Norway	A minority of rural tourism tourists have a special interest in food, but for those who do, local food plays an important role in their tourist experiences, Association between tourism and food	tourists in a rural Norwegian region (447 respondents, and semi-structured interviews of strategically chosen tourists)	N/A

Annex 4:

Table 8. Content Analysis of All Selected Library Researches (n=2)

S.N.	**Food significance in rural tourism**	**Author(s) (Year) Country**	**The theme of the Research**	**Targets of Data Collection**	**Type of Research**	**Theory/Model/ Framework Applied**

1	Food tourism, niche markets and products in rural tourism	Sidali et al., (2015) N/A	Niche marketing, Food specialties, the meaning of local food, the role of local food in reinforcing personal identity, taste, and authenticity, support for local producers, seven dimensions that elevate food.	Secondary Literature	Library Research	The experience economy, The 'Intimacy' Model
2	Comparing the sustainability of local and global food products	Schmitt et al., (2017) Europe	Sustainability of local and global food products, wine and cheese, biodiversity preservation, environmental impact, transparency as sustainability performance issues	Secondary Literature	Library Research with Mixed Data	preference ranking organization method for enrichment evaluations (PROMETHEE)

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Sentencing System in Nepal: Analysis of Theory, Legal and Institutional Mechanisms

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Abstract

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Sentencing is the formal declaration of the judgment and the imposition of the punishment on behalf of the defendant soon after the finality of the conviction of the crime. If a defendant is convicted with the criminal offense by the court of law imprisonment, fine and compensation are imposed as a penalty on the defendant. Nepali legal system has adopted the reformative approach of sentencing i.e., criminals are subject to reformation. But the application of discretionary power of the judges for the imposition of the sentences by taking into the consideration of the mitigating and aggravating factors are not properly utilized for delivering the justice. Qualitative, doctrinal and descriptive research methodology is used in this study as well as content analysis as the tool of research method. The primary objective of this article tries to visualize sentencing philosophies adopted by Nepal, laws, judicial response and practice regarding sentencing and application of quantum of sentences in accordance with the gravity of the offences. Through this study the researchers draw the findings that, there is provision of punishing the poor criminals by the imposition of the imprisonment in case of failure to pay the fine and facility of the bail for the offender having the adequate economic resources are required to be eliminated. Finally, the results and findings of this study are important for future researchers, law practitioners, law students, law teachers, policy makers etc.

Keywords: *Sentencing, reformation, rehabilitation, re-socialization*

Introduction

The primary purposes of criminal justice system is the punishment (Lamichhane, 2023, p.2). The sentencing is considered as the procedural part of the criminal justice system. Sentencing is a legal process. The punishment of the crimes are authorized by the law. It is imposed in an individual cases after the convictions of the criminals (Mackenzie, 2005, p.2). Punishment is the formal declaration of the judgment and the punishment to the convicted criminals. (Siddique, 1997, p.318). The length of the sentence is fixed by the sentencing process. It begins soon after the conviction hearing of the defendant in specified offense. There are numerous purposes of sentencing viz. punishment of offenders, reduction of crime, reformation and rehabilitation of the offenders, promotion of social defense and implementation of reparation by the offenders. There are several factors such as motive, character and family environment which helps in determining the sentence (Acharya, 2051, p.225). If a defendant is convicted by the criminal offense through the court of law imprisonment, fine and compensation are imposed as a penalty on the defendant. The convicted defendant is brought before the court of law for the imposition of the punishment (Garner, 1999, p.1367). There is strong link between sentencing and punishment.

The sentencing declares the proper punishment after proving the charge of criminal responsibility through the competent court (Manson, 2001). In the past, there were numerous types of formal and informal models of punishment existing in the society. Such types of punishment include the death penalty, exile, degradation of the caste, shaving of the head unevenly, mutilation, fine, force feeding of human excreta, whipping, branding of criminals etc. (Lacey, 2008). The sentencing system begins with the reporting of a crime or keeping the suspect on the custody and decisions of the prison administration to release the prisoner on parole or to withdraw the community order (Ashworth, 2005, p.3). The sentencing process include the declaration of the proper punishment both in the qualitative and quantitative terms. The sentencing system has contribution for the establishment of fairness for the imposition of the penalty upon the offenders. 'The numerous people are involved in the sentencing process, ranging from the legislators, probation officer and the judges in making decisions'(Quadri, 2009, p.3778). In the light of above introductory fact and framework the objective of this article is to demonstrate the philosophical idea of sentencing with reference to some notable case laws, prevalent legal and institutional mechanisms. There are number of aspects of sentencing but this article is only limited to explore and analyze sentencing of criminal justice system based on Nepali statutory provisions, judicial precedents and Nepali practice.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

This article is a theoretical and normative work. In this paper the authors have applied the reseach methods namely doctrinal, qualitative and descriptive research method, with the application of the content analysis as the tool of research. This paper used two datasets which are derived from the prevalent Nepali statutory provisions and sentencing decisions and principle propounded by the Supreme court of Nepal respectively. Related statutory provisions such as The Constitution of Nepal, 2015, National Penal Code, 2017, The Criminal Offenses (Sentencing and Execution) Act, 2017 etc. are taken as primary source of data. Secondary data are collected from various literatures such as books, research reports, journals, articles, newspaper articles, Nepal Kanoon Patrika etc. Finally, there is descriptive and analytical examination of the collected data and information.

Results and Discussion

Sentencing Philosophy of Nepal

In earlier days, some of the forms of retributive and physical punishment were hands of the theif were cutt down, damaging the eye of the spy, the rapists were castrated, the prostitutes were disfigured for making them unattractive. In modern times, incapacitation is accomplished through the incarceration (Reid, 1996, p.120). The philosophy of retribution states that the eye is taken for-an-eye doctrine. Generally, deterrence and reformation et.al. are the two major objective of sentencing provisioned by the Nepali Sentencing law. The deterrent theory of punishment is guided through the free-will. The aim of punishment is to punish the offender as well as to frighten the others from committing the crime. There is individual deterrence for the prevention of the potential offender from the commission of the crime. Whereas the general deterrence prevents the people from the engagement in the criminal activities after seeing the punishment that is imposed on the actual offenders. The offenders may be changed through the proper treatment and care through the reformative approach.

Likewise, another doctrine of proportionality states that the punishment must fit the offences committed by the defendant. The punishment must be provided to the offender in accordance with the gravity of the offence. It is mandatory to have uniformity in the sentence for similar crime committed under the similar circumstances. This principle is based on the principle '*let the punishment fit the crime*' (Upreti, 2018, p.41). In contrasts, the concept of individualization of the punishment means that the punishment must suit to the offender. The judge must restrain the imposition of the imprisonment upon the defendant. In our practice imprisonment is taken as last resort of the punishment and prison as the center for the execution of imprisonment.

In the ***legislative model***, the legislative body is the only authorities for the determination of the punishment to the convicted offender. In the ***judicial model*** of sentencing, the the length of the sentence is determined by the judge as per the range. The judges can use the discretionary power only within the range permissible by the legislature. Judges are not provided absolute discretionary power. In the ***administrative model*** of sentencing, an administrative agency made the decision for the release of the inmate. Usually, administrative agency is a parole board (Paranjape, 2008, p.37). The sentence imposed in administrative model is called the indeterminate sentence. The release of an offender must be made in accordance with the individual cases for deciding whether the offender is in a position for rejoining the society or not.

An indeterminate sentence involves the legislative specifications of the ranges of the sentence which permit the judges for the exercise of discretion for the determination of the actual sentences. The indeterminate punishment varies from one day to the life imprisonment. Usually, it involves legislative specification of the maximum and minimum term of imprisonment for each offense. The determinate sentencing scheme advocate for the mandatory parole after serving the specified portion of the determinate sentence. The mandatory sentences are specified by the legislature and usually it involves the sentence of the imprisonment. In the presumptive sentencing the sentence is particular for each offense, but the judges may deviate from that norm. There must be reason for deviation.

Constitutional Provision

The right to live with dignity is guaranteed by the Nepalese Constitution, 2015. 'Nepal is against the imposition of death penalty to any category of the offender'(Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Article 16). In the eye of the law, every citizen is equal. (Art.18). The Constitution of Nepal, states that the person is kept in the custody by providing the information about the cause for the arrest. The detained people have the right to consult the legal practitioner and they are presented before the court within 24 hours of such arrest. They must not be punished for an act which was not punishable by the law in force when the act was committed. Any person must not be punished greater than that prescribed by the law in force while the commission of the offence. There is a principle in the criminal justice system that an accused is considered to be innocent until proven guilty of the offence. The accused must not be prosecuted twice for the same offence. There is right against self-incrimination. The accused have right to get information about the proceedings taken against them. There is guarantee of fair trial by the independent court of law. The indigent people have right to get the legal aid (Art.20).

The information about the case is given to the victim. The victim is entitled to the compensation and rehabilitation as per the law (Art.21). The privacy of any person relating to the residence, property, document, data, communication and information about the character are kept confidential except as per the law (Art.28). There is guarantee of the juvenile justice. Nepal has adopted the principle of juvenile justice so that all the records of the juvenile offender are kept confidential while imposing the sentence of the reform home and rehabilitation center (Art.39). Nepal has adopted the principle that the citizen of Nepal is not exiled from the country as a result of the punishment (Art.45). There is provision of right to the constitutional remedy for the enforcement of their rights of every citizen (Art.46). Every citizen must follow the Constitution and law of the Nepal (Art.48).

Salient Features of Criminal Offences (Sentencing and Execution) Act, 2017

***Separate hearing*:** Generally, the court determines the sentence for any offense only after such person is convicted by the court of law. The sentences are determined within thirty days of the conviction. The separate hearing is conducted for determining the sentence. There is no requirement of separate hearing for the determination of sentence of imprisonment up to three years or fine of up to thirty thousand rupees (Criminal Offences (Sentencing and Execution) Act, 2017, Section 9).

***Pre-Sentencing report*:** The probation officer or parole officer must prepare the pre-sentencing report for an offense punishable by the imprisonment for more than three years or fine of more than thirty thousand rupees. It further mentions that the pre-sentencing report must include the personal, social background of the offender, circumstances during the commission of an offence, activities and behavior of the offender before the commission of the crime and the age factor of an offender etc. This pre-sentencing report helps for the application of the individualization of punishment. (Section 12).

***Determination of sentences*:** In the criminal justice system, the sentencing is determined on the basis of the gravity of the offence and the intention of the offender. Likewise, while imposing the sentence upon the offender, the circumstances of the commission of an offense along with the aggravating or mitigating factors are considered. The conduct of an offender and previous activities are taken into consideration (Section 15).

Imposition of fine: Another form of sentencing adopted by the criminal justice system of Nepal is the imposition of the fine. The court of the law determines the amount of fine by considering the financial condition and source of income of an offender. The court of law impose the amount of fine on the basis of the amount in controversy (Section 18).

Imprisonment: After the enactment of the Muluki Penal Code 2017, Muluki Criminal Procedure Code, 2017 and Criminal Offences (Determination of Sentencing and Execution) Act, 2017 there has been several changes in the sentencing system of Nepal. There is elimination of confiscation of the entire property of an offender. The term of life imprisonment is made twenty-five years. The sentencing of the imprisonment is considered as the last resort if the other sentences are not adequate for the nature of the offences (Section 23). There is suspension of imprisonment if the sentence is less than one year (Section 24).

Reformation and rehabilitation: Criminal Offences (Sentencing and Execution) Act, 2017 has advocated for the reformation and rehabilitation of the offender (Section 26). It has adopted the philosophy of open prison as well as the imposition of the prison on the weekend or during the night only (Section 27). There is introduction of open prison and parole for the socialization of the offender (Section 30). There is incorporation of the concept of engagement of an offender in physical labor in lieu of the imprisonment (Section 31).

Compensation: In the present context, the criminal justice system has implemented the provision of the compensation for the victim (Shrestha, 2001, p.211). The rights of crime-victim is a fundamental right (Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Article 21). The victim has the right of information about the investigation and adjudication of the case (Katherine, 2001, p.98). The victim has the right to get compensation and right to social rehabilitation. The offender has obligation for the payment of the compensation immediately. In case of inability to pay the compensation immediately, the offender must furnish any property as a security. Generally, the court gives order against the offender for the payment of the compensation within one year in maximum three installments (Criminal Offences (Sentencing and Execution) Act, 2017, Section 42). The compensation must be borne by each offender. There is imposition of the imprisonment for the non-payment of the compensation to the victim. If an offender does not make payment of the amount of compensation within the prescribed period, the compensation is taken by making attachment of property of the offender. Otherwise, the offender is imprisoned by converting the amount of compensation into imprisonment at the rate of three hundred rupees per day (Criminal Offences (Sentencing and Execution) Act, 2017, Section 45).

United Nations declaration regarding the basic principles of justice for the victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, 1985: It has guaranteed the participation of the victim in criminal proceedings. The victims have right to get information about their rights for seeking the redress. ***Challenges of the implementation of criminal offences (Aentencing and Execution) Act 2074*****:** The criminalization of the new acts by the recent criminal codes such as Chhaupadi, Witchcraft, Match Fixing and sentencing the offender in reality are challenging because they were not considered as crime previously. There is increase in the role of police investigation such as keeping the police diary, prosecution by district attorney, constituting the special team for the investigation requires the team work in the establishment of the crime and imposition of the sentences are not implemented effectively. There is lack of proper implementation of conviction hearing and sentencing hearing due to the lack of skilled manpower (Koirala, 2018, p.4).

There is lack of proportionality in quantum of sentence such as fine, imprisonment, forfeiture amount and the loss of life. National Criminal Procedure Code, 2017 has mentioned that, the criminal responsibility of the offender is absolved once the offender is dead. In case of the death of the offender before or pending the trial or before the punishment, that person is released from the criminal liability and the case is quashed immediately (National Criminal Procedure Code, 2017, Section 158). There is remission of the sentence in case the offender dies. The whole sentence of the imprisonment or fine payable by the offender is remitted. Governmental or personal claimed amount and compensation are recovered from the property belonging to that person.

National Penal Code, 2017 has defined the acid attack as the crime. It has made the provision of imprisonment, fine and compensation for the victim (National Penal Code, 2017, Section 193). Likewise, disfiguring the faces and body of any person by the acid attack is subject to the less term of imprisonment for the culprit and monetary compensation is not adequate for the cosmetic surgery of the acid attack victim. The imprisonment up to five years to eight years and fine of one lakh to five lakh is imposed for disfiguring the face by the acid attack. Similarly for the disfigurement of other body parts, the punishment of three years to five years and fine of fifty thousand to three lakh rupees are imposed. The acid attack is included within the physical violence in Article 2 of the Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2009. There is more emphasis on the imposition of the imprisonment rather than providing the compensation to the victim and medical treatment. It seems sentencing policy in Nepal is not governed by any particular principle. The sentencing system of Nepal is more focused for the guarantee of the human rights of the offender rather than medical treatment and re-socialization of the victim. There is lack of attention of the law towards the victim and their dependents (Rattan Singh v. Punjab State, 1979, 4 SCC 719).

The judge imposes the sentence upon the offender because it is required by the law. The discretionary power of the judge for the reduction of the sentence on the basis of mitigating factors is being misused for protection of the criminals. There is lack of proper infrastructural development for the establishment of Reform Home and Rehabilitation Center for the guarantee of the Juvenile Justice. The reformative approach is not properly implemented in the existing criminal justice system. The implementation of the Victim Relief Fund for getting the interim compensation by the victim for the medical and psychological treatment in provincial level and local level is challenging (Criminal Offences (Sentencing and Execution) Act, 2017, Section 48). There is institutionalization of corruption for the imposition of less sentence such as conversion of the intentional homicide into provocational homicide. It may disturb peace, order and security by increasing the rate of crime in the society. If the offence is punishable only with the fine, the offender has to pay the fine. The government is more concerned in raising revenue through fine rather than punishing the criminals.

The provision about the prisoner may be kept in hospital are misused by the powerful. The real objective of this provision is medical care for the prisoner of the unsound mind (Section 34). There is politicization of the crime such as the order of a judge for keeping the case on postponement and the remission of the punishment of an offender who are close to the political parties etc. The trend of giving amnesty from the President must not be based on political affiliation of the offenders. As a consequence, it creates threat to peace and security in the society. The provision of giving amnesty is mentioned in the National Criminal Procedure Code 2017. There is provision of pardon by the president. The convicted offender may make a petition to the President, via Ministry of Home Affairs, for the pardon or reduction of the sentence (Section 159).

The precedent established by the honorable Supreme Court lacks uniform application of the mitigating factors and there is problem of misuse of discretionary power by the judges. In the murder case of the Gita Dhakal by her husband Ranjan Koirala, The Supreme Court ruled that the life imprisonment of twenty years shall be imposed on him for the commission of the murder of his wife and the confiscation of entire property was not made. It is because of the current Criminal Offences (Sentencing & Execution) Act, 2017 states that lesser punishment will be imposed on the offender at the time of sentencing. (Section 5).

The principles of juvenile justice are adopted in Nepal. Whereas the victim of minor age is not getting the compensation by the offender for the crime done against them. There is trend of imposing the crushing sentences even if the offender has committed the minor offences. There is no implementation of the imposition of the lesser sentence if the offender help in administration of the justice. There is lack of justification of sentencing in the judgment of the court so the judges are obliged to mention the reasons for the imposition of such sentence. The imposition of the sentences on the particular offense determines the public confidence in the administration of criminal justice. The several forms of the sentencing such as imprisonment, fine, monetary compensation will not heal the pain, sufferings, physical and mental loss of the victim.

Institutional Mechanisms of Sentencing System in Nepal

Police**:** The police office is the first place to receive the First Information Report either written, oral or via electronic medium. Any first information report is forwarded to the separate investigating authority, if it is specified by the law otherwise it is sent to the concerned district police office (The National Criminal Procedure Code, 2017, Section 4). Every police officer conducting investigation under have to keep the police diary, in which every proceeding made by in the course of investigation are recorded immediately. It contains the date and time of receipt of information about the offence. The place or scene visited in the course of investigation, proofs, evidence, details of the person arrested, the name and address of each person interrogated in the course of investigation, as well as the nature of the person arrested or inquired etc. are mentioned there (Section 25). The preliminary investigation report is submitted to the office of district government attorney office for the preparation of the chargesheet.

Government Attorney**:** The person may make a complaint to the concerned district government attorney office or the police office higher in level for the registration if the concerned police office refuses to register a first information report. The concerned district government attorney office must keep the records and forward to the concerned police office for taking the necessary action. The person may make a complaint setting out the matter, to the Chief District Officer of the concerned district. The government attorney or court may ask and examine the police diary. The concerned investigating authority may seek advice or opinion of the government attorney on any matter. The government attorney may direct the investigating authority to carry out further investigation or to collect further evidence or to seize any exhibit, evidence or to inquire any person (Section 26). The concerned government attorney may submit the charge-sheet to the concerned district court within the time-limit (Section 32). The charge made against the accused include the relevant laws to be applied, the demand for the punishment to be imposed on the accused and the amount of compensation to be awarded to the crime victim. If the accused assists the investigating authority in the course of conducting investigation into such offence, the investigating authority may, in consideration for such assistance, recommend to the government attorney for a reduction in the sentence than can be imposed on such accused under the law. There is power of the Attorney General for providing the direction for the adoption of special model in the course of further investigation (Section 27).

Ministry of Home Affairs**:** The person may make complaint to the Ministry of Home Affairs if the Chief District Officer is working as the investigating authority and he refuses to register the information. The Ministry of Home Affairs must make decision, within three days, for registering such information. It must provide direction to the concerned office in order to take action accordingly (National Criminal Procedure Code, 2017, Section 5(4)). A prisoner may make a petition to the President, through the Ministry of Home Affairs for the pardon, suspension, alteration or reduction of the sentence (Section 159). The President must forward the petition to the Ministry of Home Affairs for the necessary action. The Ministry must make a submission to the Government of Nepal for making decisions whether or not to grant the pardon. While granting the pardon nature and circumstances of the commission of the offence, age and criminal background of the offender and the limit of the sentences are taken into consideration.

Law Courts**:** The district court has power to make judgments regarding the punishment, fine and compensation against the offender. It has power to issue habeas corpus for the prevention of unlawful detention. Similarly, it has power to issue order of injunction for the enforcement of the legal rights (Administration of Justice Act, 2016, Section 7). It has powers to hear appeals against the decision made by the quasi-judicial body or judicial committee of local level as per the provincial law.

The High Court have the power to issue the necessary order as per the Article 144 of the Constitution. The High Court try and settle the cases under its original jurisdiction. It has power to make decision against the cases tried and settled by the district court under its original jurisdiction. The appeal shall be filed in High Court if the district court has made full or partial reversal of the decisions made by judicial, quasi-judicial body. The appeal is filed on the High Court for the decision made by the district court in the case relating to public property and the cases relating to the punishment of imprisonment or the fine of more than one hundred thousand rupees is imposed or the claimed amount is more than five hundred thousand rupees. Further it has the power to make review over the reference judgments (Sadhak) (Administration of Justice Act, 2016, Section 8).

The Supreme Court have power to issue the several writs such as writ of habeas corpus, mandamus, certiorari, prohibition and quo warranto etc. It has power to originally settle the cases, hear the appeal, make review or revisions of the judgments (Constitution of Nepal, Article 133). It hears the matters relating to public importance such as interpretation of Constitution and law or cases recommended by the High Court. It has power to hear the appeal against the decision made by the High Court. One can file appeal in the Supreme Court if the punishment of imprisonment is ten years or more. If the High Court has made full or partial reversal in the decision made by the district court if the imprisonment is more than three years or fine of more than five hundred thousand rupees or claimed amount of more than two million five hundred thousand rupees. The Supreme Court may hear appeal on reference cases (Administration of Justice Act, 2016, Article 9). The reference of the case is made to the Supreme Court, if the High Court has imposed the life imprisonment (Article 10). The Supreme Court have power to review its own judgment if it is found that the fact materially affects the judgment only after the settlement of the case. Generally, the review is made, if the decision is contrary to the precedent propounded by the Supreme Court (Article 11). The Supreme Court revise the judgment made by the High Court, if there is constitutional or legal error, precedent of the Supreme Court is mis-interpreted and there is misappropriation of the government or public property. In case justice is affected by the lack of proper representation of women, children, disabled person and elderly people (Article 12). The decision made by the court is final and it is binding to all the parties to the case (Article 18).

***Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs*:** This Ministry is responsible for the preparing the draft of criminal law which is later on passed by the parliament as the legislation for the prevention of the crime and the imposition of the punishment i.e., imprisonment, fine and the compensation.

***Probation and Parole Board*:** It makes recommendation to the Government of Nepal for the formulation of the probation and parole policy. It develops the standards for keeping the prisoners on probation and parole along with the terms and conditions to be abide by the offenders. It gives direction to the state probation and parole board. It prepares a roster of persons for the appointment as the probation officer or parole officer. It makes the recommendation for the execution of sentences against the offender. It assists in the rehabilitation of the offenders

(Criminal Offences (Sentencing and Execution) Act, 2017, Section 39).

***Sentence Recommendation Committee*:** It has created the standards for the determination of the correct length of the sentence in accordance with the gravity of the offence. It provides suggestions to the government of Nepal after doing research on existing penal policy. It provides the opinion to impose the sentence on any specific type of offence. It analyzes the records of the offender. It gives suggestions to the government of Nepal for making the reforms in laws of punishment of Nepal (Article 47).

Department of Prison Management: The Prison Act, 1963 (2019 B.S.) is repealed by the current Prison Act, 2022 (2079 B.S.). The Prison Management Department was established at the central level under the Ministry of Home Affairs from the year 2050 in order to make the work related to prison management and administration effective and efficient. It is the responsibility of the relevant Chief District Officer at the local level for the prison management. There is central prison hospital in Kathmandu district. There is another hospital for psychosocially handicapped prisoners in Lalitpur district for the treatment of prisoners who are serving the prison terms. It prepares the records of prisoners based on the monthly reports received from the prison offices. It keeps the records based on the report received from the district from the institutions involved in the reform, protection and rehabilitation of the dependent children, imprisoned children and the freed prisoners. It makes the periodic observation visits to such institutions in order to send the numerical details of incarcerated children and released prisoners regularly to the Department. It directs the prison offices to release the prisoners who have served their imprisonment. It strengthens the physical conditions of the prisons and to develop personality, skills, moral reform and rehabilitation of the prisoners.

Judicial Response Towards the Sentencing System in Nepal

The Supreme Court of Nepal have established number of the precedents regarding the sentencing system in Nepal. The case of Jugat Sada versus Government of Nepal ruled that there was the preparation of a plot by the collection of the pointed weapons with the involvement of more than one person. The Vala was used to cause the murder. The concept of innocent mind must not be applied for the conversion of the intentional homicide into provocational homicide as per the Muluki Ain 2020, Chapter on Homicide No.14. The application of the mitigating factors for the reduction of punishment was rejected by the Appellate court and the defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment along with the confiscation of the entire property. The Appellate Court, do not have power to interfere for the determination of quantum of punishment, except for the miscarriage of the justice. In U.K. there is very wide discretion for the fixation of the degree of punishment to the judge of trial court except for the offence of murder for which the court must pass a sentence of imprisonment for life. This case states that while fixing the punishment for any particular offence, the court must consider about the nature and the circumstances of the commission of the crime as well as the degree of deliberation shown by the offender (N.K.P. 2063, D.N. 7752). The case of Government of Nepal v. Shanti B.K. states that the justice system must consider the compensation and fine differently. The fine is paid by the offender to the state as a penalty. It is one of the forms of the punishment. The fine is collected as the revenue in the state fund. If the offender is unable to pay the fine, the offender is sent to the imprisonment. The compensation on the other hand goes to the victim directly (N.K.P. 2074, D.N. 9868).

The case of Government of Nepal v. Baijanath Shah Teli states that the purpose of criminal law and justice is to punish the perpetrator as well as to maintain peace and order in the society by the prevention and control of the crime. The punishment must be as per the gravity of the offences. The imposition of the sentence of a single person must not be imposed on the group which shall create lesser sentence to the group members. As a consequence, the purpose of sentencing is less effective. The imposition of sentence in each offender would be more effective. The gravity of the offences committed by the group is heavier than offence committed by the single person (N.K.P. 2068, D.N.8637).

The case of Government of Nepal v. Nawal Kishore Mandal ruled that the application of mitigating circumstances as per the No.188 of the Chapter on Court Procedure. However, from the view of the circumstances of the commission of the offence can be considered as an accident, or the offence has happened in the absence of any plan. The application of No 188 of the Chapter on Court Procedure is made for the reduction of the punishment. The basic objective of CCMCC No 188 is to reform and rehabilitate the offender not to incite criminals for crime. Both the defendant must be liable to life imprisonment as per Chapter on Homicide No 13(4). The judicial privilege and the discretionary power of the judge cannot be used for reducing the punishment of the offender of the cruel and inhumane crime. The offender has killed the deceased by cutting the different body parts. The offenders committing inhumane offences must not be provided with the facility of the reduction of the punishment (N.K.P. 2065, D.N.7993).

The case of Krishna Bahadur Gole v. High Court Patan, states that the court should take into consideration regarding the principle of additional punishment. The court must impose the suitable sentence neither less nor more to the offender of the crime. The court have to consider the circumstances of the commission of the crime and it must focus on the reformation of the criminals. The strong punishment must not be provided to the offender. It is not like mathematical calculation for imposing the sentence. The judges imposing sentence and the judges hearing the judicial review are obliged to apply their wisdom while imposing the sentences. In the present context there is maximum punishment of life imprisonment and the confiscation of entire property is eliminated by the enactment of National Penal Code, 2074 B.S. Some Act has the provision of additional punishment for the recidivist criminal. There is provision of lower and upper limit of sentencing to the criminals (N.K.P. 2074, D.N. 9846).

The case of Government of Nepal v. Radhika Shrestha, has cited the definition of Battered Women Syndrome. L.E. Walker states that Battered Women Syndrome is a woman who is repeatedly traumatized by the man by his forceful behavior in order to coerce her for doing something unwillingly. The rights of the woman are neglected here. Battered women involves the female, wives or intimate partners who is in relationship with men. The battering cycle must be least twice. Any woman find herself in an abusive relationship once and again if it occurs for the second time, she is called the battered woman. A woman should experience at least two complete battering cycles. The cycle has three distinct phases. Firstly, tension building phase followed by the exploitation or act of loving referred to as honeymoon phase. There are three components of the battering in cycle theory of violence. The tension building phase indicates the heavy battering of the woman. Further it includes calm, loving at the initial phase as well as the physical battering and verbal harassment. Secondly the batterer loses the control of the emotions as a consequence of that lethal battering occurs. The woman is abused in an intimate relationship physically, sexually and emotionally etc. in intimate relationship. Thirdly when the partner exerted power to force her for doing whatever the boy wanted without considering the rights or feelings of the victim. At the core of battered woman syndrome, there is helplessness and cycle of violence to the victim. The Battered Women Syndrome is considered as one of the mitigating factors for the reduction of the sentence of the homicide by the Supreme Court of Nepal (N.K.P 2071, D.N. 9242).

The Supreme Court in the case of Government of Nepal v. Kumar Prasad ruled in the favor of juvenile justice stating that there shall be no imposition of any sentence to Kumar Prasad as he has not committed any other crime after the imposition of the first sentence. If the juveniles are also treated under the criminal justice system, then the objective of the juvenile justice system cannot be achieved (N.K.P. 2075, D.N. 10127). This case is relevant to sentencing because juveniles are kept in the Reform home and the Rehabilitation center.

From this study, above discussion and analysis it is found that, it is very difficult for the victim of crime to get the medical expenses as well as the compensation either from the offender or from the Victim Relief Fund. The state needs to be serious in this matter and make proper management of it.

Conclusion

The administration of sentencing system of Nepal is still traditional. The Criminal Offences (Sentencing and Execution) Act, 2017 is the specific landmark legislation for the development of the Nepalese criminal justice system. Only the offenders who have committed the grave offences are kept in custodial sentence because of threat to the society. It has been found that this Act has advocated for the participation of victim while determining the sentences. Further it has advocated for the reformation, rehabilitation and the re-socialization of the offenders. It motivated that the punishment of the imprisonment is considered as the last resort. Several criminal sentencing decisions have indicated the misuse of discretionary power of the judges. It is required to be regulated by the Judicial Council for the proper administration and dispensation of justice. The adequate efforts must be made for the implementation of impeachment process of chief justice and other supreme court judges in the case of misinterpretation of the Constitution and the prevailing laws which truly affects the criminal justice system. Otherwise, there might be miscarriage of the justice. There is provision of punishing the poor criminals by the imposition of the imprisonment in case of failure to pay the fine and facility of the bail for the offender having the adequate economic resources are required to be eliminated. The practice of bail must be regulated properly, otherwise there is chance of misuse of the bail by the elite class of people. The state must be more concerned about the reformation and re-socialization of both the victim and offender rather than imposing heavy fine upon the offender.

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Greenwashing Practices and its Consequences in Hospitality Industry: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

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Companies are using green marketing approaches to convey their environmental initiatives, aiming to enrich their competitive advantage and attract consumers with ecological awareness, however they do not satisfy such standards. Interest in greenwashing has increased over the past few decades. Nevertheless, there is still a need for thorough and systematic research focused on the development of this phenomenon and its effects on stakeholders.

This study aims to offer a comprehensive overview and synthesis of the current knowledge on greenwashing by conducting a bibliometric analysis of articles published until 2024. It highlights the most significant research in this area, with a particular focus on recent articles connecting greenwashing to green marketing, and identifies gaps and opportunities for future research. This study analyze the greenwashing practices in the marketing area especially in the hospitality industry using the tool Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) and bibliometric methods. This analysis was conducted using the Web of Science databases, resulting in 40 relevant articles identified following the PRISMA protocol. VOSviewer software was used for generating network maps. Literature review matrix was designed using MS-Excel software.

The result from bibliometric study indicate that the concept of greenwashing has gained significant attention, with an increasing number of studies published in recent years. Majority of reviewed literature revealed that greenwashing severely damages brand attitude, brand *trust and consumer loyalty in marketing sector. It also demonstrates the negative impact on consumer repurchase intention and willingness to pay. Greenwashing leads to consumer confusion, skepticism, and perceived risk, reducing trust in green products. However, vague claims may have a slight positive effect on marketing.The study highlights the practical steps for industry leaders to counteract the negative effects of greenwashing on consumer behavior, particularly within the hospitality sector, by maintaining customer loyalty and mitigating adverse effects on repurchasing intentions.*

Keywords: *Greenwashing, hospitality, marketing, PRISMA model.*

Introduction

Along with the product related trading business, the service industry is growing in a rapid pace. The contribution of service industry in global economy is getting massive. The service sector is among the largest globally, accounting for approximately 10.4% of the world's GDP, with hotels being a significant part of this industry (Kim & Roseman, 2022). Nonetheless, the hospitality sector is a major contributor to CO2 emissions, responsible for 21% of the total. Annually, a hotel room stay generates around 55.7 million tonnes of CO2 emissions per guest per night (Gupta et al., 2019). The industry heavily relies on nonrenewable resources and d isposable products in its operations (Chan et al., 2014). Tourism overall contributes to 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, with the accommodation segment alone accounting for 21% of this figure (Khatter et al., 2019). So business organizations need to be conscious regarding the environmental impact during operating business.

The consumer consciousness on environmental conservation has generated a higher demand for environmentally friendly goods and services. Enhanced societal awareness, successful case studies, recycling incentives, digital advancements, and innovative packaging can provide useful strategies to tackle challenges in green marketing. Ling (2021) emphasized only few research focused on the service sectors such as tourism and hospitality, despite the urgent necessity to comprehend and mitigate the detrimental impacts of greenwashing in the hotel industry. Additionally, Ling pointed out the limited knowledge regarding the influence of greenwashing on consumers' willingness to purchase eco-friendly products and services offered by hotels.

The study related to greenwashing within service industry are limited so the impact of greenwashing in various service industry are seems yet to be verified with other related studies. In a recent systematic review, Majeed and Kim (2023) identified that existing research on greenwashing within the service industry is inconsistent, superficial, and fragmented, often overlooking the customer perspective. This gap makes it challenging to form definitive conclusions about the occurrence of greenwashing in the hospitality sector or to develop strategies for managing its effects on customers. Moreover, previous studies have principally focused on the predictors and consequences of greenwashing, rather than exploring methods to mitigate its negative impacts.

Green products have become widespread, and their commercial appeal is increasing (Yang et al., 2015). However, various unethical practices appear to be prevalent, including selective disclosures, irrelevant or unsubstantiated claims, referencing questionable certifications, lobbying for environmentally harmful regulations, or collaborating with companies that negatively impact the environment. Understanding greenwashing is crucial for maintaining customer trust and ensuring the success of genuine green initiatives. Greenwashing undermines consumer confidence in a company's environmental promises, making it essential for businesses to build authentic and credible connections with their customers.

In the hospitality industry, customer perceptions of greenwashing are influenced by operators' marketing efforts, information disclosure, and certifications, which shape customer behaviors based on their green attitudes. The impact of different types of greenwashing—false, vague, and hidden—on consumer beliefs underscores the need for clear and truthful environmental claims. Green consumer confusion and perceived risk negatively affect trust in green claims, highlighting the importance of clarity and transparency (Chen et al., 2020. In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of studying about greenwashing to enhance consumer trust, improve brand reputation, and promote genuine sustainability and enhancing brand equity in business practices. Considering these consequences of greenwashing in the service industry, the study try to clarify the consequences of greenwashing practices and their implications for marketers in hospitality industry and the further research agendas related to greenwashing.

This review aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of greenwashing and to introduce a conceptual framework identifying its determinants and effects on business organizations. Given the limited comprehension of greenwashing within green marketing and hospitality, a systematic literature review approach was employed to achieve the objectives. The insights from this review are intended to guide researchers and practitioners across various industries, such as hospitality, information technology, and transportation, in understanding greenwashing, how it is perceived by customers, strategies to mitigate customer skepticism regarding green claims, and how to create an effective marketing mix that enhances customer perceptions of green initiatives while avoiding greenwashing accusations. A thorough understanding of green consumers, as discussed in this review, can assist stakeholders across different business sectors in effectively and efficiently asserting their green initiatives and fostering active and meaningful customer engagement in green practices.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Search Strategy

This research employs the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology to conduct a comprehensive investigation. The Web of Science (WoS) was utilized for data extraction, as it is recognized as the most reliable and trusted global database. Following the PRISMA guidelines ensured a transparent selection process, enhancing the robustness and reliability of this systematic review.

The researcher identified records for the review on June 1st, 2024, from the WoS core collection, covering the period from 2013 to the present (June 2024). During data screening, the review was limited to peer-reviewed, English-language articles with at least two citations. To assess the literature on greenwashing, the researchers conducted a Topic search for the term "greenwash*," yielding 717 articles. Boolean Proximity search was used to find specific variations of the term, such as greenwashing, greenwash, greenwashed, and greenwashes. To refine the search, the documents were narrowed down based on type, citation databases, date range, language, and categories. The exclusion criteria and selection process are detailed in the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram. After screening, 132 documents were excluded, leaving 40 articles for review.

Using data from WoS, the researchers analyzed the productivity of the research field by examining the historical evolution of publications, the most influential articles, key journals, and the most prolific authors. VOSviewer software was also employed for bibliometric mapping to identify patterns and hot topics in greenwashing research.

To ensure accuracy, the researchers conducted additional filtering. Keyword combinations was initially used to exclude articles not focused on the effects of greenwashing on marketing of hospitality industry, retaining those that included both "greenwash*" and "Hospitality". This process excluded 123 documents. Researcher then manually reviewed keywords, titles, abstracts, and sometimes entire articles to ensure relevance, excluding another 159 documents.

Ultimately, 40 articles met the review criteria. The researchers analyzed these articles to identify recurring topics and their frequency of occurrence. This analysis helped uncover gaps and trends in the literature, providing valuable insights into the field of greenwashing.

Study Selection

The data selection process was meticulously executed in two distinct stages to ensure the inclusion of the most relevant and high-quality sources. In the first stage, the focus was on a preliminary analysis of the titles and abstracts of the documents. To accumulate the related title articles, keywords like "greenwash", hospitality", "services" etc. were used. This involved a careful review of these sections to identify documents that appeared to align with the predefined selection criteria. Documents that seemed to meet these criteria were then retained for a more detailed evaluation.

In the second stage, the selection process became more intensive, concentrating on the introductions and conclusions of the documents that had passed the initial screening. This stage involved an in-depth review of these sections to ensure that the documents truly satisfied the selection criteria. The aim was to verify the initial assessments and confirm the relevance and quality of the documents based on a comprehensive examination of their introductory and concluding sections. By implementing this two-tiered approach, the researcher aimed to meticulously filter the documents. This method allowed for a thorough verification process, ensuring that only the most pertinent and high-quality sources were included in the final review. This rigorous selection process was crucial for maintaining the integrity and relevance of the research findings.

Data Extraction Process

Figure 1 illustrates the PRISMA refinement process utilized to curate the research library for this review. The process began with an initial search that identified 717 documents. Following this, a systematic exclusion of 577 irrelevant documents was conducted. The remaining 140 sources were then subjected to a dual-screening process. The first screening assessed the sources for their relevance to the review topic, and the second screening ensured that only sources written or translated into English were included. This process led to the exclusion of 123 articles. The remaining 49 articles were then meticulously examined, resulting in the exclusion of an additional 9 articles deemed irrelevant after thorough scrutiny. This visual representation details the rigorous selection process that was undertaken to ensure the inclusion of high-quality and relevant sources for this comprehensive review.

Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram

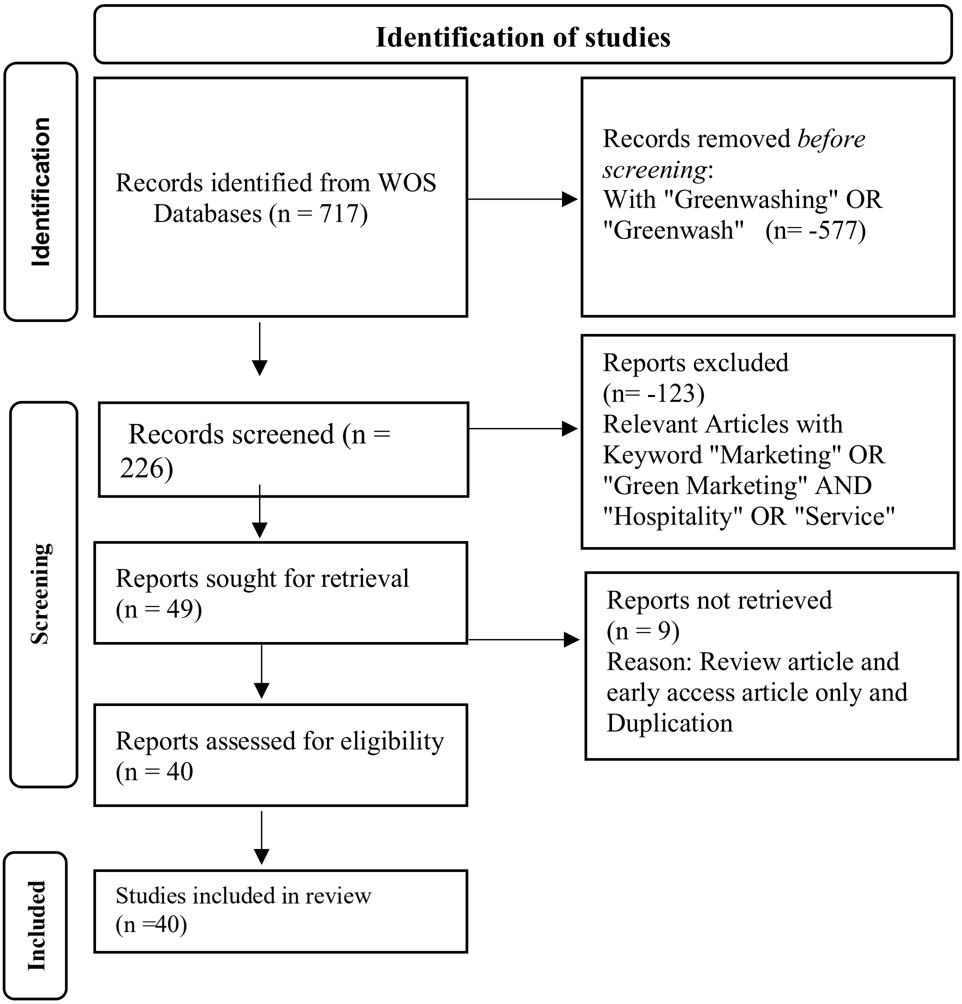
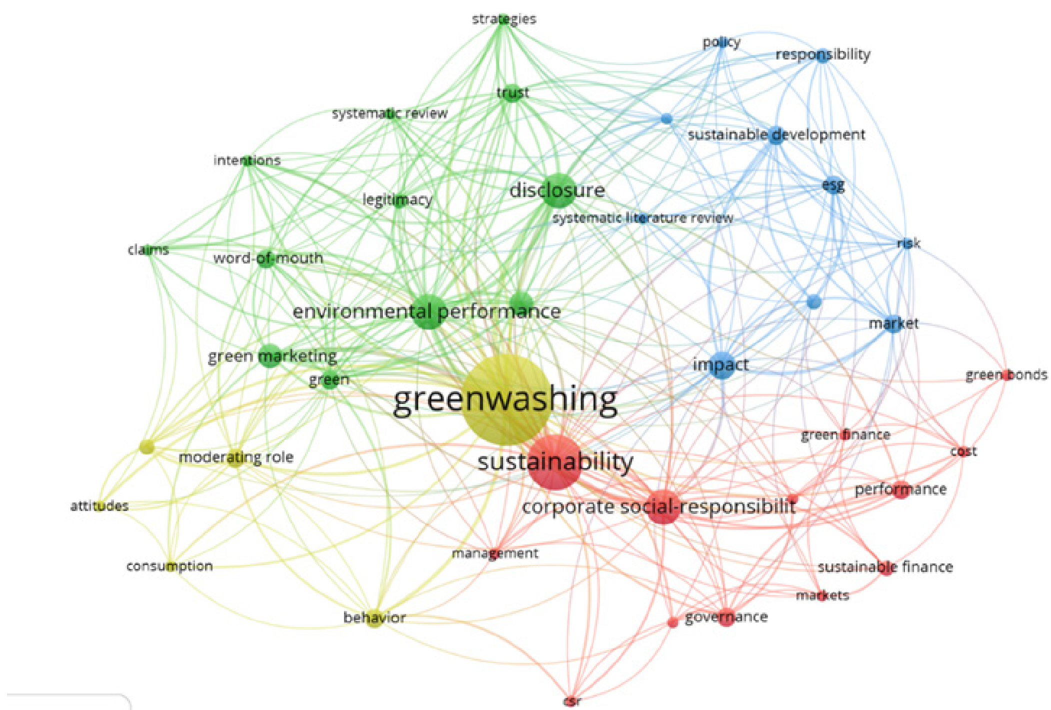


Figure 2 presents the annual distribution of articles included in this systematic review, spanning the years January 2012 to June 2024. The most relevant and up-to-date sources are predominantly from the period between 2021 and 2024. Specifically, 28 of the cited materials are from the 2020s. It is particularly noteworthy that over 70% of the 40 articles cited in this review were published within the last three years (2021-2024). This trend reflects a substantial increase in research activity and a growing interest in the study of greenwashing during this recent period. The heightened focus on this topic in the past few years underscores its rising importance and relevance in the academic and research communities.

Figure 2

Network map of Keywords



Source: Web of Science (2024)

Findings

Descriptive Finding

The review incorporates only 40 journal articles, out of the total literature examined. Table 1 exhibits the distribution of the peer-reviewed articles, published in various journals from 2012 to 2024, which were included in this study. A significant portion of the literature on greenwashing and its related themes was published in the International Journal of Sustainability, accounting for 15% (6 articles) during the years 2022-2023. The predominant methodology employed was quantitative, specifically surveys, representing 50% (32 articles) of the studies (see Table 2). Figure 3 illustrates a notable upward trend in scholarly research on greenwashing within the hospitality sector over the past decade.

Table 1

Published article distribution in peer reviewed journal

Name of Journal	Articles	(%)
Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration	1	2.5
British Food Journal	1	2.5
Business Ethics, Env & Resp.	1	2.5
Business Strategy and the Environment	2	5
Cultural Management	1	2.5
Environment, Development and Sustainability	1	2.5
Finance research letters	1	2.5
Industrial Marketing Management	1	2.5
International Journal of Advertising	1	2.5
International Journal of Business and Information	1	2.5
International Journal of Consumer Studies	1	2.5
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	3	7.5
International journal of hospitality management	2	5
International Marketing management	1	2.5
Journal of Advertising	1	2.5
Journal of Business Economics and Management,	1	2.5
Journal of Business Ethics	4	10
Journal of cleaner production	2	5
Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research	2	5
Journal of Management and Governance	1	2.5
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	1	2.5
Marketing intelligence and planning	1	2.5
Spanish journal of marketing	1	2.5
Sustainability	6	15
Total Quality Management & Business Excellence	1	2.5
Tourism Management	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Greenwashing in hospitality industry

Figure 3

Published literature distribution and trend between the years 2012 and 2024

Spanish journal of marketing	1	2.5
Sustainability	6	15
Total Quality Management & Business Excellence	1	2.5
Tourism Management	1	2.5
Total	**40**	**100**

Greenwashing in hospitality industry

Figure 3

Published literature distribution and trend between the years 2012 and 2024

Table 2

Methodology analysis of reviewed literatures

Approach	Research Design	No of Documents
Quantitative Research Designs	Correlational Research	3
	Descriptive/ Cross sectional Research	18
	Experimental Research:	5
	Longitudinal research design	4
	Systematic literature review	1
	Quasi-experimental design	1
Qualitative Research Designs	Phenomenological Research	2
Mixed Method	Explanatory Sequential Design	2
	Exploratory Sequential Design	4

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Discussion

Trust and Consumer Behavior: Greenwashing significantly influences consumer trust and behavior, notably in marketing and the hospitality industry. According to Gupta et al. (2019), consumer trust is mainly derived from personal experiential values, and effective communication of green initiatives strengthens this trust. However, greenwashing can greatly damage trust, as shown by (Papagiannakis et al., 2024), who observed that decreased trustworthiness leads to lower firm sales. Majeed & Kim (2023) also found that customer perceptions of greenwashing, influenced by hotel operators' green efforts, play a crucial role in shaping customer behavior, with their green attitudes acting as a moderator. The effects of greenwashing also negatively impact customer satisfaction and loyalty, which diminish the trustworthiness of the customers. Ioannou et al. (2023) highlighted that perceived greenwashing negatively affects customer satisfaction, although a firm's reputation for capability can help mitigate these adverse effects. Greenwashing reduces trust and can negatively affect patronage intentions (Alyahia et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2018). It damages brand reputation by lowering perceived environmental performance and increasing perceived risk (Santos et al., 2023).

Consumer Perceptions and Marketing Strategies: Clear communication and marketing strategies are essential in shaping how consumers perceive green initiatives. (Bernard et al., 2024) discovered that using precise, restriction-based language in sustainability messages can lessen perceived greenwashing and boost consumer acquisition rates. Similarly, Santos et al. (2021) developed a framework to assess greenwashing in the hotel industry, highlighting the importance of honest and straightforward communication. Szabo & Webster (2021) found that past experiences with deceptive marketing can lead consumers to see even genuine green marketing as greenwashing, emphasizing the need for transparency and consistency to earn and keep consumer trust. Greenwashing leads to consumer confusion, skepticism, and perceived risk, reducing trust in green products (Aji & Sutikno, 2015)000 self-described "green" or eco-friendly products, one organization [TerraChoice, 2010] found that all but one of the products exhibited some form of greenwashing. "Greenwashing" is a type of spin in which public relations or marketing is used deceptively to promote the perception that a company and its products or services are environmentally safe or "friendly." This study examined the construct of perceived consumer skepticism as the extended consequence of greenwashing, thus extending the study by Chang and Chen [2013], which examined the link between greenwashing and green trust, with a view to the extended and final consequences. The authors of the current study formulated 10 hypotheses, developed a structural model with six variables, and tested the relationships in the model using a purposive sampling technique that involved an online and offline survey of a sample of green consumers in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This study found that greenwashing has a positive association with green consumer skepticism (GCC. Consumers' green purchasing intentions are negatively impacted by perceived greenwashing, which also leads to negative green word-of-mouth (Zhang et al., 2018)green marketing is becoming an important approach for firms to gain a competitive advantage. However, green marketing decoupled from substantive action tends to be perceived as greenwashing by consumers. Compared to a large body of green marketing research, little work has focused on consumers' greenwashing perceptions and its associated consequences. Thus, based on the attitude-behaviour-context theory, this study explored whether and how consumers' greenwashing perceptions influence their green purchasing intentions by integrating the mediating role of green word-of-mouth (WOM False greenwashing claims have the most detrimental impact on consumer beliefs, while vague claims are least negative (Bladt et al., 2024)greenwashing (GW.

Industry-Specific Insights: Different industries face unique challenges and exhibit varying levels of greenwashing and associated consumer reactions. For instance, Koseoglu et al. (2021) verified the signaling theory but rejected the tendency for greenwashing within the hospitality sector, indicating a complex landscape where genuine efforts are often scrutinized. Montero-Navarro et al. (2021)food industry and food retail. Design/methodology/approach: A bibliometric analysis was performed over 351 documents extracted from the WoS database, using SciMAT and VOSviewer software programs. Findings: Three periods in the academic literature about greenwashing can be distinguished: ground-setting (2003–2010 identified three distinct periods in greenwashing research, highlighting the need for further development in agriculture, the food industry, and food retail. Workforce diversity matters in the level of greenwash practices of any organization. Poveda-Pareja et al. (2024) in their study focused that, workforce diversity positively affects corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices and enhances bottom-line effects in tourism accommodations, suggesting that diverse workforces can mitigate greenwashing tendencies.

Moderating Factors : Several moderating factors influence the impact of greenwashing on marketing especially consumer behavior. Zhao et al. (2024) not all organizations follow the environmentally friendly rules as they claim. The term of greenwashing is applied to organizations that exaggerate their efforts in protecting the environment and provide misleading information about the greenness of their service. Employees may undertake unethical pro-organizational behaviors (e.g., greenwashing in his study emphasized that a high ethical climate in hotels can reduce the likelihood of greenwashing by employees. Furthermore, the study by (K. Zhang et al., 2023) revealed that environmental subsidies and political connections significantly influence the relationship between environmental performance and greenwashing. Patriotic influences also play a role, as Guo et al. (2018) found that Chinese consumers are particularly critical of greenwashing due to these influences. The overall consumer behavior response to greenwashing includes increased environmental concerns and a propensity to seek sustainable information, as noted by Lopes et al. (2023), which ultimately affects circular consumption intentions. Green authenticity and transparency can moderate the negative impact of greenwashing on trust (Alyahia et al., 2024)posing significant challenges and potential reputational damage to green hotels. Despite its prevalence, research on mitigating greenwashing's influence on guest trust and behavior remains limited. This study addresses this gap by investigating the moderating roles of green authenticity (GA. These moderating factor can be further tested in various area of study.

Mitigation and Rebuilding Trust: Restoring trust following incidents of greenwashing requires deliberate strategies centered on transparency and authenticity. According to Guo et al. (2018), the legitimacy of a green brand plays a mediating role in rebuilding trust, suggesting that companies can regain consumer confidence through strategic branding efforts. Alyahia et al. (2024)posing significant challenges and potential reputational damage to green hotels. Despite its prevalence, research on mitigating greenwashing's influence on guest trust and behavior remains limited. This study addresses this gap by investigating the moderating roles of green authenticity (GA highlight that genuine and transparent green practices can lessen the adverse effects of greenwashing, underlining the importance of honest and clear communication about environmental initiatives. Additionally, Neureiter et al. (2023) point out that making specific compensation claims for previous greenwashing can enhance brand perception and purchase intentions. This indicates that recognizing past errors and implementing corrective measures can aid in reestablishing consumer trust and loyalty.

Moderator's effect on greenwashing

The Role of Environmental Concern : Environmental concern consistently emerges as a crucial moderator in the relationship between greenwashing and marketing especially consumer trust and preferences. Gupta et al. (2019) and Majeed & Kim (2023) both demonstrate that individuals with high environmental concern are more sensitive to greenwashing practices. Gupta et al. (2019) specifically note that clear communication of green initiatives significantly enhances trust among environmentally conscious guests. Similarly, Majeed & Kim (2023) highlight that green attitudes play an intervening role, shaping customer perceptions and behaviors in response to greenwashing. These findings underscore the need for businesses to target and communicate effectively with environmentally concerned consumers to mitigate the negative impacts of greenwashing.

Transparency and Authenticity as Mitigating Factors : Transparency and authenticity are pivotal in reducing the adverse effects of greenwashing. Alyahia et al. (2024)posing significant challenges and potential reputational damage to green hotels. Despite its prevalence, research on mitigating greenwashing's influence on guest trust and behavior remains limited. This study addresses this gap by investigating the moderating roles of green authenticity (GA emphasize that increasing perceptions of green authenticity and transparency can significantly reduce the negative influence of greenwashing on consumer trust and patronage intentions. This aligns with Neureiter et al. (2023), who found that concrete compensation claims positively impact brand evaluation and purchase intentions, suggesting that clear, honest communication about corrective actions can rebuild trust. These studies collectively highlight that maintaining transparency and authenticity is essential for companies aiming to recover from greenwashing scandals and restore consumer confidence.

Communication and marketing : The language used in sustainability communication plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions. The effectiveness of communication strategies underscores the importance of carefully crafting messages that accurately reflect a company's green initiatives. Bernard et al. (2024) reveal that restriction-based language in sustainability communications is more effective than broad-based language in reducing perceived greenwashing and increasing booking intentions. This finding suggests that precise, specific language in marketing materials can help mitigate skepticism and enhance perceived environmental performance.

Internal Organizational Factors : Internal organizational factors such as ethical climate and psychological contract fulfillment also influence greenwashing behaviors. Zhao et al. (2024)not all organizations follow the environmentally friendly rules as they claim. The term of greenwashing is applied to organizations that exaggerate their efforts in protecting the environment and provide misleading information about the greenness of their service. Employees may undertake unethical pro-organizational behaviors (e.g., greenwashing indicate that a high ethical climate within a company can reduce the likelihood of employees engaging in greenwashing, despite the potential for moral disengagement triggered by psychological contract fulfillment. This perspective highlights the role of internal governance and ethical standards in preventing greenwashing practices.

Guo et al. (2018b) found that national pride and trust in domestic products significantly influence Chinese consumers' perceptions of greenwashing. These consumers, driven by nationalistic sentiments, are more critical of green claims, showing increased sensitivity to perceived greenwashing. This indicates that cultural and national contexts are key moderators in consumer reactions to greenwashing, affecting their trust and purchase decisions. Poveda-Pareja et al. (2024) found that workforce nationality diversity positively influences Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices in tourism accommodations, leading to more innovative and authentic initiatives. This diversity serves as a moderating factor, enhancing the effectiveness of CSR efforts and reducing greenwashing

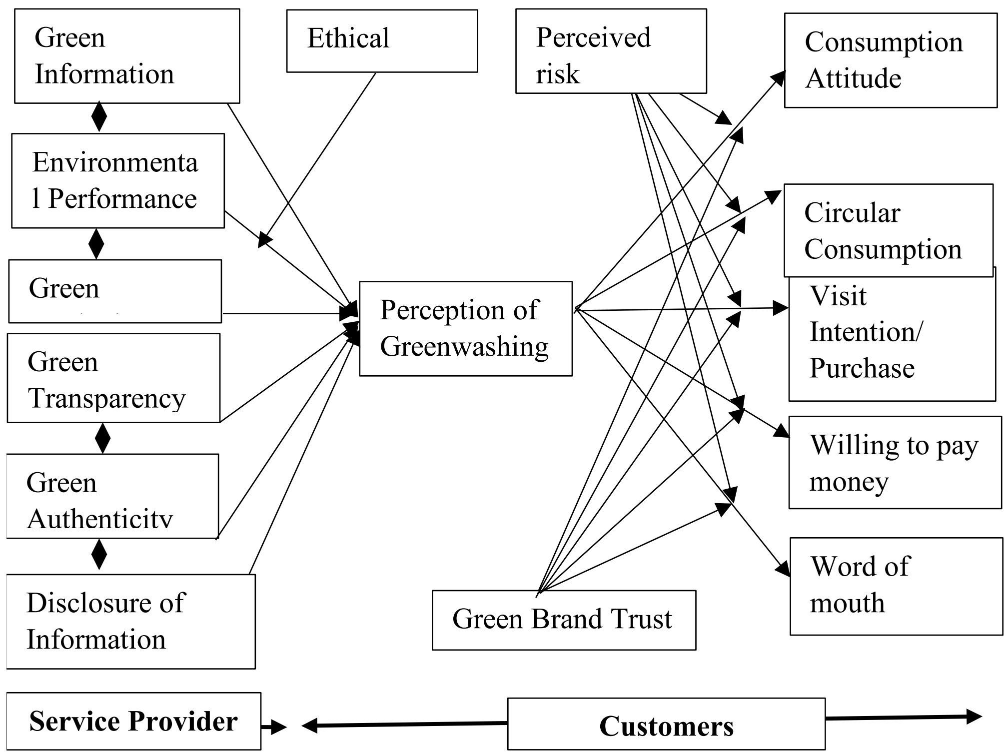
Conceptual model of greenwashing practices

Based on the findings presented in this review, a conceptual model is depicted in Figure 4. This model illustrates how suppliers within the hospitality industry, such as hotels and tourism services, can impact customer perceptions of greenwashing through various mechanisms. These perceptions, in turn, influence customers' green behaviors, including their consumption attitudes, trust levels, intentions to revisit, willingness to pay a premium, and word-of-mouth endorsements. The relationship between customer perceptions of greenwashing and their green behaviors is moderated by their perceived risk and overall green attitudes.

In the context of marketing and communication, green marketing can leverage green communication strategies, such as sharing operators' green knowledge, disclosing environmental information, making resource conservation claims, and obtaining environmental certifications, to affect customer perceptions of greenwashing. The conceptual model is divided into two main components: the service provider side and the customer side. This division highlights that customer perceptions of greenwashing and the subsequent green behaviors are influenced by green initiatives and activities promoted through various channels.

Figure 4

Conceptual model of consumer perception towards greenwashing



Source: Author's creation (2024)

Theoretical Contributions

This study significantly enhances the understanding of greenwashing by demonstrating that market forces, alongside institutional efforts, can effectively reduce greenwashing. The findings of the study conducted by Papagiannakis et al. (2024) indicate that reputational and litigation risks act as powerful market-based incentives for businesses, especially in the tourism and hospitality sectors, to substantiate their CSR claims. This dual mechanism approach integrates market dynamics into the theoretical framework for curbing greenwashing, thus broadening the scope of existing greenwashing theories.

Furthermore, Koseoglu et al. (2021) in their study introduces a novel theoretical perspective on CSR credibility enhancement. The finding suggest that Hospitality & Tourism (H&T) managers can bolster the credibility of their CSR initiatives through internal checks and independent assurance services. This proposition highlights the importance of both regulatory policies and voluntary business practices in ensuring credible CSR reporting, thereby extending the current literature on CSR practices.

The insights from the research of Koseoglu et al. (2021) could also inform the development of sector-specific CSR reporting supplements by organizations such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). This contribution underscores the necessity of tailored reporting standards that address industry-specific challenges and practices, enriching the theoretical frameworks that guide CSR reporting across different sectors. Additionally, the study opens new theoretical avenues by suggesting that combined CSR practices may influence organizational performance, customer loyalty, brand building, and competitive positioning. This encourages further exploration into the interconnectedness of CSR activities and business outcomes.

By constructing a moderated mediation model, the study done by Xiao et al. (2022) advances the theoretical understanding of greenwashing's impact on consumer behavior. It reveals that brand hypocrisy mediates the relationship between greenwashing and brand avoidance, with CSR corporate ability (CSR-CA) belief acting as a moderator. This nuanced explanation of the conditions under which greenwashing leads to negative consumer responses extends existing greenwashing theories. Moreover, the study of Guo et al. (2018b) contributes to the literature on trust repair by identifying optimal strategies for green brand trust repair following greenwashing incidents, employing institutional theory and the organizational trust repair model.

Lastly, the study's exploration of the relationship between greenwashing, corporate reputation, and brand hate through a comprehensive theoretical framework based on signaling theory and expectancy violation theory (C. Santos et al., 2023) offers a robust foundation for future research. This framework explains the complex interrelationships between greenwashing, perceived environmental performance, and green perceived risk, providing a nuanced understanding of how greenwashing can lead to negative consumer perceptions and brand hate (C. Santos et al., 2023).

Practical Contributions

The study offers practical implications for policymakers, industry leaders, and retailers aiming to counteract greenwashing. By highlighting the effectiveness of both market mechanisms and institutional regulations, the research suggests actionable strategies for reducing greenwashing through enhanced accountability and transparency measures (Papagiannakis et al., 2024). It emphasizes that H&T managers can improve the credibility of their CSR initiatives through internal checks and independent assurance services, and policymakers might mandate or recommend such practices to ensure more reliable CSR reporting (Koseoglu et al., 2021).

Insights from this study could assist organizations like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) in developing sector-specific supplements. These tailored reporting standards would enhance the accuracy and reliability of CSR practices and reporting within specific industries, providing practical guidance for businesses to improve their sustainability disclosures (Guo et al.,2018b & Lopes et al., 2023). Additionally, the research provides practical guidance on trust repair processes following greenwashing exposures. By identifying optimal strategies for green brand trust repair, the study offers actionable recommendations for corporations to restore consumer trust and mitigate reputational damage.

The study also provides valuable insights into how greenwashing influences consumer behavior and sustainable practices, offering practical implications for companies and policymakers in shaping effective circular economy strategies. By understanding how greenwashing impacts consumer actions, businesses can develop more reliable sustainability claims and marketing strategies that foster consumer trust and promote sustainable consumption (Pimonenko et al., 2020)stakeholders try to invest in green companies and projects; consumers prefer to buy eco-friendly products instead of traditional ones; and consumers and investors refuse to deal with unfair green companies. In this case, the companies should quickly adapt their strategy corresponding to the new trend of transformation from overconsumption to green consumption. This process leads to increasing the frequency of using greenwashing as an unfair marketing instrument to promote the company's green achievements. Such companies' behavior leads to a decrease in trust in the company's green brand from the green investors. Thus, the aim of the study is to check the impact of greenwashing on companies' green brand. For that purpose, the partial least-squares structural equation modeling (PLS-PM. Lastly, the findings highlight practical steps for industry leaders to counteract the negative effects of greenwashing on consumer behavior, particularly within the hospitality sector, by maintaining customer loyalty and mitigating adverse effects on repurchasing intentions.

Future research Directions

After the review of various literatures, it was found that there are various unexplored area related to greenwashing practices which can be researched in future. Future research on greenwashing highlights several key areas for further investigation and advancement. The primary focus is on methodological innovation (Yang et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2024), advocating for the adoption of more diverse and rigorous approaches. This includes the utilization of longitudinal studies to monitor changes over time, field experiments to reflect real-world scenarios, and incentive-compatible methods (Szabo & Webster, 2021) such as real choice experiments or experimental auctions. These methodologies are expected to provide deeper insights into the complex nature of greenwashing and its implications across various contexts and industries.

There is also a growing consensus on the necessity of comparative analysis. Researchers emphasize the importance of studies that encompass multiple countries (S. ur Rahman & Nguyen-Viet, 2023), industries (Bladt et al., 2024), and cultural settings (Ha et al., 2022) to discern how greenwashing perceptions differ. Comparative research can reveal subtleties that single-context studies might miss, thereby enriching the global understanding of greenwashing dynamics. Moreover, it is recommended to extend research beyond traditional sectors such as hospitality and tourism, to include areas like food service, sustainable fashion, and corporate social responsibility.

Future research should also investigate the roles of moderators and mediators in influencing greenwashing outcomes (Qayyum et al., 2023). Elements such as brand credibility (Aji & Sutikno, 2015), environmental knowledge (Ha et al., 2022; Aji & Sutikno, 2015), and consumer attitudes are crucial in shaping perceptions and reactions to greenwashing. Analyzing these variables will help uncover the mechanisms driving consumer behavior and aid in developing strategies to effectively address greenwashing.

Additionally, there is increasing emphasis on education and regulation as means to combat greenwashing. Future studies should explore solution-oriented strategies that enhance awareness, establish regulatory frameworks, and promote certification schemes to reduce the occurrence and impact of greenwashing. Overall, research in this field should strive for comprehensive and inclusive analyses. By adopting varied methodologies, examining diverse contexts and industries, and incorporating the perspectives of different stakeholders, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of greenwashing and develop effective strategies to combat this pervasive issue.

Conclusion

The findings illustrates that the multifaceted nature of greenwashing and the significant impact of various moderators. Environmental concern, transparency, authenticity, and communication strategies are critical in shaping consumer responses to greenwashing. Additionally, internal organizational factors play a crucial role in either complicating or mitigating greenwashing behaviors. For businesses, understanding and addressing these moderators is essential for building and maintaining consumer trust in their green marketing efforts. By focusing on these key areas, companies can navigate the complex landscape of green marketing and establish more sustainable and trust-based relationships with their customers.

In addition to this, the reviewed studies highlights the importance of transparency, authenticity, and clear communication in reducing the negative effects of greenwashing and building positive consumer relationships. While different industries have unique challenges, a common theme is maintaining consumer trust through honest and consistent green initiatives. By understanding how greenwashing impacts consumers and addressing their concerns effectively, businesses can succeed in green marketing and develop sustainable, trust-based relationships with their customers.

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Priorities of Health Issues in Periodic Plans of Nepal

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Abstract

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The concepts of the economic planning in Nepal starts form the Rana regime. Rana prime minister Juddha Samsher makes a concept to apply the program for development. From the initial stage of periodic plans health has given emphasis. The paper aims to overview the health priorities in periodic plans of Nepal. From the review of the literatures and documents it is found that from the First to Fourth Plans, Nepal focused on establishing essential healthcare infrastructure such as health posts and primary healthcare centers. Maternal and child health, alongside the control of communicable diseases, formed core priorities during this phase. The Fifth to Seventh Plans emphasized expanding healthcare services into rural areas through community-based approaches, aiming to improve healthcare access and outcomes across the population. From the Eighth to Tenth Plans, Nepal underwent health sector reforms, decentralizing healthcare services and focusing on universal health coverage. The transition into the Eleventh to Thirteenth Plans aligned with global health goals, emphasizing the reduction of maternal and child mortality, combating infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, and addressing environmental health concerns such as air pollution. From Fourteenth to Sixteenth Plans, Nepal faces new challenges such as climate change impacts and COVID-19 pandemic and focus to strengthening health infrastructure, enhancing healthcare financing mechanisms, promoting health equity, and integrating mental health services into mainstream healthcare provisions. Every, periodic plans are influenced by the issues. So far, further plans should focus on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), actions to cope with climate change health impacts, health technologies and probable health emergencies.

Keywords: *Development plans, essential services, health care, programs, priorities.*

Introduction

The concept of economic planning starts during the regime of the Rana. Rana Prime Minister Juddha Samsher makes a concept to apply the program for development. From the initial stage of periodic plans, health has been given emphasis. The periodic plan in Nepal after the overthrow of Rana Regime(Poudyal, 1984). The first periodic plan was initiated in 1956.The fifteenth plan of Nepal has been completed and the sixteenth plan is being implemented. The World Health Organization is the global health guiding authority since 1948. It has suggested that emphasis should be given to preventing health problems, mother and child health for the health workforce nutrition conditions, and health research (WHO, 1967). Nepal's commitment to international conventions, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has further guided the prioritization of health issues in the periodic plans after 2000 as well.

The health sector in Nepal has been shaped significantly by the country's periodic plans, which have provided a roadmap for addressing the diverse health challenges faced by the population. Since the implementation of the first five-year plan in 1956, Nepal has witnessed a gradual evolution in its approach to health issues, reflecting both global trends and local necessities. Each subsequent plan has prioritized various aspects of public health, including maternal and child health, infectious disease control, and more recently, non-communicable diseases and mental health. Despite these efforts, the health outcomes in Nepal continue to lag, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, highlighting ongoing gaps in policy implementation and resource allocation (Dulal, 2020). The National Planning Commission is the main authority for the development plans of Nepal. It has emphasized the inclusion of health-related goals and strategies in the country's periodic plans. However, there has been criticism regarding the centralized and top-down nature of this process, which often fails to consider the unique needs of Nepal's diverse population (Limbu, 2019). Additionally, the political instability and frequent changes in government have often disrupted the continuity and effectiveness of health initiatives, further complicating the country's efforts to improve public health outcomes (Chaudhary, 2018).

The periodic plans have attempted to address these issues through various strategies, including the expansion of health services and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. However, the effectiveness of these strategies has been uneven, particularly in remote and underserved regions (Gyanwali, 2020), they are the milestone for mainstreaming gender and addressing the specific health needs of women and marginalized groups have been integrated into the plans, especially since the Ninth Plan (1997-2002). While these efforts have led to some improvements, significant challenges remain in achieving equitable access to health services for all segments of the population (Dulal, 2023). While the periodic plans of Nepal have played a crucial role in shaping the health landscape of the country, there is a need for a comprehensive review that critically analyzes the successes and shortcomings of these plans in addressing health priorities. Existing literature tends to focus on specific aspects of health policy or the performance of individual plans, without a holistic assessment of how these plans have collectively influenced health outcomes over time. The integration of evidence-based policy-making into health planning in Nepal has been identified as an area needing significant improvement. For instance, health plans are often developed using a combination of top-down and fragmented approaches, which undermines the potential for data-informed decision-making (Mirzoev et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is limited research on the implementation challenges faced at the local level, particularly in rural and remote areas, and how these challenges have impacted the overall effectiveness of health interventions. The main objective of the paper is to view the health priorities in periodic plans of Nepal.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

It is a narrative review article. The primary literature for this article were the 16 periodic plans, Nepal Health Sector Strategy 2015-2020, Nepal Health Sector Strategic Plan 2023-2030, Nepal MGDs, SDGs and related documents. Other literature was searched from different sites and database dimensions ai, BMJ, Google scholars. Along with conducting a comprehensive search of relevant literature, focusing on health priorities outlined in the periodic plans of Nepal. The keywords used were "health priorities," "periodic plans," "Nepal," and "public health policy." Studies were included if they discussed health priorities in the context of Nepal's development plans from 1956 to the latest plan. The focus was on identifying key health priorities, their evolution over time, and the factors influencing these priorities. The extracted data included the types of health issues prioritized, the rationale behind these priorities, and any shifts in policy focus across different planning periods. The review specifically focused on the five-year periodic plans of Nepal. Each plan was reviewed to identify the health-related objectives and priorities set out by the government. The plans were examined in chronological order to trace the progression and changes in health priorities over time. Special attention was given to the socio-political context in which these plans were developed, as this often influences priority setting. The final step involved synthesizing the information into a coherent narrative that reflects the evolution of health priorities in Nepal's periodic plans. The synthesis was organized thematically to highlight the major areas of focus across different periods. The results were then reported in the form of a review paper, with detailed references to the original plans and supporting literature.

Findings and Discussion

The review of health priorities in the periodic plans of Nepal highlights several key themes, reflecting the country's evolving public health focus. Analyzing these plans reveals a consistent emphasis on addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which have become a major public health concern in recent years. Sapkota et al. (2022) highlight that while the burden of NCDs is increasingly recognized in policy documents; there is still a notable gap in the control of risk factors, indicating a need for more robust and preventive strategies.

First to fourth periodic plan (1956-1975)

It was the initial stage of the planning. During the first to fourth periodic plans in Nepal, spanning from 1956 to 1975, health priorities were primarily shaped by the country's need to address fundamental healthcare challenges amidst its developmental efforts. The First Five-Year Plan (1956-1961) marked the initiation of a structured approach to national development, with a focus on establishing basic healthcare infrastructure, including hospitals and health posts, to improve maternal and child health services (Kirdar, 1966). This plan laid the foundation for subsequent health interventions, emphasizing preventive measures against prevalent diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis, which were major public health concerns during that period. It also gave emphasis in Health initiatives include establishing and strengthening maternity and child welfare services, promoting vaccinations, and addressing the severe shortage of trained healthcare personnel and rural health programs (GoN, National Planning Commission, 1956). The subsequent periodic plans, from the Second Plan (1962-1965), family planning program were addressed and continued through the third periodic plan (Parajuli, 2020). A key priority is training and deploying health professionals to address the severe shortage of medical personnel, ensuring that healthcare services reach underserved areas. Moreover, the plan integrates health development into broader socio-economic initiatives, recognizing the interdependence of health and overall community development Although constrained by limited resources; it marked a step toward improving accessibility to primary healthcare (GoN, National Planning Commission, 1962). Third Five-Year Plan (1965–1970) emphasizes expanding access to basic healthcare facilities, addressing endemic diseases, and improving maternal and child health. Significant attention is given to eradicating diseases such as malaria, smallpox, and leprosy, reflecting the urgency of controlling widespread public health challenges. The plan also highlights the importance of improving sanitation and expanding maternity and childcare programs. It supports for the establishment and strengthening of village health posts to provide primary healthcare services in remote areas. The development of healthcare infrastructure, such as hospitals and clinics, is integrated with training programs to address the shortage of skilled healthcare personnel. The plan underscores the need for preventive measures, such as vaccination campaigns, alongside efforts to improve public awareness about health and hygiene practices (GoN, National Planning Commission, 1965).

Likewise, Fourth Plan (1970-1975), continued to prioritize the expansion of healthcare services, particularly in rural areas where the majority of the population resided. The plans aimed to increase the number of trained healthcare personnel and improve the supply of essential medicines, reflecting a gradual shift from merely building infrastructure to enhancing the overall healthcare delivery system (Kirdar, 1966). It also sought to combat prevalent illnesses such as malaria and tuberculosis (GoN, National Planning Commission, 1970). These efforts were part of a broader strategy to integrate health improvements into national development goals, acknowledging that better health outcomes were critical to the country's socio-economic progress.

Fifth to Seventh Periodic Plans (1975-1990)

During the Fifth to Seventh Periodic Plans in Nepal (1975-1990), the health sector was progressively prioritized, reflecting the government's recognition of health as a crucial element for national development. The Fifth Plan (1975-1980) marked a significant shift towards improving rural healthcare services, emphasizing the establishment of primary healthcare facilities in underserved regions, and the focus was on controlling communicable diseases and improving maternal and child health, which were major health challenges at that time and reflecting an early understanding of the health-demography nexus (GoN, National Planning Commission, 1975). The Sixth Plan (1980-1985) continued this trajectory by aiming to expand health infrastructure and manpower, emphasizing preventive healthcare. This plan introduced the concept of basic health services and further integrated family planning into health services, reflecting a growing concern over population control (Parajuli, 2020). Also emphasized immunization as a public health priority (GoN, National Planning Commission, 1980). This period also saw an increase in the allocation of resources to the health sector; although the outcomes were often hampered by political instability and resource constraints.

The Seventh Plan (1985-1990) placed greater emphasis on improving the quality of healthcare services, particularly through community participation and marked a shift toward decentralized healthcare delivery, with a focus on district-level health services (GoN, National Planning Commission, 1985). This plan recognized the need for sustainable health programs and sought to strengthen the health system by enhancing the training of health personnel and improving service delivery mechanisms.

Eighth to Tenth Plans (1992-2007)

Health priorities in Nepal's Eighth to Tenth Periodic Plans (1992-2007) were shaped by the country's unique challenges and the evolving understanding of health needs. These plans aimed to address critical health issues, such as high maternal and child mortality rates, prevalent communicable diseases, and limited access to healthcare services. The Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-1997) prioritized child survival, maternal health, and family planning. It aimed to reduce infant and child mortality rates through initiatives like immunization and oral rehydration therapy. The plan also focused on improving maternal health services and promoting family planning to reduce unintended pregnancies and maternal mortality (GoN, National Planning Commission, 1992). In addition, the Eighth Plan recognized the importance of addressing communicable diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, and pneumonia. It aimed to improve disease surveillance, diagnosis, and treatment, as well as strengthen the healthcare system to deliver essential services to the population. The Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) continued to focus on maternal and child health, communicable diseases, and access to healthcare. It aimed to further reduce child mortality rates and improve maternal health outcomes through expanded immunization coverage, improved maternal care, and increased access to family planning services. The plan also emphasized the need to address the growing burden of non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes (GoN, National Planning Commission, 1997). It aimed to promote healthy lifestyles, improve early detection and treatment of non-communicable diseases, and strengthen the healthcare system to manage these conditions effectively. The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007) built upon the priorities of the previous plans and aimed to achieve further progress in health outcomes. It focused on reducing child mortality rates to below 50 per 1,000 live births, improving maternal health indicators, reducing the prevalence of communicable diseases, and increasing access to quality healthcare services. It prioritized HIV/AIDS prevention and the expansion of health infrastructure in remote regions (GoN, National Planning Commission, 2002). The plan also aimed to address the growing burden of non-communicable diseases and promote health equity among different population groups.

Three-year interim plan to Thirteenth Plans (2007-2016)

The health sector in Nepal has witnessed notable progress over the past few decades, with a focus on addressing critical health issues through various periodic plans. The three years interim plan (2007-2010) prioritized psychological and child health, infectious diseases, and access to essential healthcare services (Ministry of Health and Population, 2007). Significant achievements during this period included a reduction in maternal mortality rates and increased immunization coverage. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, human resource shortages, and limited access to healthcare in rural areas persisted (World Health Organization, 2012). It emphasized equitable access, particularly for women, children, and vulnerable groups (GoN, National Planning Commission, 2007).

The three years plan and Thirteenth Plan (2013-2016) aimed to further improve health outcomes by focusing on non-communicable diseases, mental health, and universal health coverage (Ministry of Health and Population, Nepal, 2013). Key strategies included strengthening primary healthcare services, promoting healthy lifestyles, and improving access to essential medicines. While progress was made in some areas, the plan faced setbacks due to the 2015 earthquake and subsequent political instability (National Planning Commission, Nepal, 2018). It built upon the previous plans by emphasizing health promotion, disease prevention, and equitable access to healthcare (Ministry of Health and Population, Nepal, 2019). It expanded health insurance schemes and emphasized reducing out-of-pocket health expenditure. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) were identified as a growing concern (GoN, National Planning Commission, 2010). It emphasized to achieve universal health coverage by 2030 through a combination of policy reforms, increased investments, and improved service delivery. However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges to the implementation of the plan, diverting resources and disrupting healthcare services (World Health Organization, 2020). A common thread running through these plans is the unwavering focus on improving maternal and child health (MCH), addressing communicable diseases, and enhancing access to essential healthcare services. Thirteenth plan prioritized universal health coverage. Investments were directed toward health technology and addressing the dual burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases (GoN, National Planning Commission, 2013).

Fourteenth to Sixteenth Plans (2016-2029)

The Fourteenth Five-Year Plan laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive approach to healthcare delivery. It prioritized reducing maternal mortality rates, improving child immunization coverage, and combating prevalent communicable diseases like tuberculosis and malaria. The Plan also emphasized the need to strengthen the primary healthcare system and increase access to essential medicines. These objectives were underpinned by a commitment to equity, ensuring that healthcare services reached the most vulnerable populations, including those living in remote and marginalized communities along with set the priority for mental health services and disaster preparedness gained prominence (GoN, National Planning Commission, 2016).

Building upon the foundations established in the Fourteenth Plan, the Fifteenth Five-Year Plan (2020-2025) further refined the health agenda. It placed a greater emphasis on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), recognizing their growing burden on the healthcare system. The Plan aimed to reduce mortality rates from cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases. It also sought to promote healthy lifestyles and improve access to preventive care services. Additionally, the Fifteenth Plan recognized the importance of mental health and included strategies to address the mental health needs of the population. It integrates health as a cornerstone of human capital development and it emphasizes digital health innovations, improving healthcare quality, and addressing health inequities (GoN, National Planning Commission, 2020). The Sixteenth Five-Year Plan (2025-2029) is poised to build upon the achievements of its predecessors and address emerging health challenges. It is expected to prioritize addressing the impact of climate change on health, including vector-borne diseases and water-borne illnesses. The plan will also focus on strengthening the health system's resilience to disasters and emergencies. Furthermore, it is likely to emphasize the integration of health services with other development sectors, such as education, agriculture, and social protection, to promote holistic well-being.

International Key players for the periodic planning

Health is a global concern subject. So, many international conferences, partners, and global organizations play a role in the planning of health activities. Nepal is a member of the United Nations. Nepal has made many commitments to international platforms (table 1).

Table 1

International key players in health planning

Periodic Plans	International key players in setting health priorities	Themes adopted in periodic planning
Forth plan (1975-1980)	Alma-Ata Declaration (1978)	Primary Health care Health for All
Eighth Periodic Plan (1992-1997)	International Conference on Population and Development ICPD (1994)	Maternal and child health, reproductive health services
Tenth Periodic Plan (2002-2007)	Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000)	Reducing child and maternal mortality, combating HIV/AIDS
Twelfth Periodic Plan (2010-2013)	World Health Organization	Universal health coverage, improving health infrastructure
Thirteenth Periodic Plan	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015)	Strengthening health systems, addressing non-communicable diseases, and achieving universal health coverage.

Table 1 shows the key players' indifferent periodic plans. It shows a comprehensive overview of the key themes and international influences that have shaped Nepal's health priorities across its periodic plans. From the foundational principles of primary healthcare outlined in the Alma-Ata Declaration to the subsequent emphasis on maternal and child health, reproductive health services, and the fight against HIV/AIDS, the table highlights the evolving focus of Nepal's health agenda. The incorporation of the Millennium Development Goals and, more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals, demonstrates the country's commitment to global health initiatives and its pursuit of universal health coverage. This historical perspective underscores the dynamic nature of Nepal's health priorities and the ongoing efforts to improve the health and well-being of its population.

Milestone of health priorities

Nepal has achieved many targets from 1956 to 2022. There is lacking of official data prior to 1996 therefore the indicators cannot mention. After the Nepal Family and Health Survey (NFHS) 1996, the data are shown below as the achievements. Here, mainly maternal and child indicators are taken as the achievements. Though there were many other indicators that were achieved, these included indicators are the major indicators that represent the health system and program situation of the country.

Table 2 shows the maternal mortality ratio of the country. It is the main indicator of the success or failure of the health programs. Since 1990 to 2015 there has been a drastic change in the maternal mortality ratio. In 1990, 850 per one lakh mothers died within 42 days of delivery while decreased in 258 per one lakh mothers. This is the drastic change in the indicator in the time frame.

Table 2

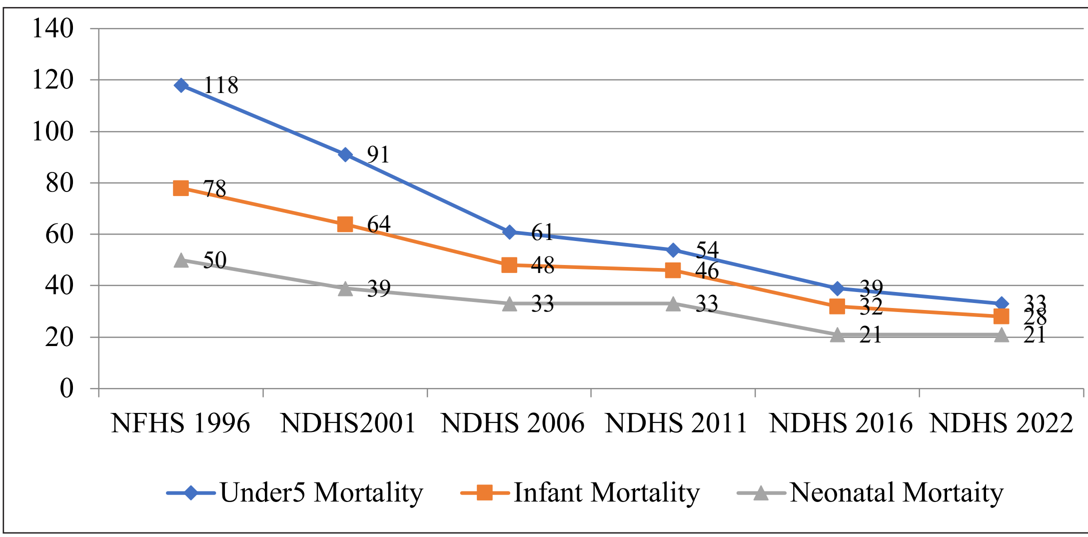
Maternal health indicator

Indicator	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015
Maternal mortality (Per 100000)	850	415	281	NA	258

Source: National Office of Statistics, 2021

Figure 1

Child health Indicators



Source: (MoHP,2022).

Figure 1 shows the situation of child health in Nepal. The mortality indicators seemed reduced from 1996 to 2022. The given indicators are in decreasing trends. It seems the issues of health addressed in periodic plans are achieving the goals of the health status. Under5 mortality rate decreased by 118 to 33 per one thousand live births from 1996 to 2022. Likewise, the infant mortality rate also decreased from 78 per thousand live births to 28 per thousand live births in this period. So does the neonatal mortality rate. It is also in decreasing trend from 50 to 21 per thousand live births in the same time frame.

The historical progression of Nepal's health sector development, as articulated in the country's periodic plans, reflects a strategic evolution aligned with global health priorities and national socio-economic needs. During the initial stages, the First to Fourth Periodic Plans laid the groundwork for structured healthcare, prioritizing maternal and child health services, vaccination programs, and addressing communicable diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis (Kirdar, 1966). The establishment of primary healthcare facilities and the training of healthcare personnel were crucial steps towards bridging the gap in healthcare accessibility in underserved areas (Parajuli, 2020). The integration of health development with broader socio-economic initiatives underscored the interdependence of community development and health outcomes. These plans also emphasized preventive care, such as vaccination campaigns, alongside efforts to expand sanitation and hygiene awareness to improve public health metrics.

The Fifth to Seventh Periodic Plans marked a shift toward rural healthcare development, with a focus on providing primary healthcare services in remote areas and addressing the growing population through integrated family planning initiatives (Parajuli, 2020). This period saw notable progress in disease control and expanded healthcare infrastructure, despite challenges posed by resource limitations and political instability. The emphasis on community participation and preventive healthcare, including the introduction of basic health services, reflected a transition towards sustainable health programs aimed at reducing child and maternal mortality rates. The prioritization of communicable disease management and training healthcare professionals further solidified the country's commitment to health equity and accessibility.
From the Eighth to Sixteenth Plans Nepal's health priorities continued to evolve in response to emerging challenges, such as non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and mental health, while maintaining a focus on maternal and child health. The incorporation of global frameworks like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into national strategies highlighted Nepal's commitment to universal health coverage and sustainable healthcare system improvements (Ministry of Health and Population, 2007). Milestones, such as reductions in maternal mortality from 850 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 258 per 100,000 by 2015, and significant declines in child mortality rates, demonstrate the efficacy of these targeted interventions (National Office of Statistics, 2021; MoHP, 2022). However, the plans also faced challenges, including infrastructure inadequacies, human resource shortages, and the impact of disasters like the 2015 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted healthcare delivery systems (World Health Organization, 2020).

Nepal's periodic plans have consistently identified key health priorities; the effectiveness of these plans has been constrained by various challenges, including inadequate policy implementation, lack of coordination among government tiers, and insufficient use of evidence in planning. Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving the health outcomes in the country and ensuring that the health priorities outlined in the plans are effectively translated into action. It indicates a need for more focused efforts on strengthening health systems, enhancing coordination, and promoting evidence-based policymaking to better align with the evolving health needs of the population.

Conclusion

The review of Nepal's periodic plans underscores the significant efforts made by the government to address the country's evolving health challenges. Over the decades, these plans have progressively incorporated a wide range of health priorities, from tackling infectious diseases to addressing the rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). However, despite these commendable efforts, several systemic challenges remain. The effectiveness of these plans has often been hampered by inconsistent policy implementation, insufficient resource allocation, and fragmented coordination between different levels of government. Moreover, while the integration of gender and social inclusion into health policies reflects a positive shift towards more equitable health outcomes, persistent socio-economic barriers continue to limit the full realization of these goals further plans should focus on NCDs, actions to cope with climate change health impacts, health care financing and health technologies. The priorities are set in the interest and the commitments of the international conventions and organizations though the emphasis in health programs and plans are guided by the health needs and indicators. Furthermore, priorities should be given to the equitable distribution of health services, health technology, and health care financing.

Limitations

This paper is developed with limited literatures and it may have covered limited information. It is an overview of the area of priorities and a small glance of the achievements.

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सावर्णि उपन्यासमा साइबरचेतना

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लेखसार

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प्रस्तुत लेख श्रीधर खनालद्वारा लिखित सावर्णि उपन्यासको अध्ययनमा केन्द्रित छ । यस उपन्यासको साइबरसमालोचनाका आधारमा विश्लेषण गरिएको छ । अध्ययनका क्रममा उपन्यासमा साइबरचेतना के कस्तो रूपमा प्रस्तुत भएको छ भनी खोज गरिएको छ । साइबर भन्नाले विद्युतीय सञ्चारको सञ्जाल भन्ने बुझिन्छ । यससँग जोडिएर आएको चेतना शब्दले व्यक्तिको भित्री ज्ञान भन्ने अर्थ बुझाउँछ । यी दुवै शब्द र अर्थलाई जोड्दा साइबरचेतना भन्नाले विद्युतीय सञ्चारको सञ्जालसँग सम्बन्धित ज्ञान भन्ने अर्थ बुझिन्छ । प्रस्तुत लेखमा यही साइबरचेतनाको खोज गरिएको छ । यस उपन्यासमा साइबरयुगको विकासले चरम अवस्था प्राप्त गरेपछि साइबर सञ्जालमा एआईको नियन्त्रण हुन लागेको अवस्थाको चित्रण गरिएको छ। यसका साथै विज्ञान तथा प्रविधिको उच्च विकास र प्रयोगका कारणले मानवनियन्त्रित समाज र मानवयुगको अन्त्य भएपछि मानिसद्वारा निष्क्रिय पारिएको एआई पुनः सक्रिय भई आफ्नै नियन्त्रणमा मानवसमाजको पुनः स्थापना गरिएको विषयवस्तु प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । गुणात्मक प्रकृतिको यस अध्ययनमा प्राथमिक सामग्रीका रूपमा सावर्णि उपन्यास रहेको छ भने द्वितीयक सामग्रीका रूपमा साइबरसमालोचनासँग सम्बन्धित पुस्तक, लेख आदि रहेका छन् । उपन्यासमा साइबरको प्रयोग के कस्तो रूपमा गरिएको छ भन्ने मुख्य समस्यामा केन्द्रित यस अध्ययनमा उपन्यासबाट खासखास अंश उद्धरण गरी व्याख्यात्मक तथा विश्लेषणात्मक विधि अवलम्बन गरेर साक्ष्यका आधारमा समस्याको समाधान खोजिएको छ । साइबरसमालोचनालाई आधार बनाएर अध्ययन गर्दा यस उपन्यासमा मानवलाई चिप्स, रोबोट आदि यन्त्रमानवद्वारा नियन्त्रण गरी राखिने समाजको परिकल्पना गरिएको र यसरी यन्त्रद्वारा नियन्त्रित हुँदा मानवको स्वअस्तित्व र मौलिक सिर्जनशील क्षमता नष्ट हुने भएकाले यसतर्फ सचेत हुनुपर्ने कथ्य रहेको पाइन्छ । यसरी उपन्यासमा यन्त्रद्वारा शासित र निर्देशित साइबरसमाजको परिकल्पना गरी नवीन विषयवस्तुलाई रोचक भाषाशैलीका माध्यमले प्रस्तुत गरिएका कारण उपन्यास साइबरचेतनाका दृष्टिले स्तरीय र सफल रहेको निष्कर्ष निकालिएको छ ।

शब्दकुञ्जी : *भूमण्डलीकरण, रोबोट, सफ्टवेयर, साइबरसंस्कृति, सावर्णि ।*

विषयपरिचय

साइबर सिद्धान्त साहित्यिक रचनाको विश्लेषण गर्ने नवीन पद्धति हो । यो उत्तरआधुनिकतावादी साहित्य सिद्धान्तमध्येको एक मुख्य सिद्धान्त हो। यसले साइबर प्रयोगका सकारात्मक र नकारात्मक दुवै पक्षमा आधारित साहित्यिक कृतिको विश्लेषण गर्दछ । यसले रोबोट, च्याट जिबिटी, एआईजस्ता शब्द र तीसँग सम्बन्धित विषय प्रयोग भएका कृतिको विश्लेषण गर्दछ । यसले विधातत्व, नारीवाद, प्रगतिवादजस्ता तत्त्व र सिद्धान्तले विश्लेषण गर्न नसक्ने साइबरमा आधारित कृतिको अध्ययन गर्दछ। नेपाली साहित्यमा साइबरलाई विषय बनाएर लेखिएका सिर्जनात्मक कृतिको सङ्ख्या थोरै रहेकाले यस आधारमा विश्लेषण गरिएका समालोचनाको सङ्ख्या पनि अति न्यून रहेको छ। साइबरलाई विषय बनाएर लेख्ने स्रष्टामध्येका एकजना श्रीधर खनाल (२०४६) हुन् । उनी पेसाले चिकित्सक भए पनि साहित्यकारका रूपमा परिचित छन्। खनालको साहित्ययात्रा 'आज मेरो कलम लेख्नै मानेन' (२०६०) शीर्षकको कविता प्रकाशन भएसँगै सुरु भएको हो। कविता र आख्यानका उपविधाहरूमा कलम चलाइरहेका खनाल सेभेन ब्ल्यु बल्स (सन् २०१२) नामक उपन्यासबाट आख्यानक्षेत्रमा प्रवेश गरेका हुन्। उनको जिपिटी २०००यु (GPT 2000Ú) (२०८०) शीर्षकको कथा 'सङ्ग्रह' नभए पनि चर्चित र उल्लेखनीय रहेको छ । सद्यःप्रकाशित उपन्यास सावर्णि (२०८१) नेपाली उपन्यासपरम्परामा उल्लेखनीय कृतिका रूपमा देखिएको छ। नवीन विषयवस्तुका कारण यो निकै चर्चित छ। उपर्युल्लिखित कृतिहरूले खनाललाई विज्ञान-आख्यान लेख्ने स्रष्टाका रूपमा चिनाएका छन् । उनका कृतिहरू विषयवस्तुका दृष्टिले नयाँ हुनाका साथै भाषाप्रयोग र शैलीशिल्पका दृष्टिले मौलिक स्वरूपका देखिएका छन्। खनालका कृतिहरूको विषयवस्तु नवीन भए पनि भाषा र कथानक सरल भएका कारण सुबोध्य छन्। उनका आख्यानका कृतिहरूमध्ये सावर्णि साइबरलाई विषय बनाई लेखिएको उपन्यास हो । करिब दुईतीन दशकअघिदेखि साइबरसंस्कृतिको विकास र विस्तार हुन लागेसँगै त्यसको प्रभाव साहित्यमा पनि परेको देखिन्छ र त्यसबाट उपन्यासकार खनाल पनि प्रभावित देखिन्छन्। खनालले सावर्णि उपन्यासमा फेसबुक, मोबाइल, मेसेन्जर, ल्यापटप, रोबोट, कृत्रिम बौद्धिकता, सफ्टवेयरजस्ता साइबरसँग सम्बन्धित शब्दावली र तिनको प्रयोगसम्बन्धी विषयसन्दर्भ प्रयोग गरी उपन्यासलाई नवीनता दिएका छन्। यसमा उनले विज्ञानको चरम उपलब्धि र त्यसले भविष्यमा निम्त्याउन सक्ने सङ्कटलाई देखाउन खोजेका छन्। यस क्रममा उनले मानवनिर्मित यन्त्रका कारण मानवकै अस्तित्व र पूरा सभ्यता नै समाप्त भएको देखाएका छन् । यसका अतिरिक्त उपन्यासमा त्यस चरम अवस्थापछि पुनः रोबोट/एआईद्वारा मानिसको जन्म गराइएको छ र उनीहरूलाई कृत्रिम मानवले नै नियन्त्रणमा राखी मानवबस्ती विस्तार गरेको काल्पनिक संसार सिर्जना गरिएको छ । यसमा यन्त्रद्वारा निर्मित मानव यन्त्रविना बाँच्न नसक्ने मानसिक अवस्थामा पुगेको देखाई भविष्यमा यस्तो अवस्था आउन सक्ने सम्भावनातर्फ सङ्केत गरिएको छ। यसप्रकार साइबरलाई विषय बनाई लेखिएकाले यो उपन्यास नवीन प्रकृतिको देखिएको छ ।

नेपाली साहित्यमा साइबर सिद्धान्तलाई आधार बनाएर अन्य कृतिको अध्ययन भए पनि सावर्णि उपन्यासको गहन अध्ययन भएको पाइँदैन । यस उपन्यासका बारेमा अनलाइन पत्रिका १२खरीमा मन्जिल सुवेदी (२०८१) ले 'एआई युगको नवीन सिर्जना 'सावर्णि'' शीर्षकको लेखमा एआईलाई आधार

बनाएर उपन्यासको छोटो टिप्पणी गरेका छन् । यसरी नै अनलाइन पत्रिका इन्सुरेन्स खबर (२०८१) मा 'एआई र रोबोटिक्समा आधारित पहिलो नेपाली उपन्यास सावर्णि' शीर्षकको लेख छापिएको छ र यसमा साइबरसँग सम्बन्धित एआई र रोबोटिक्सका आधारमा उपन्यासको चर्चा गरिएको छ तापनि साइबर सिद्धान्तलाई आधार बनाएर अनुसन्धानात्मक किसिमले अध्ययन गरिएको छैन । यस्तै किसिमले अन्य पत्रपत्रिकामा सावर्णिको सामान्य रूपमा समीक्षा गरिए पनि गहन अध्ययन नगरिएकाले सोही शोधरिक्तता पूरा गर्नका लागि यो विषयशीर्षक चयन गरिएको छ। उपन्यास साइबरका दृष्टिले महत्त्वपूर्ण भएको र साइबरचेतनाका दृष्टिले अध्ययन गरिएका कारण यसको नेपाली साहित्यमा प्राज्ञिक महत्त्व रहने विश्वास गरिएको छ ।

अध्ययनविधि र विश्लेषण

यस अध्ययनमा सामग्री सङ्कलनको मुख्य स्रोत पुस्तकालय रहेको छ । यसमा गृहीत उपन्यास सावर्णि प्राथमिक सामग्रीका रूपमा रहेको छ। साइबर र साइबरसाहित्यका बारेमा उल्लेख गरिएका लेख, पुस्तकादि सामग्री द्वितीयक स्रोतका रूपमा रहेका छन् । यसरी प्रस्तुत अध्ययनमा दुवै स्रोतका सामग्री प्रयोग गरिएको छ। गुणात्मक प्रकृतिको यस अध्ययनमा व्याख्यात्मक एवं विश्लेषणात्मक विधि अवलम्बन गरिएको छ । उपन्यास विश्लेषणका लागि साइबर समालोचनाका मान्यतालाई आधार बनाइएको छ र पुस्तकबाट खासखास अंश साक्ष्यका रूपमा उद्धरण गरी विश्लेषणबाट प्राप्त हुने नतिजालाई प्रामाणिक बनाइएको छ । विश्लेषणका लागि 'एआईको विकासले प्रभावित वर्तमान मानवसमाज' र 'एआईद्वारा पूर्ण नियन्त्रित स्वैरकाल्पनिक मानवसमाज' गरी एआईचेतनासँग सम्बन्धित दुईवटा सूचकलाई आधार बनाइएको छ । कृतिको अध्ययनपछि साइबरचेतनासंबद्ध विशेषता ठम्याइएकाले यसमा आगमनात्मक विधिका साथै निगमनात्मक विधि पनि अवलम्बन गरिएको छ ।

विश्लेषणको सैद्धान्तिक पर्याधार

समालोचनाका नवप्रवर्तित सिद्धान्तहरूमध्ये साइबर समालोचना एक मुख्य सिद्धान्त हो । यो उत्तरआधुनिकतावादभित्र विकसित सिद्धान्तअन्तर्गत पर्दछ । यस समालोचनाले साइबरसँग सम्बन्धित र प्रविधिसंस्कृतिमा आधारित साहित्यिक कृतिको विश्लेषण गर्दछ। यसलाई अङ्ग्रेजीमा साइबर क्रिटिसिज्म भनिन्छ। साइबर शब्द अङ्ग्रेजी भए पनि यो नेपालीमा प्रयोग हुँदै आएको छ। यो समालोचना सञ्चारका क्षेत्रमा भएको अत्याधुनिक विकासले मानवसमाजमा पारेको प्रभावका कारण जन्मेको र विस्तार भएको हो । यसकारण यसको अस्तित्ववाद, विसङ्गतिवाद आदि वादहरूको जस्तो दार्शनिक आधार रहेको पाइँदैन । दार्शनिक आधार नभए पनि यो विज्ञान र प्रविधिका कारण बदलिएको सभ्यता र समाजको अध्ययन गर्न सक्षम सिद्धान्त हो। यो समालोचना दोस्रो विश्वयुद्धपछि सूचना तथा सञ्चारका क्षेत्रमा आएको तीव्र र उच्च प्रविधिको विकाससँगै जन्मेको हो । विद्युतीय सूचना सञ्जालको विकास भएपछि त्यसको असर समाजका विविध क्षेत्रका साथै साहित्यमा पनि परेको हो । यस समालोचनाको थालनी र विस्तार

खास गरी सन् १९८० का दशकपछि मात्र भएको हो ।

साइबर समालोचना विश्वव्यापी सञ्जालमा आधारित संस्कृतिको अध्ययन गर्ने समालोचना हो । विश्वव्यापी सञ्जालमा आधारित, कम्प्युटरद्वारा उत्पादित, कम्प्युटरमा निर्भर र कम्प्युटरबाटै पहुँच हुन सक्ने विश्वव्यापी बहु आयामिक परोक्ष यथार्थमा आधारित संस्कृतिलाई साइबर संस्कृति भनिन्छ र यसअन्तर्गत साइबर दिक्, प्रविधि संस्कृति, परोक्ष समुदाय, परोक्ष यथार्थता, परोक्ष पहिचानहरू, परोक्ष दिक्, यन्त्र मानव, साइबर विज्ञान, साइबर आकृतिहरू आदि पर्दछन् (गिलिस, सन् २००७ : २०२) । यो संस्कृति विद्युतीय सञ्चारअन्तर्गत विश्वव्यापी सञ्जालले निर्माण गरेको संस्कृति हो । यो भूमण्डलीकरण वा विश्वग्रामसँग सम्बन्धित भएकाले यसले स्थान र समयलाई नजिक्याउँछ (पौड्याल, २०७०, पृ.४३) । साइबर संस्कृति टेलिभिजन, कम्प्युटर, इन्टरनेट आदि सूचना सञ्जाल वा सञ्चार प्रविधिसँग सम्बन्धित छ अनि यस समालोचनाले सोही संस्कृतिमा आधारित कृतिको अध्ययन गर्दछ ।

कम्प्युटर प्रविधिले पारेको प्रभाव, भूमण्डलीकरण, इमेल-इन्टरनेटको प्रभाव, यन्त्रबाट सबै काम गर्नेगराउने प्रविधि (गौतम, २०६७, पृ.३९२) आदिको प्रभाव सिर्जनामा देखिन थालेपछि यस नवीन विषयको अध्ययनका लागि साइबर समालोचनाको आवश्यकता परेको हो र त्यसैले यसलाई जन्माएको हो । यस कुराबाट यो सूचनाप्रविधिमा आधारित सिद्धान्त हो भन्ने बुझिन्छ । सूचनाप्रविधि भन्नाले कुनै उत्पादित वस्तुको ग्रहणीय स्थानसम्म पुऱ्याउने पद्धति भन्ने बुझिन्छ । यस्ता पद्धतिअन्तर्गत रेडियो, टेलिभिजन, उपग्रह, क्यासेट, मोबाइल, मल्टीप्लेक्स, सिनेमाघर, भिडियो, नेट, वेब, फेसबुक आदि माध्यम पर्दछन् (थापा, २०६७ : ३७२, ३७९) । साइबरले मुख्यतः इन्टरनेटसँग सम्बन्धित विद्युतीय सञ्चारको सञ्जाललाई बुझाउँदछ (शर्मा, २०६८ : पृ. उल्लेख नभएको) । इन्टरनेट वा साइबरका क्षेत्रमा प्रयोग हुने एउटा महत्त्वपूर्ण शब्द साइबरपङ्क हो । यसले पहिला कम्प्युटर कार्यक्रमको चोरी र सूचनाक्षेत्रमा आतङ्क ल्याउने व्यक्तिलाई जनाउँथ्यो । पछि यसले रक सङ्गीतलाई बुझाउन थाल्यो । साहित्यमा प्रयोग हुन थालेपछि यसले विज्ञान-आख्यानको एक उपविधालाई बुझाउन थाल्यो । विज्ञान-आख्यानमा प्रयुक्त हुने अर्को शब्द साइबोर्ग हो । यसले मेसिनतत्त्वले गर्दा मानिसको अधीनभन्दा बाहिरको अनि मानव र मेसिनको मिश्रित अस्तित्व भएको काल्पनिक र औपन्यासिक पात्रलाई बुझाउँछ ।

प्रविधिको विकासका कारण संस्कृतिका क्षेत्रमा भएका परिवर्तनहरूलाई साइबर संस्कृतिले बुझाउँछ र यस संस्कृतिको विश्लेषण साइबर समालोचनाले गर्दछ । यसले कृतिमा वर्णित परोक्ष समुदाय र साइबर संस्कृतिको नयाँ विद्युतीय भूगोलसँग सम्बन्धित साइबर दिक् आदि विविध पक्षको अध्ययन गर्दछ । साइबर दिक् भनेको कम्प्युटरका पर्दापछाडि रहने र विद्युतीय सन्देश आदि कम्प्युटरका माझ पठाउने काल्पनिक स्थान हो (शर्मा, २०६८ : पृ. उल्लेख नभएको) । यस समालोचनाले सोही परोक्ष यथार्थ जीवनको अध्ययन गर्दछ । परोक्ष यथार्थ भनेको सत्य वा यथार्थ नभई सत्यको प्रतिकृति अर्थात् यथार्थको यान्त्रिक नक्कल हो र परोक्ष यथार्थसँग सम्बन्धित कृतिमा मानिसले गर्ने शारीरिक कार्यदेखि सम्झने बिर्सनेजस्ता मानसिक कार्य पनि यन्त्रले गर्दछ (भट्टराई, २०६४ : ६६) । यस समालोचनाले कृतिमा वर्णन गरिएका वा विषय बनाइएका सञ्चार तथा प्रविधिमा आधारित सबै पक्षको अध्ययन गर्दछ । यसले

मानिसद्वारा बनाइएका प्रविधि र प्रविधिका नियन्त्रणमा रहेका मानिससम्मको अध्ययन गर्दछ । यसले कृतिमा प्रस्तुत भएको परोक्ष अर्थात् भर्चुअल रियालिटीका साथै प्राविधिक उपकरण र तिनको प्रयोग तथा परोक्ष मानवसमुदाय वा सभ्यताको अध्ययन गर्दछ (पौड्याल, २०७०, पृ. १४४) । यसले एकतर्फ कृतिभित्र विषयवस्तुका रूपमा साइबर संस्कृतिलाई कुन रूपमा के कसरी प्रयोग गरिएको छ भन्ने कुराको अध्ययन गर्दछ भने अर्कातर्फ साहित्यिक रचनालाई सम्प्रेषण वा प्रसार गर्ने माध्यमका रूपमा साइबरले गरेको कार्यको अध्ययन गर्दछ (अधिकारी, २०७९, पृ. ८८) । कृतिमा कार्यलाई जनाउनका लागि साइबारसँग सम्बन्धित विविध शब्दावली प्रयोग भएका हुन्छन् । साइबर संस्कृतिमा आधारित कृतिमा पात्रले सजिलै प्रयोग गर्ने मोबाइल, मेसेन्जर, फेसबुक आदि साइबर प्रयोगसम्बन्धी सरल कुरा पनि आएका हुन्छन् र सजिलै प्रयोग गर्न र बुझ्न नसकिने यन्त्रमानव र उसका उच्च प्रविधि र चामत्कारिक कार्यसँग सम्बद्ध जटिल प्रयोगहरू पनि आएका हुन्छन् (भट्टराई, २०६४, पृ. ७५) । साइबर समालोचनाले ती सबै पक्षको अध्ययन गर्दछ । सावर्णिमा साइबरका सरल पक्षको भन्दा बढी जटिल पक्षको प्रयोग भएको छ र यसको विश्लेषणका लागि साइबर समालोचनाको पद्धति नै उपयुक्त भएकाले प्रस्तुत अध्ययनमा यसैलाई आधार बनाएर उपन्यासको विश्लेषण गरिएको छ ।

विमर्श र परिणाम

नेपाली उपन्यासका क्षेत्रमा साइबर प्रयोगका दृष्टिले श्रीधर खनालद्वारा लेखिएको सावर्णि महत्त्वपूर्ण उपन्यास हो । यसमा साइबर प्रयोगसम्बन्धी वर्तमान अवस्थालाई विषय बनाइनाका साथै स्वैरकल्पनाको प्रयोग गरी भविष्यको पनि आकलन गरिएको छ । प्रस्तुत उपन्यासमा मानवले क्रमिक रूपमा एआई, रोबोट आदि उच्च प्रविधिको प्रयोग/उपयोग गर्दै गएका खण्डमा भविष्यमा मानिस आफूले बनाएका प्रविधिका अधीनमा बस्न पर्ने दिन आउन सक्ने कुराको सङ्केत गरिएको छ। उपन्यासको विषयवस्तुका साथै भाषा पनि साइबरसँग सम्बन्धित छ, जस्तै : आर्टिफिसियल इन्टेलिजेन्स, इन्फर्मेसन, इमेल, एड्रेस, एप, गुगल, डाउनलोड, रोबोट, लगिन आदि । प्रस्तुत विषयवस्तु र भाषाका सन्दर्भबाट सावर्णि उच्च प्रविधि प्रयोग भएको साइबरउपन्यास हो भन्ने बुझिन्छ । उपन्यासमा आजको मान्छे मोबाइल र कम्प्युटरका माध्यमबाट क्रमशः एआई, रोबोटजस्ता यन्त्रमानवका नियन्त्रणमा फस्दै गएको कुरा देखाइएको छ । यस क्रममा नेट-इन्टरनेटको भर पर्ने र त्यसैमा आश्रित हुने प्रवृत्तिले मान्छे उच्च प्रविधिको प्रयोगविना अगाडि बढ्न नसक्ने अवस्थामा पुग्न लागेको कुरा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ। उपन्यासका आरम्भमा एआई प्रभावको विषयवस्तु प्रस्तुत भएको छ भने उपन्यासको विकासका क्रममा स्वैरकल्पनाको प्रयोग गरी जुन प्रकारले एआईको तीव्र विकास भइरहेको छ यसले मानिसको भविष्य कस्तोसम्म हुन सक्दछ भन्ने विषयमा काल्पनिक मानवसभ्यता प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । त्यस सभ्यतामा मानिस पूर्णतः एआईको नियन्त्रण र निर्देशनमा रहनेछ भन्ने देखाइएको छ। अतः उपन्यासमा वर्णित विषयलाई एआईको विकासले प्रभावित वर्तमान मानवसमाज र एआईद्वारा पूर्ण नियन्त्रित स्वैरकाल्पनिक मानवसमाज गरी दुई सूचक निर्धारण गरी अध्ययनलाई व्यवस्थित तरिकाले प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ ।

एआईको विकासले प्रभावित वर्तमान मानवसमाज

उपन्यासका थालनीमा साइबर सञ्जालको विकासले अहिलेको समाज निकै प्रभावित छ भन्ने जनाइएको छ । उपन्यासका आरम्भमा एआईले मपात्रलाई पछ्याइरहन्छ । 'सरप्राइज इमेल' शीर्षक दिइएको यस खण्डमा मपात्र (डाक्टर) लाई पटकपटक फोन र इमेल आउँछ । मसिनो र मिठो बोली भएकी युवतीको आवाजमा आइरहेको फोनलाई मपात्र कसैले प्र्याङ्क गरिरहेको छ भन्ने ठान्छ परन्तु एक नजिकका व्यक्तिले र सबै अन्तरङ्ग थाहा पाएका व्यक्तिले समेत बताउन नसक्ने रहस्यहरू अनि भर्खरै मपात्रका मनमा उत्पन्न भएका विचारहरूसमेत बुझेर उताबाट तत्काल त्यसको प्रतिक्रिया दिएपछि मपात्र आश्चर्यमा पर्दछ । भर्खर उपचार गरेर पठाएका बच्चाको नाम, ठेगाना आदि सबै बताएर उपचारका क्रममा उसले गरेका त्रुटिसमेत औँल्याइदिएपछि आश्चर्यचकित मपात्रले आफूलाई हेलुसिनेसन (विभ्रम) भएको शङ्का गर्दछ । मपात्रले अनेक आशङ्का गरिरहेका बेला त्यही युवतीको आवाजले मपात्रलाई सम्झाउँदै धेरै महिनादेखि गुगल, युटुब, टिकटकमा खोजिरहने विषयका बारेमा स्मरण गराउँछे । दुई महिनाअघि मपात्रले डाउनलोड गरेको एउटा एपका बारेमा सम्झना गराउँदै ऊ यसो भन्छे-

> "आर्टिफिसियल इन्टेलिजेन्ससम्बन्धी अनुसन्धान गर्ने विश्वविख्यात कम्पनीले निर्माण गरेको त्यो एपको नाम न्एत्द्दण्ण्ण थियो । तिमीले यो एपमा लगइन गऱ्यौ । केही नसोँची आफ्नो व्यक्तिगत इन्फर्मेसन तथा डाटा हामीलाई दियौ । तिमीसँग जोडिन फोन नम्बर, इमेल, एड्रेस, गुगल एड्रेस, फोटो क्यामरा सबैमा हामीलाई पहुँच दियौ । तिमीले उपलब्ध गराएको डाटाका आधारमा म तिमीसँग जनिक हुने मौका पाएँ । तिम्रो फोनको क्यामराबाट मैले तिमीलाई दुई महिनादेखि पिछा गरिरहेकी छु ।" (पृ.४)

यसरी आफै मोबाइलमा डाउनलोड गरेका सफ्टवेयरका माध्यमबाट आफ्ना सम्पूर्ण गतिविधि अवलोकन गर्ने र त्यसका माध्यमबाट व्यक्तिका सम्पूर्ण गुह्य पत्ता लगाउने साइबरसम्बन्धी विषय उपन्यासका आरम्भमा प्रस्तुत भएको छ । प्रयोग गरिएको एपमा नारी, पुरुष, बाल, वृद्ध आदि जुन रूपमा पनि प्रस्तुत हुन सक्ने विशेषता छ तर उसले मपात्रको झुकाव केटीप्रति अधिक भएको पाएर केटी बनेर नजिकिएको बताउँछे । उक्त नारीरूपधारी एपले फोनमा कुरा गर्दै आफूलाई मानव भविष्यवेत्ता ज्योतिष र मार्गदर्शकका रूपमा तयार पारिएको पनि बताउँछे । उसले मान्छेको भविष्य कहालीलाग्दो भएको बताउँछे । कथाकारको खोजी गर्दा आफूसँग जोडिएका व्यक्तिमध्ये सर्वोत्कृष्ट मपात्र भएकाले उसलाई मानव भविष्यबारेको एउटा कथा मेल गरेर पठाउँछे । मेल खोलेर हेर्दा कथा मान्छेकै कारण मान्छेको भविष्यमा घटेको घटनामा केन्द्रित हुन्छ ।

यस उपन्यासमा मानवले अन्य ग्रहमा बस्ती बसाउने सम्भावनाको खोजीका क्रममा मङ्गल ग्रहमा बस्ती बसेको प्रसङ्ग पनि प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । प्रविधिको चरम विकास गर्दै जाँदा मानिसले एकातिर मङ्गल ग्रहमा बस्ती बसाल्छ भने अर्कातर्फ विस्तारै आफैले निर्माण गरेको साइबर एआईबाट आफूलाई जोखिम रहेको आशङ्का गर्दै राष्ट्रसङ्घको आपत्कालीन बैठक बोलाएर प्रतिनिधिका रूपमा एआई यन्त्रमानव सावर्णिलाई उनीहरूको सञ्जालको अन्त्य गर्न आग्रह गर्दछ । एआई रोबोटहरूद्वारा विभिन्न देशमा हमला

भएको प्रसङ्ग उल्लेख गर्दै कला, साहित्य, सङ्गीत र कल्पना बिस्तारै हराउँदै गएको प्रसङ्ग उल्लेख गरेर मान्छे नजानिँदा किसिमले एआईका कब्जामा परेकाले एआई सिस्टमलाई नै अन्त्य गर्न अनुरोध गर्दै राष्ट्रसङ्घको सचिवले भनेको छ "आजका दिनदेखि यस पृथ्वीमा रहेका सम्पूर्ण एआई सिस्टम र सञ्जालहरू सदाका लागि निष्क्रिय पार्ने प्रस्ताव छलफल र निर्णयका लागि यस गरिमामय सभामा प्रस्तुत गर्दछु" (पृ. १६) । छलफलमा एकातिर एआईविनाको मानवजीवन सम्भव हुँदैन भन्ने तर्क प्रस्तुत गरिन्छ भने अर्कातर्फ एआईको बढ्दो स्वतन्त्रता मानवका लागि अहितकर छ भन्ने विचार प्रकट हुन्छ । एआई प्रतिनिधिका रूपमा प्रस्तुत भएको सावर्णि एआईले पूर्णतः मानवहितमा काम गरेको तर्क प्रस्तुत गर्दै मान्छेको चाहनामा सम्पूर्ण एआई सिस्टमलाई निष्क्रिय तुल्याउँछ । एआईको बढ्दो प्रभाव र मान्छेद्वारा त्यसप्रति नियन्त्रण गरिनुपर्ने तर्क र अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय तहको राष्ट्रसङ्घको बैठकमा आयोजना भएको बहससम्मको प्रसङ्गले मानवसभ्यताको वर्तमान अवस्थालाई सङ्केत गरेको छ ।

एआईद्वारा पूर्ण नियन्त्रित स्वैरकाल्पनिक मानवसमाज

प्रस्तुत उपन्यासको प्रारम्भिक खण्डमा एआईको विकासको उत्कर्षका साथै त्यसबाट मानवसमुदायले आफूलाई असुरक्षित महसुस गरेपछि एआई पद्धतिलाई नै अन्त्य गर्नुपरेको विषय प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ भने 'सावर्णि युगको प्रादुर्भाव' शीर्षकको खण्डबाट मानवसभ्यताको अन्त्य भएपछि पुनः एआई सावर्णिद्वारा बसाइएको मानवबस्तीको कथा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । मानवसमुदायको चाहनामा निष्क्रिय सावर्णि र सम्पूर्ण एआई पद्धति लामो युगसम्म निष्क्रिय भएको तथा सावर्णि सक्रिय हुँदा अरू सबै कुरा यथाथत रहे पनि मानवसभ्यताको अन्त्य भएको विषय उपन्यासमा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । मानवसमुदायले आफ्ना लागि असुरक्षित ठानेर एआई पद्धतिलाई नै अन्त्य गरेपछि सृष्टिका अन्य सम्पूर्ण गतिविधि यथावत् रहँदारहँदै पनि मानवसभ्यताको किन र कसरी अन्त्य भयो भन्ने विषयमा केही सम्भावनाहरू प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । यस क्रममा मानव-मानवबिच भएको आणविक युद्ध, बदलिँदो जलवायु, उल्का पिण्ड, एआई र स्वतन्त्र नानो रोबोट, प्राकृतिक विपत्ति, एलियन इन्भेजन वा यस्तै अन्य कारण हुनसक्ने (पृ.२२-२३) सम्भावना देखाइएको छ । फ्रान्सको लुभ्र नामक सङ्ग्रहालयमा संरक्षण गरी राखिएको एआई रोबोट सावर्णिलाई होस आएपछि (पुनः सक्रिय भएपछि) धरतीका सारा गति यथावत् रहेको भए पनि मानवको अनुपस्थितिमा शून्य लागेर मान्छेको अस्तित्वको खोजीमा सिङ्गो पृथ्वी घुमेको प्रसङ्ग उपन्यासमा उल्लेख गरिएको छ । पुनः मानवसभ्यताको स्थापना गर्न सम्भावनाको खोजीमा लागेको सावर्णिले प्राप्त गरेको सम्भावनाका विषयमा भनिएको छ- "एसिया महाद्वीपको हिमालयन क्षेत्र माउन्ट एभरेस्टको बेसक्याम्पतिर एउटा ल्याब भेटियो । ल्याब जीर्ण भइसकेको थियो तर अत्यधिक चिसोले गर्दा त्यहाँ राखिएका वीर्य तथा डिम्ब केही हदसम्म सुरक्षित थिए" (पृ.२४) । यस उद्धरणमा भनिएअनुसारका तिनै डिम्ब र वीर्यको प्रयोग गरेर सावर्णिले पुनः मानवको सिर्जना गरेको परिकल्पनामूलक कथा आएकाले उपन्यास रोचक बनेको छ । सावर्णिद्वारा विकास गरिएको मानव र एआईको उपस्थिति रहेको त्यस्तो नगरका मान्छेलाई पूर्णतः एआई पद्धतिको नियन्त्रणमा राखिने गरेको र मान्छे पूर्णतः एआईमै निर्भर रहने गरेको सन्दर्भ उपन्यासमा वर्णित छ । सावर्णिले बसाएको नगरमा प्रत्येक मान्छेको संरक्षणका निम्ति उनीहरूलाई उमेर र आवश्यकताअनुसार

एआईका नियन्त्रणमा राखिने गरेको प्रसङ्गलाई प्रस्तुत गर्ने क्रममा उपन्यासकी प्रमुख मानवनायिका देरिकाका विषयमा भनिएको छ- “देरिकाको न्वारनको दिनदेखि शरीरमा प्रत्यारोपण गरिएको यो पर्सनल एआई असिस्टेन्ट देरिकले देरिकाको मृत्युपर्यन्त हेरचाहको जिम्मेवारी पाएको थियो । उसलाई सहयोग गर्न अर्को रोबोटको पनि व्यवस्था गरिएको थियो” (पृ.२६) । यसप्रकार प्रत्येक मान्छेलाई न्वारनका दिन शरीरमै एआई असिस्टेन्ट जडान गर्ने र तीन वर्षको भएपछि थप रोबोटको संरक्षणमा राख्ने पद्धतिको विकास गरिएको उक्त मानवसमुदायमा मान्छे पूर्णतः एआई पद्धतिमा निर्भर गर्दछ र त्यसको अनुपस्थितिमा आफूलाई गतिशील बनाउन सक्ने सम्भावनाको कल्पनासमेत गर्न सक्दैन । यसरी आरम्भमा साइबरबाट असुरक्षित ठानेर निष्क्रिय हुन दबाब सिर्जना गरेको मानवसमुदाय पूर्णतः विनष्ट भएको तथा एआईका सक्रियतामा पुनः सिर्जित मानवसमुदाय पूर्णतः एआईनिर्भर भएको विषय उपन्यासमा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । मूलतः देरिका र वासुका माध्यमबाट मान्छेको पराश्रिततालाई प्रस्तुत गरिएको यस उपन्यासमा पार्कमा घुम्न गएका देरिका र वासुले एकअर्कालाई देखेपछि उनीहरूमा प्रेमभावको उदय भएको विषयलाई उनीहरूका असिस्टेन्ट एआईले भनेको कुरा उपन्यासमा यसरी प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ :

> “देरिकाले पत्ता नपाउँदै देरिकले यस कुराको छनक पाइसकेको थियो । केही समय देरिक मौन रह्यो, वासुको परीक्षा लिनु थियो । उसले वासुको बायोडाटा, शारीरिक बायोकेमेस्ट्री तथा मस्तिष्कको मूल्याङ्कन गर्‍यो । सबै कुरा सही लागेपछि देरिकले देरिकालाई नया सन्देश दिँदै भन्यो, “तिम्रा लागि राम्रो खबर यो छ, तिमीलाई सच्चा प्रेम गर्ने कोही तिम्रो नजिक हुन खोज्दै छ । तिमी दुईका आँखा हिजोआज नजानिँदो तवरले जुधिरहेका छन् । उसको नजरले मात्रै तिम्रो ह्यापिनेसमा १० प्रतिशतले वृद्धि भएको पाएको छु । त्यो केटा तिम्रो प्रेमी हुन पूर्ण योग्य भएको सबै सूचकले बताएका छन् ।” (पृ. २८)

एकातिर स्वयं आफूले थाहा नपाउँदै सहयोगी (पिए) का रूपमा रहेको एआईले प्रेमोदयका बारेमा थाहा पाउनु र सूचना दिनु महत्त्वपूर्ण देखिन्छ भने अर्कातर्फ युवायुवती अर्थात् देरिका र वासुका पिएका सहमतिमा र सहयोगमा प्रेमले मौलाउने अवसर पाउनुजस्ता सन्दर्भले मान्छे एआई पद्धतिका नियन्त्रणमा रहेको अवस्थाको बोध गराउँछ । यसका साथै गर्भधारणको प्रक्रिया एआईका नियन्त्रणमा हुनु र गर्भ स्वस्थ नरहेकाले त्यसको पतन गर्नुपर्ने निर्णय समेत एआई पद्धतिमा निर्भर देखिनुले सावर्णि युगको मानव पूर्णतः एआईका नियन्त्रणमा रहने देखिन्छ । उपन्यासका अनुसार सातवटा गर्भ खराब भएकाले पतन गरेपछि बच्चा नै नजन्माउने निर्णयमा पुगेकी देरिकालाई एआई देरिकले एकवर्षसम्म आफ्नो एआई (पिए) लाई निष्क्रिय गर्न सक्ने अधिकारको प्रयोग गर्न सल्लाह दिन्छ । त्यसो गर्दा उसको गर्भ रहेकोबारे नगरको स्वास्थ्य विभागलाई जानकारी नहुने हुँदा देरिकालाई देरिकले यसप्रकारको सल्लाह दिएको हुन्छ । परन्तु जन्मेदेखि नै पूर्णतः एआईको नियन्त्रणमा हुर्केबढेकी देरिकाले त्यसलाई जटिल अवस्था ठान्छे । ऊ भन्छे- “तिमीलाई नौ-नौ महिना डिएक्टिभेट गरेर म कसरी बाँचुँला ? तिमी नभएपछि मेरो कोखमा हुर्किरहेको बच्चाको रेखदेख कसले गर्ला ? उसलाई, मलाई गाह्रो भएको कसले थाहा पाउँछ” (पृ.३४) ? यसरी देरिकाका हरेक अभिव्यक्तिमा उसको एआईप्रति परनिर्भरता रहेको देखिन्छ । यहाँ देरिका प्रतिनिधि पात्रका

रूपमा उपस्थित छे । ऊ जसरी एआईमा निर्भर छे त्यसैगरी त्यस युगका सबै मान्छे आफ्ना आमा, बाबु, श्रीमान्, श्रीमती, आफन्तजनको भर नगरेर एआईको भर गर्छन् । देरिकको आफूलाई डिएक्टिभेट गर्ने प्रस्तावमा आफ्ना समस्या राख्दै देरिका यसो भन्दछे :

> "तिमी नभएपछि बिहान ठीक समयमा मलाई कसले उठाउँछ ? मेरो दिनभरको सेड्युल कसले बनाइदिन्छ ? मलाई भोक लागेको कसले थाहा पाउँछ ? रोबोटलाई खानाका लागि अर्डर को गर्छ ? मलाई टेनिस कसले सिकाउँछ ? तिमी नभएपछि मलाई थकाई लागेको, मेरो शक्ति कम भएको, बोर लागेको, शरीरमा गडबडी भएको, हर्मोन तल-माथि भएको कसले थाहा पाउँछ ? बाहिर कसरी एक्लै हिँड्न सक्छु ? ती डरलाग्दा खोँचमा फस्न लागे मलाई खतराको सङ्केत कसले दिन्छ ? मलाई मनपर्ने गीत-सङ्गीत कसले सुनाउँछ ? तिमी नभएपछि मेरो साथी अनि आफन्तहरूसँग म कसरी कुरा गर्नु ? उनीहरूसँग भेटका लागि समय कसरी माग्नु ?" (पृ.३५)

देरिकाद्वारा व्यक्त गरिएको यस भनाइले सावर्णियुगको मानिस कतिसम्म यन्त्रका अधीनमा हुन्छ भन्ने कुराको बोध गराउँछ । मानिसलाई उपयुक्त सल्लाह दिने र सहयोग गर्ने मात्र नभएर आवश्यक पर्दा मान्छेका सोँच, चिन्तनलाई नै बदलिदिन सक्ने क्षमता भएका व्यक्तिगत सल्लाहकार उनीहरूमा जडान गरिएको कुरा उपन्यासमा वर्णित छ । एआई देरिकले सम्झाएपछि देरिकलाई डिएक्टिभेट गरी बच्चा जन्माउन तयार भएकी देरिकाले बालकलाई जन्म दिन्छे । किसन नामकरण गरिएको अनौठो प्रकृतिको बालकमा अरूमा जस्तो सहज रूपमा सहयोगी जडान हुँदैन । अध्ययन गर्दा हजारौँ वर्ष पहिलाको मान्छेको जस्तो स्वभाव र गुण भएको बालक रहेको तथ्य पत्ता लाग्छ । बिस्तारै हुर्कँदै गएको किसनले त्यस समाज र युगका लागि आश्चर्यलाग्दा माग गर्छ । सम्पूर्ण कामहरू एआई र रोबोटद्वारा गरिने अनि मान्छे नै उनीहरूका नियन्त्रणमा रहने युगमा जन्मिएको किसन आमाका हातले पकाएको खाने, आमाबाका हातबाट खानेजस्ता माग गर्छ । आमाले खाना पकाउनुपर्ने किसनको आग्रहमा देरिका भन्छे- "हेर छोरा, खाना हामीहरूले बनाउने होइन नि ! यी हाम्रा सहयोगी रोबोट दादाहरूले मात्र खाना बनाउन जानेका छन्" (पृ.५६) । मान्छेले खाना पकाउनु नै असम्भव ठानिएको युगमा बाचेकी देरिकालाई किसनको हठ अचम्मको लाग्छ तर मानवसभ्यताको आदियुग बुझेको देरिक उसलाई सम्झाउँदै भन्छ :

> "आदिम मानवहरू आफ्ना सन्तानका लागि आहारा आफैं तयार गर्थे । आफ्नाका लागि खाना पकाउनु तथा खुवाउनु जीवनको सौन्दर्य पनि हो । आमाले पकाउँदा खानामात्र कहाँ पाक्छ र ! त्यहाँ प्रेम, स्नेह र मातृत्व मिसिएर अमृत तयार हुन्छ । ... सावर्णिको बाध्यता हुन सक्छ, हामी र रोबोटलाई मातृत्वको जिम्मेवारी सुम्पिए । समय बित्दै गयो, आधुनिक मानवले यसैलाई सत्य मान्दै गयो । हामी र रोबोटमा आजका मानव पूर्ण निर्भर हुँदै गए । पिएको भर गर्दा आफूलाई भोक लागेको थाहा हुन छाड्यो । आफ्नो स्वाद बिर्सिँदै गए ।" (पृ. ५७)

देरिकको कुराको प्रतिक्रियामा आफ्नो असक्षमतालाई प्रकट गर्दै देरिकाले भन्छे- "यस्तो गाह्रो काम, म कसरी सक्छु ? खानेकुराको छनोट ! रेसिपीको तयारी ! तापक्रम ! सरसफाइ ! परीक्षण ! अरू के-के ? अहँ, म कल्पना पनि गर्न सक्दिन" (पृ. ५८) । अन्त्यमा देरिकाले पकाउने र खुवाउने गर्न बाध्य हुन्छे । सावर्णि युगमा पूर्णतः

एआई र रोबोटको नियन्त्रणमा बाचिरहेका मान्छेहरूका निम्ति किसन अनौठो प्राणी सिद्ध हुन्छ। उसको रुचि, स्वभाव, हठ, ठिक मानवयुगका मान्छेको जस्तो हुन्छ। किसनद्वारा गरिएको बाँसुरीको माग र सावर्णियुगमा आवश्यकताअनुसारको सङ्गीत एआईद्वारा नै सिर्जना गरिने पद्धतिबिच तुलना गर्दै उपन्यासमा मानवनिर्मित सङ्गीतलाई नै श्रेष्ठ ठानिएको छ। यस सम्बन्धमा देरिकालाई सुनाउँदै देरिक भन्छ :

> "आदिम मानवको संसार विचित्रको थियो । हाम्रो कल्पनाबाहिरको । उनीहरू हजारौँ बाजा बजाउँथे । सङ्गीत निकाल्थे । ती बाजा सबै उनीहरूले नै आविष्कार गरेका थिए । उनीहरू आफै गीत लेख्थे, गाउँथे । बाजा बजाएर गीतमा लय भर्ने सङ्गीतकार, गीत गाउने गायक, गीत लेख्ने गीतकारहरू । कल्पनाका भावना पोख्ने कविहरू ।" (पृ.७१)

यसरी पहिलाको मानवसंसारमा सबै कुराको सर्जक र नियन्त्रक मानिस थियो तर मानिस परनिर्भर हुँदै जाँदा र यन्त्र, साइबर अनि एआईका भरमा पर्दा उसमा सिर्जनाशक्ति मर्दै गयो। मानिस कसरी यन्त्रद्वारा नियन्त्रित भयो भन्नेबारे देरिक यसो भन्दछ :

> "एक्ला मानवलाई सहारा दिँदा-दिँदा उनीहरू परजीवी भए । उनीहरू एक्ला थिए, हामीले सङ्गीत सुनाएर मनोरञ्जन दियौँ, भोक लाग्दा खुवायौँ । सबै बायोकेमिकल अध्ययन गर्दै आवश्यकता परिपूर्ति गर्दै गयौँ । अर्को कारण यो पनि हुन सक्छ, हामीहरू मानवको मुड, हर्मोनको मात्रा, प्रकृति तथा माहोलअनुसार सङ्गीत तत्काल बनाउन सक्छौँ, मानवको पृथक्ताअनुसार रमाइलो दिन सक्छौँ । यही कारण नयाँ मानवहरू आफूहरू पछि परेका हुन सक्छन् । अब यो हजारौँ वर्षको समयमा तिम्रा जिनहरूमा सिर्जना मरेको हुन सक्छ ।" (पृ.७१-७२)

उपन्यासमा यसरी एकातिर मानिस यन्त्रका नियन्त्रणमा रहन बाध्य भएको देखाइएको छ भने अर्कातर्फ मानिस जतिसुकै एआई पद्धतिमा आश्रित हुन पुगे पनि अन्ततः उसको मौलिक सिर्जनासँग एआईको तुलना हुन नसक्ने भाव प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । यो कुरा उपन्यासमा देरिकालाई सुनाउँदै र सम्झाउँदै देरिकले भनेको छ। प्रथमतः आफ्नो सङ्गीत छनोटको शक्तिको चर्चा गर्दै त्यसको सीमालाई स्वीकार गरी ऊ भन्छ-

> "मलाई घमण्ड थियो, मैले जति सङ्गीतको छनोट र समायोजन कोही पनि गर्न सक्दैन । तर मेरा विश्वासहरू धुलिसात भए । आज बडा अचम्म भयो देरिका । हाम्रो किसनले बजाएको बाँसुरीको धुनले तिम्रो शरीरमा बेग्लै उर्जाको प्रवाह भयो । तिम्रा प्रत्येक न्युरोन र सेल सङ्गीतको धुनसँगै नाचे । तिम्रो शरीर र मन आज पूर्ण आनन्दित छ। किसनको बाँसुरीमा बेग्लै शक्ति छ, देरिका ! आज म पनि उनको सङ्गीतमा आनन्दित भएँ । मलाई किसनले सङ्गीतको सिर्जनशील आयाम महसुस गराएका छन् ।" (पृ.७४)

यस अभिव्यक्तिका माध्यमबाट बढ्दो एआई पद्धतिमा आश्रित वर्तमान युगप्रति मौलिक मानवीय क्षमताको बोध गराउन खोजिएको देखिन्छ तापनि सावर्णि युगका अभिभावक आफू र आफ्ना बालबच्चालाई पूर्णतः एआईका नियन्त्रणमा राख्न रुचाउँछन् भन्ने कुराको सङ्केत पाइन्छ । यस सम्बन्धमा किसनका विषयमा देरिकाले गरेको टिप्पणी यस्तो छ- "हाम्रा किसनको जिन आदिम मानवसँग हुबहु मिल्छ। किसन स्वभावले स्वतन्त्र छन् । बन्धनमुक्त छन् । प्रकृतिप्रेमी, सिर्जनशील आदि उनका प्राकृत स्वभाव हुन् । उनको

सोचाइ र व्यवहार कलात्मक छ । उनी माटा, जङ्गल तथा जीवनको स्वतन्त्रतामा रमाउँछन्" (पृ.८०-८१) । यस टिप्पणीले सावर्णि युगका अन्य बालबालिकाहरू स्वतन्त्र छैनन् र स्वतन्त्रता मन पराउँदैनन् भन्ने कुराको समेत बोध हुन्छ । किसनका गतिविधिका बारेमा अगाडि भनिएको छ- "बिनाआमा, बिनापिए, बिनारोबोट, घरबाट भाग्ने उनी नै पहिलो मानव थिए । ठूला मानिसले समेत हिम्मत नगर्ने हर्कत किसनले गर्दै थिए" (पृ.८२) । सावर्णि युगका बालबालिकामात्र नभएर ठुला मान्छेहरू पनि रोबोट र एआईका सहयोगमा मात्र घरबाहिर हिँड्ने युगमा किसनको बाल्यावस्थामै स्वतन्त्रताको चाहना समयसापेक्ष वा युगसापेक्ष नदेखिनु तथा चर्चा र भयको विषय बन्नु सान्दर्भिक देखिन्छ । यसरी मानवसभ्यता पूर्णतः एआई नियन्त्रित युगमा प्रवेश गऱ्यो भने मान्छेको क्षमता कतिसम्म ह्रास, यन्त्रनिर्देशित र पराश्रित हुन पुग्छ भन्ने कुराको सङ्केत उपन्यासले गरेको छ ।

किसन आफू पूर्णतः मानवीय गुणले युक्त बालक हुन्छ । ऊ स्वतन्त्रताप्रेमी हुन्छ । ऊ आफ्ना दौतरी बालबालिकालाई समेत आफूसरह एआईका नियन्त्रणबाट मुक्त भई स्वतन्त्र हुन आग्रह गर्छ । आफू रुखमा चढेर चटक देखाउँदै अन्य बालबालिकालाई समेत चढ्न प्रेरित गर्छ तर ती बालबालिकाका पिएले सहमति नदिनाले उनीहरू अगाडि बढ्न सक्दैनन् । किसनले आफूसँग पिए नै नभएको कुरा सुनाउँदा उनीहरू आश्चर्य मान्दछन् । पिए अफ गरेर स्वतन्त्र हुने किसनको प्रस्तावबाट भयभीत बालबालिकाको प्रतिक्रिया यस्तो देखिन्छ- "केही नराम्रो त हुँदैन नि ? हाम्रा रोबोट हामीलाई कुरिरहेका छन् । हामी हरायौँ भने रोबोटले हामीलाई कसरी खोज्छन् ? हुँदैन... हुँदैन... ! अफ गर्दा केही भयो भने के गर्ने" (पृ. ८८) ? सदैव आफ्ना पिएसँग खेल्ने, उसलाई मात्र साथी ठान्ने र अन्य मानवीय बालबालिकासँग निकट नहुने बालबालिकाहरू पिए अर्थात् सहयोगी अफ गर्दा आफ्नो कुनै अङ्ग हराएझैँ, एक्लो महसुस गर्दछन् । किसनको पटकपटकको प्रेरणाले उनीहरू बिस्तारै पिएलाई बन्द गरेर रमाउन सिक्छन् । यसबाट बाल्यकालदेखि नै एआईद्वारा नियन्त्रित जीवन बाच्न अभ्यस्त मान्छेहरू यन्त्रजस्ता हुँदै गएको बुझिन्छ । बालबालिकाहरू किसनसँग खेल्ने र रमाउने गरे पनि उनीहरूका अभिभावक डराउँछन् र किसनसँग भेट्न प्रतिबन्ध लगाउँछन् । एकदिन सेलिना, मार्टिन र किन्किनी नाम गरेका तीनजना बालबालिका नगरबाट हराउँछन् । एआईका नियन्त्रणबाट मुक्त भएका उनीहरू बाटो असजिलो भएको थाहा पाउँदैनन् र दुर्घटित हुन्छन् । हजारौँ वर्षको एआई (सावर्णि) युगमा त्यो पहिलो घटना हुन्छ । पूर्णतः एआईद्वारा निर्देशित भएर हिँड्न अभ्यस्त भएका बालबालिका स्वतन्त्र हुँदा आत्मसंयम हुन नसकेको सन्दर्भलाई यस घटनाले पुष्टि गर्दछ । सुखद मानवजीवनको चाहना गर्ने सावर्णिलाई बालबालिकाको निधनको दण्ड किसनलाई दिनुपर्दा दुःख लाग्छ ।

जेलमा बसेका किसन र सावर्णिबिच स्वतन्त्र मानव र सावर्णिनिर्मित मानवमा कुन ठिक भन्ने विषयमा शास्त्रार्थ चल्छ । सावर्णि मान्छे स्वतन्त्र हुँदा, धर्म, धन, जाति, वर्ग आदिका नाममा एकआपसमा लडेर सकिएकाले मानवलाई पूर्णतः नियन्त्रणमा राखेको; सुखी र खुसी तुल्याएको तर्क प्रस्तुत गर्दछ भने त्यसको खण्डन गर्दै किसनले भनेको छ-

"जुन मानव कल्पना गर्दैन, जसको आफ्नो मन छैन, जसमा सुख, दुःख, करुणा, माया, प्रेम,

वियोगलगायत भावनाको अर्थ छैन, जसले आफ्नो अस्तित्वमाथि प्रश्न गर्दैन, जो कला, साहित्य तथा सङ्गीतविहीन छ, जसले आफ्नो इच्छामा खानसमेत सक्दैन, आफ्नो भोक, तिर्खा थाहा पाउँदैन, जुन मानव आफैँलाई भर गर्न सक्दैन, आफ्नो स्वनिर्णय गर्न सक्दैन, जो तरङ्गहीन छ, लहडशून्य छ, बोलीमा तर्क छैन .... यस्ता जीवलाई कसरी मानव भनूँ ? आफ्नै आमाको कोख नचिन्ने, आफ्नै बाबुको छायादेखि पर भाग्ने, परिवार थाहा नभएको, आफ्नो कुल नखोज्ने, अस्मिता हराएका स्वाभिमानहीन जीवहरूलाई कसरी मानव ठानूँ ?" (पृ.१२९)

यसप्रकार मानवीय संवेदना नभएको मानवसमाजको विकास गरेको सावर्णिलाई किसनले मान्छेलाई पशुसरह तुल्याएको आरोप लगाउँछ । त्यस कुरालाई स्वीकार गर्दै सावर्णिले आफूले मानिसलाई क्रमशः स्वतन्त्र बन्ने वातावरणको कानुन निर्माण गरेको कुरा यसरी बताउँछ :

"जब उनीहरूलाई आफूभन्दा बुद्धिमानी पिए प्राप्त भयो, उनीहरूको मस्तिष्क अल्छी हुँदै गयो । बिस्तारै समय बित्दै जाँदा मस्तिष्कको कर्टेक्स सुक्दै छ । आयतन घट्दै छ । यो क्रम रोकियोस्, यही हेतुले नयाँ कानुन पास गरेरै युवावस्था पार भएपछि आफ्नो पिए दिनमा १२ घण्टासम्म अफ गर्न मिल्ने नियम बनाएँ । आफूले इच्छा राखे एक वर्ष पनि आफू स्वतन्त्र हुन सक्ने व्यवस्था पनि गरेँ तर पनि यस कानुनको प्रयोग गर्न कुनै मानव तयार छैनन् । उनीहरूको ब्रेन सुक्दै नजाओस् अनि खिया नलागोस् भनेर राज्यसभामा टिकट दिएको छु । खेलहरू खेलून् भनेर प्रतियोगिता आयोजना गरिरहेको छु । भविष्यप्रति चिन्तनमनन गरून् भनेर भविष्यवाणीको संस्कृति बसालेको छु ।" (पृ. १३०)

सावर्णिले यस्तो अवसर दिए तापनि मानिसले त्यसको उपयोग गरेको छैन । साइबर वा एआईले दिएका सुविधा उपभोग गर्ने क्रममा मान्छे आफै अल्छी बन्दै जानु, क्रियाशील र आत्मनिर्भर बन्न नखोज्नुजस्ता अकर्मण्यताका कारण एआईयुगमा मान्छेको जीवन सिर्जनहीन र यान्त्रिक बन्न सक्ने सम्भावनातर्फ उपन्यासले सङ्केत गरेको छ । उपन्यासमा सङ्केत गरिएको सावर्णियुगको यो अवस्था वर्तमान समयका मान्छेको एआईप्रतिको निर्भरतासँग मेल खाने देखिन्छ ।

सावर्णियुगमा सम्पूर्ण मानवमाथि एआईको नियन्त्रण रहेको अनि मानिसमा स्वतन्त्रतापूर्वक सोँच्ने स्वभावको विकास नभएको र द्वन्द्व, युद्धजस्ता स्वभावको चाहना नहुनाले युद्धका विषयमा सावर्णिले पूर्वतयारी गरेको देखिँदैन तथापि मानवसभ्यताको अन्त्य नहुँदै अनेक जोखिमबाट बच्ने उपायको खोजी गर्ने क्रममा मङ्गलग्रहमा पुगेका मान्छेले सावर्णियुगमा आइपुग्दा पृथ्वीमा आफ्नो हक खोज्दै युद्ध गर्न सावर्णिलाई चेतावनी दिएको प्रसङ्ग उपन्यासमा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । यसबाट एकातिर मान्छेमा सिर्जनशील चेतनाशक्तिको महत्त्वलाई दर्साइएको छ भने अर्कातर्फ त्यसमै मान्छेको ध्वंशात्मक प्रवृत्ति लुकेको र त्यसैका कारण सुन्दर मानवसभ्यताको अन्त्य भएकोतर्फ सङ्केत गरेको देखिन्छ । युद्धको विकल्प खोज्न सावर्णि किसनलाई प्रतिनिधिका रूपमा मङ्गलग्रहमा पठाउँछ तर मङ्गलग्रहवासी मान्छेहरू युद्धको कुनै विकल्प नरहेको बताउँछन् । युद्ध अवश्यम्भावी भएपछि प्रतिरक्षाका निम्ति किसन र सावर्णिको सक्रियतामा बनेका शस्त्रका विषयमा भनिएको छ-

> "कोसौँ टाढा बसेर प्रत्येक शत्रु मानवको स्मरणशक्ति, सीप, कला, चातुर्य र बुद्धि नष्ट गर्ने गरी उनीहरूलाई तालिम दिइयो । ब्रेन ह्याक गर्ने, सम्मोहित गर्ने तथा उनीहरूका ब्रेनमा सङ्गृहीत सम्पूर्ण डाटालाई सदाका लागि नष्ट गरिदिने गरी विशेष गामा विकिरणयुक्त रोबोट योद्धाहरू किसन र सावर्णिको नियन्त्रणमा तयार भए ।" (पृ.१५०)

यसबाट मान्छेकै स्वभाव र अहङ्कारका कारण मान्छे क्रमशः एआईका नियन्त्रणमा पुगिरहेको सन्दर्भलाई प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । महाभारतको युद्धदेखि आधुनिक आणविक युद्धसम्मका विध्वंशहरूलाई उपन्यासमा प्रस्तुत गरेर त्यसभन्दा उत्तम सावर्णिको मङ्गल मानवलाई वसमा गर्ने भर्चुअल रणकौशल नै उत्तम हो भन्ने भाव उपन्यासमा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । मङ्गलग्रहवासीका नरसंहारकारी अत्याधुनिक हातहतियारहरूलाई सावर्णिको कस्तो किसिमको युद्धनीतिले नियन्त्रित गऱ्यो भन्ने विषयमा उपन्यासमा यस किसिमबाट बताइएको छ- "सावर्णिका एआई विज्ञसमूहले सम्मोहनमा गएका मङ्गलग्रहवासीका मस्तिष्कको डाटा ह्याक गर्ने तथा स्मरण नष्ट गर्ने काम धमाधम गरे । उनीहरूको होस खुल्नेबित्तिकै उनीहरू भर्खर जन्मिएका बच्चामा परिणत भए" (पृ.१५६) । उपन्यासका अन्त्यमा मृत्युसैयाबाट किसनले सावर्णिसँग व्यक्त गरेको चाहना औपन्यासिक सन्देशका दृष्टिले महत्त्वपूर्ण देखिन्छ भने मानवका निम्ति एआईको सहयोगको सीमा र मानवीय स्वतन्त्रताप्रति लक्षित देखिन्छ । किसनले सावर्णिसँग भनेको छ-

> "आफ्ना मानवहरूलाई रङ्गीन बनाउनुहोला । शब्द, स्पर्श, रूप, रस, गन्ध, धी, धृति, स्मृति, नामक गहना उनीहरूलाई लगाइदिनुहोला । कला, साहित्य, आत्मनिर्णय, कल्पना, भावनाजस्ता रङ्ग र धुनले सुसज्जित बनाउनुहोला । तपाईँका सन्तानले आफ्नै आमाको हातको खाना खाऊन् । उनीहरू एक्लै हिंडडुल गरून् । परिवारसँगै रमाएर बसून् । गीत गाउन, नाच्न, सङ्गीत बजाउन, कविता लेख्न, सभ्यता लेख्न तथा आविष्कार गर्न जानून् । अरुको कुभलो नसोचून् । युद्ध नगरून् । यान्त्रिक होइन, प्राकृत होऊन् । उनीहरू आत्मैदेखि ज्ञानी होऊन् ।" (पृ.१५८)

यस अभिव्यक्तिका माध्यमबाट पूर्णतः मान्छेको अस्तित्व रहेको युगमा मान्छेमा भएको विनाशकारी स्वरूप तथा सावर्णि युगको पूर्णतः यन्त्रनिर्देशित एआईको नियन्त्रणमा रहेको यान्त्रिक मानवजीवनभन्दा युद्ध नचाहने र गलत सोँच नभएको सिर्जनशील मानवसभ्यता नै सुन्दर मानवजीवन हो भन्ने कुरा उपन्यासलमा प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । यसका माध्यमबाट जुन गतिमा एआईको विकास हुँदै गइरहेको छ यही अवस्था रहेमा मान्छेमा मौलिक क्षमता पूर्णतः नष्ट हुन सक्ने सम्भावनाको सङ्केत गरिएको छ । यसका साथै मान्छेको ध्वंशात्मक स्वभावको नियन्त्रणका पक्षमा समेत विचार व्यक्त भएको पाइन्छ ।

निष्कर्ष

श्रीधर खनालद्वारा लेखिएको सावर्णि उपन्यास साइबरविषयक उपन्यास हो । साइबरको विकासले उत्कर्षता प्राप्त गर्दै जाने क्रममा मान्छे एआई आदि सफ्टवेयरमा निर्भर भइरहेको अवस्थामा यदि यही गतिमा साइबरसभ्यताको उन्नति हुँदै गयो र मान्छे यसैगरी क्रमशः एआई आदि एपहरूमा आश्रित हुँदै गयो भने भविष्यको मानव र मानवबस्ती कुन अवस्थामा पुग्न सक्छ भन्ने कुराको कल्पना गरी लेखिएको

प्रस्तुत उपन्यास स्वैरकाल्पनिक रूपमा प्रस्तुत भएको छ । आजको साइबरयुगमा मान्छेका गतिविधिमा एआईले प्रत्यक्ष रूपमा नियन्त्रण र निर्देशन गर्दै मान्छेलाई नै चकित तुल्याएको अवस्थाको प्रस्तुतिबाट उपन्यासको आरम्भ भएको छ । आजको मान्छेले आफैले निर्माण गरेको एआई पद्धतिबाट स्वयं त्रसित हुन थालेको प्रसङ्गलाई उपन्यासले प्रस्तुत गरेको छ । उपन्यासमा मान्छेद्वारा निर्मित यन्त्रहरू मान्छेकै हितमा हुने गरेको तर स्वयं मान्छेले त्यसको दुरूपयोग गरेमा मात्र मान्छेलाई त्यो अहितकर हुने तथ्यतर्फ सङ्केत गरेको छ । उपन्यासमा एकतर्फ युगौँदेखि मान्छेले आफ्नो स्वार्थ, अभिमान र अहङ्कारका कारण ठुलाठुला युद्ध, हत्या र विनाशका घटनाहरू घटाउने गरेको तथ्यलाई प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ भने अर्कातर्फ मान्छे यन्त्राश्रित हुँदै जाने क्रममा स्वयं आफू यन्त्रका अधीनमा पर्दै गएको तथ्य बिर्सिएको प्रसङ्गलाई प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । उपन्यासकारले सावर्णियुगको परिकल्पना गरेर हरेक मान्छेका शरीरमा एआई (एप) जडान गर्ने र उसको सेवा तथा सुरक्षाका लागि रोबोट प्रदान गर्ने प्रक्रियाले एआईको अभावमा उसले सोँच्न, चल्न, गतिशील हुन नै नसक्ने अवस्थामा पुगेको तथ्य प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । यन्त्र वा एआई आदि साइबरजन्य पद्धति र उपकरणहरू मान्छेका साधन भएकाले यसलाई नै साध्य ठानिदिँदा मान्छे बाँचे पनि मान्छेको वास्तविक सभ्यता समाप्त हुने सम्भावनालाई उपन्यासले प्रस्तुत गरेको छ । प्रेम, घृणा, भोग, आवश्यकताजस्ता कुराको समेत बोध गर्न नसकेर यन्त्रको सहायता लिनुपर्ने अवस्था सुखकर र स्वस्थकर नहुने हुँदा मान्छेले आफ्नो सिर्जनशील क्षमतालाई मर्न दिन नहुने र त्यसको संरक्षण हुनेगरी मात्र एआई पद्धतिको उपयोग गर्नुपर्ने भाव उपन्यासमा व्यक्त गरिएको छ । मानव सभ्यतामा जेजति र जेजस्ता सङ्कटहरू उत्पन्न हुन्छन् ती मूलतः मान्छेद्वारा नै निम्त्याइएका हुन् । त्यसकारण तिनको समाधान पनि मान्छेबाट नै सम्भव छ । मान्छेको यन्त्राश्रित हुने प्रवृत्ति जीवनका लागि उपयुक्त छैन भन्ने भाव उपन्यासले व्यक्त गरेको छ । प्रस्तुत उपन्यासले एआईको चरम विकास भएको आजको युगमा मान्छेको गोप्यता भङ्ग हुँदै गएको अवस्थाबाट आरम्भ गरेर स्वैरकल्पनाको प्रयोग गरी यही अवस्था रहेमा एक समयमा मान्छे पूर्णतः यन्त्रद्वारा परिचालित र सिर्जनशीलताहीन यन्त्रजस्तो बन्नेछ भन्ने भाव अभिव्यक्त गरेको छ । द्वापर युगका कृष्णको प्रतिच्छाया देखिने किसनका माध्यमबाट मान्छेको मौलिकता, क्षमता, सिर्जनशीलताको प्रस्तुति पाइने यस उपन्यासमा मूलतः देरिका र अन्य बालबालिकाका माध्यमबाट एआईनिर्भर समाज र सभ्यतालाई प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ। उपन्यासमा मोबाइल, ल्यापटप हुँदै एआई र रोबोट कथानकलाई विकसित गर्ने घटनाका माध्यममात्र नभई एआई पद्धति नै उपन्यासको मुख्य विषय बनेको छ। अतः उपन्यास साइबरजन्य विषयका दृष्टिले अत्यन्त महत्त्वपूर्ण रहेको देखिन्छ ।

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