

Technological Strategic Planning for Marketing Spiritual Destination in Uttarakhand

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Abstract

Destination marketing has been one of the important thematic issues in the success of tourism industry. Influence of advertisements on both outbound and inbound tourists in choosing traveling destinations is being increasingly researched. Spirituality, in general, has recently become an important subject of research in social and business areas. This has added a new dimension to the tourism industry, called 'spiritual tourism'. Consequently, there has been an increase in the awareness and research interest in the thematic field of spiritual tourism. The present research work is concerned with an investigation of the marketing aspects of the spiritual tourism in Uttarakhand state of India vis-à-vis its infrastructure, destinations and economy. The paper presents a strategic management approach by which those responsible for marketing destinations can develop holistic and coordinated strategies for Uttarakhand state of India which will be helpful for making destination decision by potential travelers.

Keywords: *Destination marketing, marketing strategies, economy, Spiritual Tourism, revenue.*

1. Introduction

People have been always looking for new ways of being and have travelled throughout the human history. The combination of the two is closely associated with the phenomenon of growth of a civilized society. The increase in communications, information technology and the increasing ease with decreasing cost of travel have resulted in a situation within the modern society where the combination of travel and the search for spiritual novelty is both possible and accepted. The situation has naturally opened up a huge economic proposition, widely called tourism. The activity in

different forms has grown to such a dimension today, that it is capable of controlling economies of several countries worldwide. India, home to a rich civilization historically and birthplace of many spiritual philosophies, is not lagging behind either in the process.

International tourism has increased exponentially since the last decade in Uttarakhand state and it continues to grow. The state is working hard to place itself in the International tourism map of the world. Uttarakhand is known as the spiritual and adventure capital of the country. Uttarakhand state is not a newcomer to the international tourism market; in fact, it is one of the traditional and powerful competitors in international tourism market. Its abundance of natural resources, beautiful mountains, rich cultural heritage, forests, agriculture, Industry, multi-culture and diversity of people of plains and hills, weather variations in different districts, holy shrines like the 'Char Dham' and other attributes make Uttarakhand state very attractive and charming to international tourists. However, when considering the competitive market, no destination can succeed without putting in some effort. Therefore, the identification of Uttarakhand's important attributes and a comprehensive evaluation of these attributes in terms of their effectiveness in impacting on international tourists in their decision when choosing their prospective destination would be of great value to State's tourism planners. It will, amongst others, help them to formulate appropriate marketing strategies and there is little doubt that an appropriate marketing strategy is essential for such a spiritual destination to continue being successful in the more competitive international tourism market.

2. Objectives of the Present Study

The main objective of this study is to analyse the existing marketing practices of spiritual tourism in the state of Uttarakhand, India in the context of present requirement and develop suitable marketing strategy. The specific objectives include:

1. To examine tourism marketing practices currently being followed in India as a whole, and, the state of Uttarakhand, in particular.
2. To suggest suitable marketing strategy to develop spiritual tourism as a prime industry in the state.

3. Research Background

Spiritual tourism is also recognized as one of the major contributors in a state's revenue. However, organized research activities in the area are yet to be seen. Thus, although there has been an encouraging trend in the recent years, sufficient literature on spiritual tourism is yet to be generated. There are immense scopes of research in the area.

Segmentation of inbound and outbound tourists needs to be studied well. Segmentation, as suggested by Tkaczynski *et al.* (2009), should be at the tourism stakeholder level rather than at the destination level. Destination marketing has been recognized worldwide as one of the important aspects in marketing of tourism. Segmentation and marketing aspects of spiritual destinations, sustainability and attractiveness of spiritual destinations are some of the aspects that require systematic investigation. Possible affect on number of inbound and outbound tourist to different spiritual places and its economic implications needs to be investigated. Such investigation could be case specific as different spiritual places are located at different geographic locations. Different spiritual places might attract tourists on different special occasions unlike season based tourist movements in most of the general tourist places. For example, it is quite possible and reasonable that the requirements and feelings of a *Hajji* (in the Gulf of Saudi Arabia) would differ significantly to those of an *Amarnath Yatri* (in the Indian Himalayas). Such investigation could help formulating better tourism product and contribute towards building better

infrastructure. Formulation of marketing strategies to promote spiritual tourism needs to be investigated.

Tourism has been recognized as one of the major revenue earning industries worldwide. It is considered as a smokeless industry which has been continuously growing and flourishing. It is important to note that the concept and scope of tourism have been progressively changing. In an earlier work, Hunziker and Krapf, in the year 1941, defined tourism as "the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity" (Leiper, 1979). Today, tourism has attained the status of even the highest revenue earning industry for many countries. This service sector industry has become a real threat for the core manufacturing sector industries in the recent times. Consequently, research interest in the area has also been increasing considerably.

India is also witnessing an impetus in the tourism sector in the recent years. For example, according to the data revealed by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, the foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in India during the year 2010 were 5.58 million with a growth rate 9.3% against the FTAs of 5.11 million and growth rate of (-) 3.3% during the year 2009. Thus, the growth rate in FTAs for 2010 over 2009 for India is better than the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's (UNWTO) estimated growth rate of 5% and 6% for the world during the same period (Ministry of Tourism, 2010). Further, the Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from tourism in Rupee terms during the year 2010 were `64,889 crores with a growth rate of 18.1%, as compared to the FEE of `54,950 crores with a growth rate of 8.3% during the year 2009 over 2008 (Ministry of Tourism, 2010). Consequently, the Government of India has adopted different approaches for promotion of tourism, which include new mechanism for expediting implementation of tourism projects, development of integrated tourism circuits and rural destinations, special capacity building in the unorganized hospitality sector and new marketing strategies to promote India as a brand. Spirituality, which is traditionally imbibed with the Indian culture, has become

another subject of attraction for the international tourists visiting India. A significant fraction of the total domestic tourists in India even travel for spiritual purposes. However, corresponding comprehensive scientific data about the spiritual tourists in the Indian context as well as with respect to different states are yet to emerge.

In India, Uttarakhand, which is a hilly state and home to many spiritual activities, is considered a tourist's paradise. The state offers a number of unmatched destinations to the tourists for quenching their spiritual thirsts, for holidaying and for sporting thrills. The mid Himalayan region of Garhwal and Kumaon, which was called by the name Kedarkhand and Manashkhand in the *Purans*, is known as Uttarakhand today. This entire hilly region covers an area of 53,483 square kilometer, which is 1.63 percent of India's area, comprises of 16,828 villages in 13 districts. Uttarakhand extends from 28° 43' N to 31° 27' N longitude and 77° 34' E to 81° 02' E latitude. This new state in the northern part of India is surrounded by Nepal in the East, China in the North, Himachal Pradesh in the west and U.P. in the South. The geographical location of the state with its major tourist destinations are shown in Figure 1.

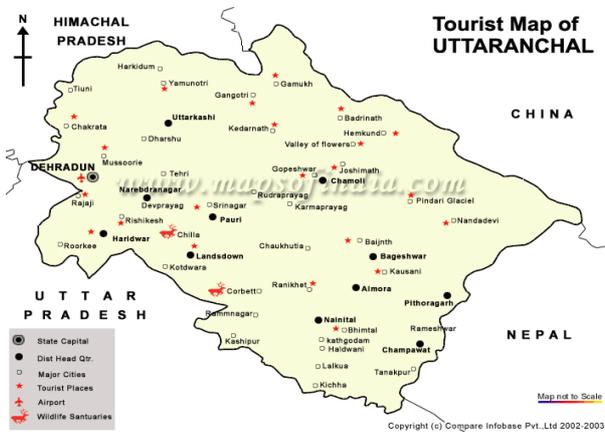


Fig.1 Different places of tourist interest in the state of Uttarakhand [www.mapsofindia.com]

Known as "*Devbhumi*", meaning "the land of God," Uttarakhand also nourishes a diverse and rich culture and monuments of historical importance (Kumar

Sanjay, 2009). Uttarakhand - the home of Himalayas is truly a paradise on earth for tourists, not only for its scenic beauty, fresh air, pure water, and chilling snow, but also for being the home of a number of well-known famous spiritual places. The major financial sectors in Uttarakhand have been identified as Agriculture, Natural Resources, Industry, Real Estate and the booming sector is Tourism. Every year, the state attracts a good number of tourists and the state's economy is also greatly influenced by the tourism revenue. The tourism potential in the state has prompted the state to take many tourism oriented initiatives; few tourism-based academic programs are also being run. The state government has also taken some steps to study the status of tourism in the state through different surveys and corresponding planning are being initiated (Government of India, 2008).

4. Methodology of the Proposed Study

The purpose of the proposed investigation is to study different aspects of marketing of spiritual tourism and development of marketing strategies in the Uttarakhand state of India. Tourism is a complex phenomenon that involves a number of constitutive elements. Research in such an area calls for careful consideration of different attributes. In the present study, primarily 'self-administered questionnaire survey' methodology has been adopted. Data were collected through various methods. In order to collect primary data, cross-sectional multiple research design methodology was adopted in which samples would be questioned only once as part of the personal survey. Secondary data were collected from the data generated by different agencies and government organizations, other data repositories and published literatures.

5. Emergence of Spiritual Tourism

Spiritual tourism is also termed as religious heritage tourism. It includes all the religions, religious places associated with, emotional attachment to these centers and infrastructure facilities for the tourists. This can also be referred to as pilgrimage tourism, as clients are not looking for luxury but arduous journeys to meet

the divine goal or simple life. The essence of spiritual tourism is inner feeling through love.

Globally, mental strain of the people is increasing. Consequently, people are looking for solace in spiritual reading, meditation and moments of divine ecstasy. India has been known as the seat of spiritualism, and its cosmopolitan nature is best reflected in its pilgrim centers. India is not only known as a place rich in its culture with varied attractions but also for many places of worship. She presents herself as embodiment of compassion where one gets peace of mind. Globally, India has been respected as a destination of spiritual tourism. However, India is yet to exploit the potential of this industry of the future. A scientific study on spiritual tourism in India is expected to generate considerable interest and would carry immense scope.

The tourism industry is a major contributor to the economy of Uttarakhand. This region has some of the holiest Hindu shrines, and for almost 2000 years, pilgrims have been visiting the temples at Haridwar, Rishikesh, Gangotri, Yamunotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath. Millions of pilgrims flock to Haridwar to pray and to attain *Nirvana*. This picturesque holy state is also a natural destination to the lovers of nature. While, it has been attracting tourists with its century old spiritual places, it is rapidly becoming a place of interest for some spiritual gurus operating from the state with huge followers worldwide. Consequently, the state as a place of spiritual activities is gaining importance everyday and a well structured tourism marketing planning could provide a huge impact in the state's economy. The two study sites Haridwar and Rishikesh are enriched with rich cultural heritage and history associated with it. These places are enriched with spiritual shrines as well as a place for yoga and Meditation hub. The state conducts International Yoga festival in Rishikesh every year in the month of February-march which attracts a large number of International tourists to this place. The place is also famous for renowned Spiritual gurus who preach here. This is the place where people throng from different parts of the country and world to take a holy dip in the River Ganges.

Spiritual tourism, as observed by Haq *et al.* (2008), 'seems to be a newer academic concept, but it is certainly not a new phenomenon'. The term spiritual

tourism, of late, has attracted many researchers globally. This increasing interest is not because of its spiritual perspective, but for the potential it carries to become the largest segment within the industry.

6. Analysis and Findings to encourage Uttarakhand as a Spiritual Destination

Today, tourism has been considered as the only source of income for many countries, globally. It is one of the major sources of the state economy for several countries. Thus, most of the countries are naturally convinced to invest in tourism – physically as well as intellectually. Consequently, many countries, apart from developing world class tourism related infrastructure and then marketing those aggressively, have been investing heavily on tourism research and its sustainable development.

Historically, India has been a place of attraction to the global tourists owing to her ancient civilizations, great diversities in many aspects – geographical, religious, cultural, its image as the home to growing intellects, its growing economy and its Diaspora. Her earning through tourism over the years has also been rising substantially. Thus, tourism in India has positioned itself as one of the prime revenue earners in the services sector. The country, in turn, has also responded through programs like 'Incredible India'.

The growth rate of tourism sector of India has been way above the world average in the last few years. The year 2006-2007 is the fourth consecutive year of high growth in foreign tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings from tourism. By the year 2020, tourism in India could contribute ` 8, 50,000 crores to the GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2006). In Uttarakhand, the number of tourists to the state, both inbound and outbound, has been increasing; however, the rate of growth is very marginal. The annual growth rate of domestic tourist visits in Uttarakhand during the period 2001 – 2006 was 12.9% as against 14% growth at the national level. Further, the international tourist growth rate achieved by Uttarakhand was 12.0% as against 16.0% growth at the national level. In a recent study under the aegis of the Government of Uttarakhand

reveals that the estimated total numbers of domestic and international tourists that will be visiting the state in the year 2022 stand at 143.30 million and 0.703 million respectively. The projected arrival of tourists, both domestic as well as international, in the state is illustrated in Figure 2. The projections illustrate that the trends are healthy, and it is expected that the state should prepare itself to make the trend healthier with appropriate planning- infrastructural and academically. Further, information available with Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB, 2011) reveal that about 58.2% of the international tourists visit for holiday/ sightseeing, 21.9% for health/yoga, and about 19.4% for pilgrimage/ religious functions as shown in Figure 3. For domestic tourists, on the other hand, the main purpose of 44.2% of the tourists visit was pilgrimage/ religious while that of 43.6% was holiday/ sightseeing. It is thus imperative that the earnings from the spiritual tourists of the state could have a major influence on the economic health of the state. Consequently, a scientific study in order to help optimizing the state’s earnings should be a welcome step.

Table 1 presents the profile of the domestic and international tourists visiting the major spiritual destinations in Uttarakhand state. It has been clearly seen that two major destinations- Haridwar and Rishikesh have recorded the highest increase in the tourists among the destinations considered.

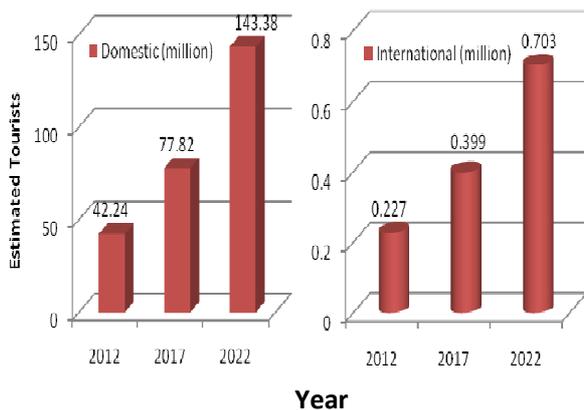


Fig. 2 Estimated tourists in Uttarakhand in the next ten years (Data Source: Government of India, 2008).

Further, the economic implications of tourism in Uttarakhand have also been analysed. The data revealed by the Government of India (2008) clearly indicate that steady growths are projected with respect to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and employment due to the projected growth in number of tourists as already discussed in Figure 2. The corresponding estimates are shown in Figure 4 and Figure 5 respectively. The facts do indicate a significant influence on the state’s economy and call for adopting appropriate strategies to attract tourists to the state.

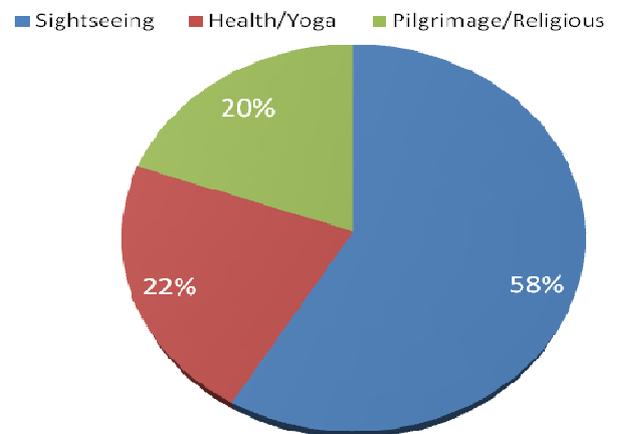


Fig. 3 Segmentation of tourists according to motivation of visit (Data Source: UTDB, 2011)

Table 1 Tourist statistics of important spiritual tourists places in Uttarakhand in the years 2008, 2009 and 2010 (Data Source: UTDB, 2011)

Spiritual Place	Total Year-wise		
	2008	2009	2010
Badrinath	1075583	798204	921526
Gangotri	326366	380157	310561
Haridwar	11374104	12069517	18866680

Hemkund Sahib	400533	332466	309150
Kedarnath	470048	403636	400511
Rishikesh	556547	586419	1098712
Yamunotri	327611	322242	309634
Total	14530792	14892641	22216774

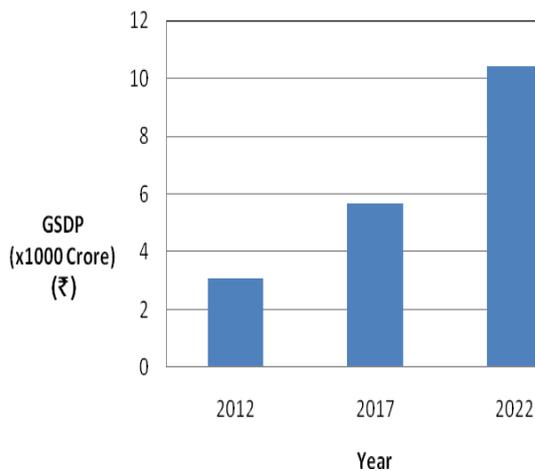


Fig. 4 Estimated GSDP in Uttarakhand in the next ten years (Data Source: Government of India, 2008)

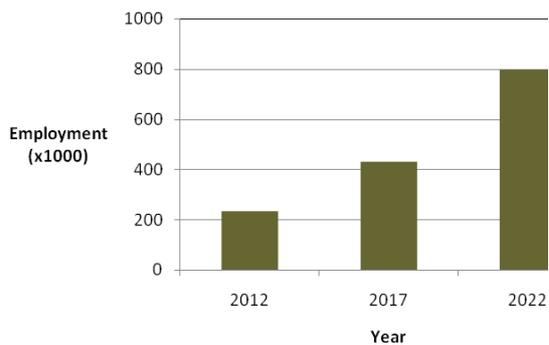


Fig. 5 Estimated tourism employment to be generated in Uttarakhand in the next ten years (Data Source: Government of India, 2008)

Tourism sector is expanding very fast in India. Travel and tourism industry is considered as the fastest growing sector of global trade.. The spiritual tourists form a reasonable share of the total tourists visiting the state. There are a number of requirement to be met before the full potential of the many unique resources can be utilized for both outbound and inbound tourists. The state has to focus on the marketing strategies for effective branding of the state. India is yet to exploit the potential of this industry of the future. A scientific study on spiritual tourism in India is expected to generate considerable interest and would carry immense scope. A promising tourist inflow to Uttarakhand, both domestic as well as international, in the years to come and an impetus to plan ahead is the main motivation for the present study. Analysing the marketing aspects associated with spiritual tourism, analyzing the tourism infrastructure and its influence on the state's economy has been the major focus of the study. It has been decided upon to adopt a descriptive research methodology for the intended investigation.

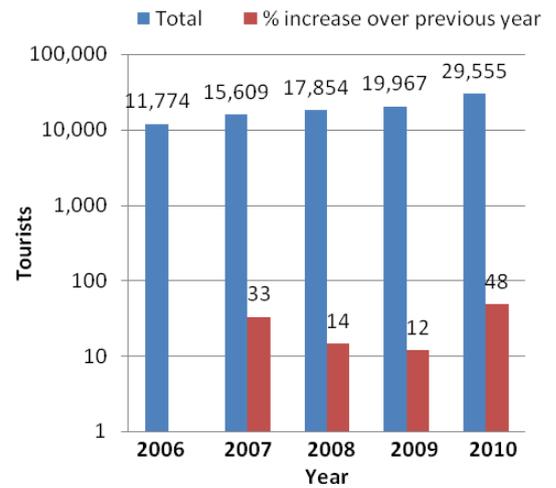
7. Marketing Strategies Needed

Tourism research has been traditionally focused on the demand side of tourist motivation and behavioral patterns to discover why tourists visit particular destinations. This paper presents a strategic management approach by which those responsible for marketing destinations can develop holistic and coordinated strategies for Uttarakhand state of India which will be helpful for making destination decision by potential travelers. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to develop an improved understanding of the key factors that likely to influence the choice of destination. Two important heritage sites of the state namely– Haridwar and Rishikesh were targeted for the discussion. The places were so chosen because (i) Haridwar is said to be the gateway to Uttarakhand, commonly known as '*Hari ka dwar*', and (ii) Rishikesh especially because of the history associated with this place. The study focuses on the effectiveness of different attributes that motivate international tourists to visit Uttarakhand. This paper also investigates the factors that influence the repositioning of a tourist destination. An attempt has

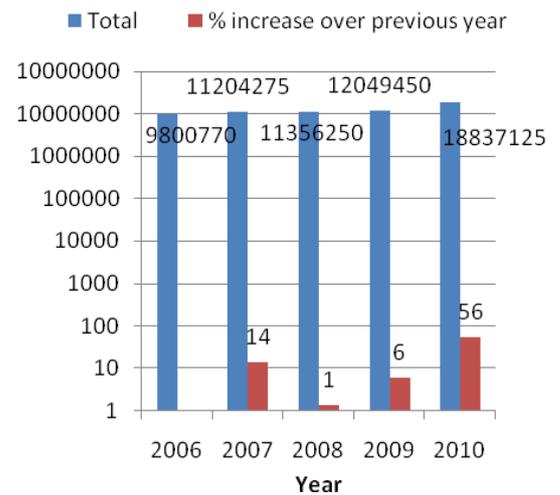
been made to review the significant literatures on tourism destination image and focused on the factors that influence the repositioning of a tourist destination.

Uttarakhand, one of the youngest states in India, fortunately, has many reasons to become one of the natural destination choices for the tourists. The state possesses unmatched natural locations for holidaying, sports, adventures, and, in particular, several places for spiritual activities. Many people consider the state as the spiritual capital of India. On the other hand, interest towards spiritual activities has been rising globally, which has been seen as one of the effective means to relieve stresses. Out of 472.56 million tourists that visited India in the year 2007, 19.45 million tourists visited Uttarakhand (4.11 %). Further analysis revealed, out of the 0.10 million foreign tourists that visited Uttarakhand, 20% tourists came for spiritual activities (Government of India, 2008). Thus, the state has a very strong case to invest for encouraging spiritual tourism in the state in terms of infrastructure as well as intellectual activities. A systematic study on spiritual tourism of the state would be of potentially great value for all the stake holders.

Further, it is evident from the Table 1 that Haridwar and Rishikesh are two most significant destinations for the spiritual tourists in the state. An analysis of international and domestic tourists visiting Haridwar in the last five years of the preceding decade has been presented in the Figure 6. There have been changes in the trends of the tourists. Similar analysis for other destinations can be derived. However, sufficient data regarding the spiritual tourists visiting the state, their requirements, priorities, logistics, etc. with respect to different spiritual destinations are not easily available for analysis. Moreover, strategies to attract the spiritual tourists to the state need detailed analysis. Consequently, a systematic study on different aspects of these destinations in the state, the marketing aspects, in particular, is needed.



(a) International Tourists



(b) Domestic Tourists

Fig. 6 International and Domestic tourist visiting Haridwar during 2006-2010 (Data Source: Government of India, 2008)

8. Conclusion

Tourism industry, regarded as a smokeless industry, has been fast growing and flourishing as an organized industry. In the recent years, tourism has made people feel about its many fold impacts,

particularly on a state/country's economy. Of late, tourism and its associated economic impacts have taken place within a wider context of globalisation of the world economy. However, there are still infrastructural inadequacies that are constraining the growth of tourism in India. Further, tourism development needs to be pursued with a focus on sustainability. The state of Uttarakhand, regarded as the '*Devbhumi*', offers a plethora of highly sought after places of spirituality. Consequently, lion's share of the state's tourism revenue is related to spiritual tourists. In the present study attempts have been made to analyse the existing marketing practices of the spiritual destinations in the state, possible impacts of tourism in general and spiritual tourism, in particular, on the state's economy. Considering the practical constraints of the study, some important aspects, basically the promotional aspects of marketing, have been emphasized in the present study. As tourism, infrastructure and economy are three closely related entities; their influence on each other shall be explored. In this study, the descriptive methodology has been adopted for different economic estimations based on the primary data collected through questionnaire survey administered in Haridwar and Rishikesh, and the secondary data available from various surveys conducted by different agencies and government organizations.

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