Sustainable Tourism Development: An Empirical Survey of Tour Operators in India

Mamhoori A*

Department of Business Administration, Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

Tourism is the fastest developing industry in the world in terms of many items such as employment generation and addition to national income. It generated US$7.6 trillion (10% of global GDP) and 277 million jobs (1 in 11 jobs) for the global economy in 2014. The travel and tourism sector is also the third largest generator of foreign exchange earnings in the world. After having reached a historic milestone of International tourist arrivals also surged, reaching nearly 1.14 billion and visitor spending more than matched that growth. Visitors from emerging economies now represent a 46% share of these international arrivals (up from 38% in 2000). Proving the growth and increased opportunities for travel from those in these new markets. Tourism has maintained its momentum of growth and is expected to reach 1.5 billion by 2020. Increased footfall of tourists and the explosive growth of the industry over the past decade have produced significant impacts on natural resources, consumption patterns, pollution and social systems. This has reiterated the need for a more responsible planning and management of the industry in order to minimize its negative impacts and maximize its potential for a sustained development. Sustainable development of tourism, thus, is fast becoming an indispensable aspect of tourism strategy worldwide. The proposed study, thus, is an attempt to explore the status of sustainable tourism development in Indian context. While emphasis has been on all stakeholders contributions in promoting sustainable tourism, focus has been on the role of Tour Operators- the main service providers in the tourism supply chain. An empirical survey has been undertaken to study the perception of Tour Operators towards various dimensions of sustainable tourism in India. Finally, a model for the development of sustainable tourism is proposed from service provider's (tour operators) perspective based on the findings of the research.

Keywords: Economy; Environment; India; Sustainable tourism development; Socio-culture tour operators

Sustainable Tourism Development

The meaning of the term 'Sustainable Tourism has been seen as a value-laden construct and one that is open to interpretation. It is interpreted- as cast multifariously, as a philosophy, as an ideology, a concept, a political catch phrase, a process or even as product [1]. The key for Sustainable Tourism 'is not ensuring the continued introduction of small-scale, environmentally and culturally appropriate form of tourism, but as an activity to make existing mass tourism developments as sustainable as possible'. Document sustainable tourism's evolution in this direction, highlighting the term's shift in relevance from small-scale to mass tourism.

Sustainable tourism should be considered in the context of a whole system, rather than being conceived solely at the destination level as an approach; now being captured in measurement of tourists' total ecological impacts (Figure 1). The World Commission on Economic Development defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" and it is framed by the domains of environmental integrity, social equity and economic prosperity, commonly referred to as the triple bottom line (Table 1).

Tour Operators

Tour operators, being the key stakeholder in the tourism supply chain, are in a unique position to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism in the country. Since they were the respondents of the empirical survey, the validated framework has direct implications for them. Though each of the above discussed suggestions has implication for tour operators, the key implication for them is to address those areas of concern where there are implementation gaps. Some

of the micro variables like benefits to local community (economic), reducing pollution (environmental), and preserving cultural heritage (socio-cultural) which emerged as significant predictors of sustainable

Source: Retrieved from WTTC Travel and Tourism Economic Impact [1].
Figure 1: World ranking.
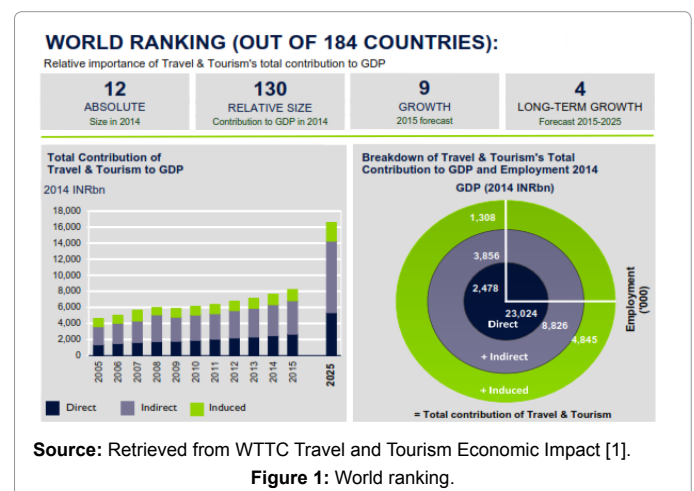
Corresponding author: Mamhoori A, Department of Business Administration, Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh, India, Tel: +919910616711; E-mail: alimamhouri@yahoo.com

Row No		Description
1	GDP: Direct Contribution	The direct contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP was INR2,478.2bn (2.2% of total GDP) in 2014, and is forecast to rise by 7.6% in 2015, and to rise by 7.2% pa, from 2015-2025, to INR5, 339.2bn (2.5% of total GDP) in 2025.
2	GDP: Total Contribution	The total contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP was INR7, 642.5 bn (6.7% of GDP) in 2014. And forecast to rise by 7.5% in 2015, and to rise by 7.3% pa to INR16, 587.2 bn (7.6% of GDP) in 2025.
3	Employment: Direct Contribution	In 2014 Travel and Tourism directly supported 23,024,000 jobs (5.5% of total employment). This is expected to rise by 1.9% in 2015 and rise by 2.2% pa to 29,020,000 jobs (5.7% of total Employment) in 2025.
4	Employment: Total Contribution	In 2014, the total contribution of Travel and Tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 8.7% of total employment (36,695.500 jobs). This is expected to rise by 1.8% in 2015 to 37,365,000 jobs and rise by 2.0% pa to 45.566,000 jobs in 2025 (9.0% of total).
5	Visitor Exports	Visitor exports generated INR1, 224.4 bn (4.1% of total exports) in 2014. This is forecast to grow by 5.2% in 2015, and grow by 6.3% pa, from 2015-2025, to INR2, 377.2bn in 2025 (4.2% of total).
6	Investment	Travel and Tourism investment in 2014 was INR2, 107.2bn, or 6.2% of total investment. It should rise by 9.3% in 2015, and rise by 6.5% pa over the next ten years to INR4, 337.8bn in 2025 (6.9% of total).

Source: Ministry of Tourism Report (MoT).

Table 1: Indian Tourism Figures 2015.

S. no	Categories	Definition
1	**Travel Agents**	A Travel Agent is one who makes arrangements of tickets for travel by air, rail, ship, passport, visa, etc. It may also arrange accommodation, tours, entertainment and other tourism related services
2	**Inbound Tour Operators**	An Inbound tour operator is one who makes arrangements for transport, accommodation, sightseeing, entertainment and other tourism related services for foreign tourist.
3	**Tourist Transport Operators**	A Tourist Transport Operator Organization is one, who provides tourist transport like cars, coaches, boats etc. to tourists for transfers, sightseeing and journeys to tourist places etc.
4	**Adventure Tour Operators**	An Adventure Tour Operator is one who is engaged in activities related to Adventure Tourism in India namely, water sports, aero sports, mountaineering, trekking and safaris of various kinds, etc. In addition to that he may also make arrangements for transport, accommodation, etc.
5	**Domestic Tour Operators**	A domestic tour operator is one who makes arrangements for transport, accommodation, sightseeing, entertainment and other tourism related services for domestic tourists.

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (www.tourism.gov.in).

Table 2: Categories of Tour Operators in India.

management practices but do not contribute significantly to the extent of sustainable tourism development, highlight the gap in implementing these aspects of sustainability [2].

Further, tour operators can harness the potential of the local community by playing a more proactive role and by collaborating with the government in doing so. In fact being in direct contact with almost all key stakeholders of sustainable tourism, they are capable of playing a much more critical role, than they are at the moment. One important step in the direction is to bring in all the unrecognized private players in this segment, which are sizable in number and yet out of ambit of government control.

Role of tour operators

Tour Operator is a business that combines two or more travel services (e.g., transport, accommodation, catering, entertainment, and sightseeing) and sells them either through travel agencies or directly to finial consumers as a single product called 'a package tour'. The tour operators offer a packaged combination of transport, accommodation and services and have very significant roles to play as travel intermediaries that link local tourism suppliers with overseas tour operators.

Tour Operators represent an important link towards the development of culturally responsible tourism behavior. The role of a tour operator is to be a cultural broker who facilitates communication i.e., understanding and action between hosts and tourist who differ culturally, and hence can play the most significant role in promoting sustainable tourism. UNWTO [3] has envisaged codes of responsible tourism for Tour Operators worldwide and has even established criteria and indicators to assess their contribution in promoting sustainable tourism.

Every single tour operators is required to follow the UNWTO [3] international codes of responsible tourism behavior, some of which are as follows:

- Tour Operators and Wholesalers need to develop educational travel programs (e.g., destination familiarization presentations) that would provide examples of the specific foreign language and non-verbal behavior codes, explain the preservation programs for natural, historical and cultural resources in foreign countries, principles of conservation different customs and foreign cultural policies, as well as the tour guides training and responsibilities, cultural assistance programs, and coordination of cultural and social requirements.

- The Tour Operators responsibility is to demonstrate respect to the host country by negotiating with host communities.

- Conditions required for tourist visits some of these conditions are the recognition of acceptable activities, suitable group size and appropriate places for tourist visitation.

- Tour Operators should treat cultural heritage of the host country with dignity and respect by informing tourists about local customs and traditions and appropriate behavior. They should ensure that tourists ask permission to take photographs or videotape local people, and do not damage or remove religious or cultural artifacts.

In India, the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) has provided for a classification of the travel trade service providers and grants recognition to these tour providers, in order to ensure that they provide quality services to the tourists. A list of approved categories of Tour Operators and their brief description is provided in the Table 2 below. Thus, in order to encourage quality standard and service in this category so as to promote sustainable tourism in India, a voluntary scheme of granting recognition is open to all bonafide tour operators to bring them in

organized sector. Guidelines and details of the process and tenure of recognition are provided on the official site of the Ministry of Tourism. As on December, 2014, 407 Inbound Tour Operators and 107 Domestic Tour Operators were registered with the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) (Table 2).

To further involve and engage the Tour Operators in India in promoting sustainable tourism, a comprehensive set of criteria and indicators (STCI, 2011) have been outlined by the committee which has been launched recently (Press release, August 2014, MoT) for various other segments like the accommodation sector etc, by the Minister of Tourism. This is expected to enhance the level of sustainable tourism development in the country, provided these are implemented sincerely by these stakeholders. As a part of the doctoral research under consideration, a comprehensive empirical survey has been undertaken to assess the level of perception, implementation and contribution of Tour Operators in India in promoting sustainable tourism in the country. The results and implications of the survey are reported in chapter five of the thesis, and form the key focus of the research study.

Roles of tour operators in promoting sustainable tourism in India: The tour operators offer a packaged combination of transport, accommodation and services and have very significant roles to play as travel intermediaries that link local tourism suppliers with overseas tour operators.

• UNWTO [4,5] has envisaged codes of responsible tourism for Tour Operators worldwide and has even established criteria and indicators to assess their contribution in promoting sustainable tourism.

• In India, the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) has provided for a classification of the travel trade service providers and grants recognition to these tour providers, in order to ensure that they provide quality services to the tourists.

• To further involve and engage the Tour Operators in India in promoting sustainable tourism, a comprehensive set of criteria and indicators have been outlined by the committee which has been launched recently for various other segments like the accommodation sector etc, by the Minister of Tourism.

• A detailed empirical survey about the perception and role of Tour Operators in India in promoting sustainable tourism is undertaken as a part of this research; the conclusions of which are presented in subsequent section.

Tour operators in India

The basic approach of the study is to develop the conceptual research model at the outset on the basis of literature review, and then validate and interpret them with the help of empirical studies. For this the entire study is divided into three phases, the outline of which is discussed below and is depicted in the Figure 2.

Phase -iii- empirical study for hypotheses testing: The testing of hypotheses was carried out through questionnaire based survey eliciting response from various Inbound and Domestic Tour Operators. The conceptual research model proposed for the study was validated and interpreted with reference to Tour Operators.

Finally, the results from the descriptive study, expert interview and the empirical study are synthesized, based on which suggestions for a more sustainable management of the tourism sector have been outlined.

Research Methodology for the Empirical Survey

The empirical research under consideration was primarily carried out using the scientific method for opinion survey. Empirical Survey as a scientific method of enquiry is best suited for a research where original/primary data is collected for describing a population too large to observe directly. It is frequently used in social science research where a researcher selects a sample of respondents and administers a standardized questionnaire to them.

The survey based research has been liberally used in management research as well but has been criticized for the statistical weaknesses (lack of validity, reliability) and inconclusiveness (risk of generating no cumulative knowledge). Thus, adequate steps should be undertaken for establishing the rigor and relevance of the research method adopted. The research process must be objective to reduce a biased interpretation of the results documenting all data and methodology so that it is available for careful scrutiny by other theorist and domain experts, thereby allowing other researchers the opportunity to verify results by attempting to reproduce them. This also permits statistical measures of the reliability (of these data) to be established.
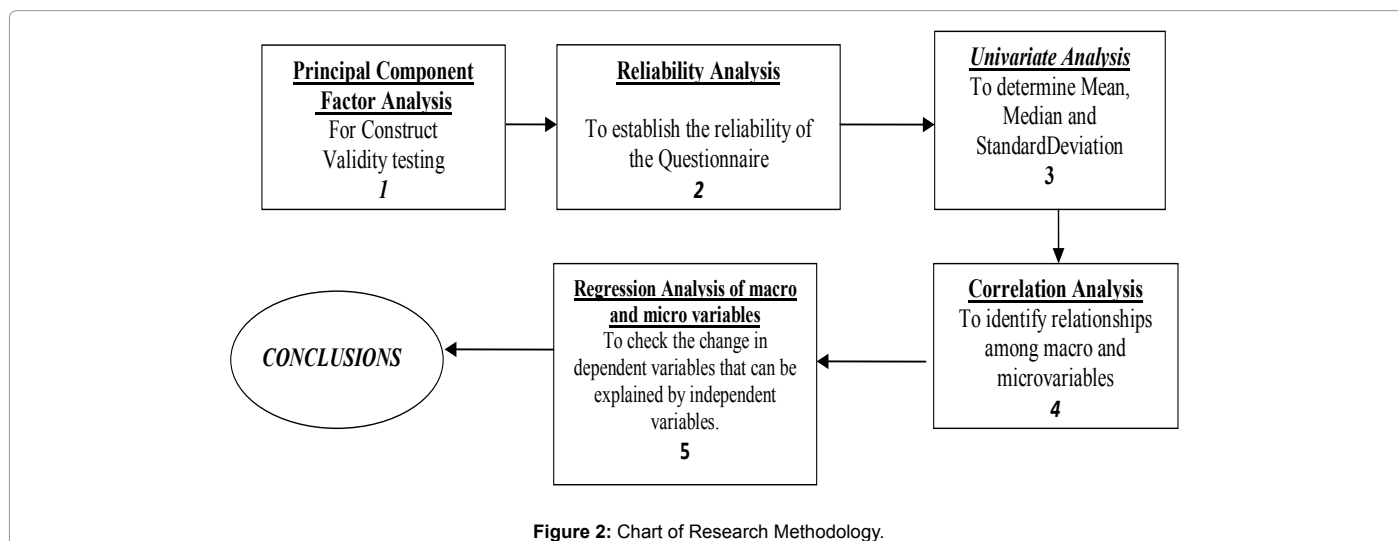

Figure 2: Chart of Research Methodology.

The empirical survey in this research aims at developing basic understanding about the likely impact of the Economic, Environmental and Socio-Cultural Factors on the Statues of Sustainable Tourism Development in India, as per the opinion of Tour Operators in India. The criterion for respondent's selection for the opinion survey was largely purposive, as one top level manager was selected from each of the Domestic and Inbound tour operating company registered with the Ministry of Tourism, India. From out of 407 Domestic and Inbound tour operating companies registered with the Ministry of Tourism, valid responses have been received from 180 companies.

The data has been collected through questionnaires formulated to capture the responses of Domestic and Inbound Tour Operating Companies registered with the Ministry of Tourism, India. The main questionnaire designed to elicit response from the top management of the select tour operating companies, forms the basis for validating the conceptual research model. Principal Component Factor Analysis has been used to validate the items of the constructs with the help of the survey results. Chronbach Alpha has been computed to ascertain the reliability of the questionnaire thus establishing its internal consistencies (Tables 3-5). Univariate analysis is undertaken to analyze the descriptive statistics of all the macro and micro variables. Correlation and step-wise regression analysis are used to test the hypotheses of association. While correlation has been determined to ascertain the relationship between macro and micro variables, regression analysis forms the basis of the hypotheses testing. The statistical analysis of the data has been carried out, using statistical software (SPSS version 22); the conclusions have been made based on the results explains the flow chart of statistical analysis, used in analyzing the data of the empirical survey (Figure 2).

Methodology of the Paper

A survey method has been used to empirically validate the conceptual research model representing hypothesized relationships among the variables of sustainable tourism development, by taking the response of Tour Operators (TO), using a questionnaire. Some related aspects of the survey such as questionnaire development, its administration, validity, descriptive and related statistics are summarized before enumerating the key findings.

For pre-testing, five experts were interviewed, using a pretesting template based on the Questionnaire Appraisal System (QAS), after which the number of items in the questionnaire reduced from 40 to 34.

In all 449 tour operators (both Inbound and Domestic) have been registered, out of which 400 were sent the questionnaire. Finally, 185 questionnaires were received of which 180 were found to be valid for analysis.

For construct validity, the EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis) was performed using PCA (Principal Component Analysis) method for which a factor loading of 0.50 has been used as cut off point. Finally, six items with loadings less than 0.5 were dropped, thus confirming twenty nine items for the final analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measures of sampling adequacy values were well within the acceptable range of 0.5 to 1.

The overall Cronbach's Alpha value of the questionnaire is quite high (0.795), indicating that the research instrument used is adequately reliable. The Cronbach's Alpha values of all the macro and micro variables are within the acceptable range, that is, more than the cut off value of 0.6.

Major findings of the survey

Some of the key findings and conclusions of the survey are enumerated as follows:

An analysis of the univariate statistics of the macro variables of the study, indicate higher mean and median values for economic and socio-cultural factors, reiterating our conjecture that economic and socio-cultural factors, gets higher precedence than environmental factors, which is often compromised in the tourism sector. The standard deviation and variance are within permissible limits.

Results of correlation analysis of all micro variables suggest that there is significant correlation among most of the variables. A stronger relationship is exhibited among the micro constructs of independent and dependent variables.

Empirical Survey	To validate the relationships between the Economic, environmental and Socio-cultural factors with Sustainable Tourism Development	Questionnaire based survey method	Purposive sampling (Tour Operators registered with Government of India)

Table 3: Statistical Analysis Flowchart.

Research context/domain	Research variables Investigated	Survey Instrument Used	Unit of analysis	Sample size
Tour Operators (Domestic and Inbound in India	All macro and micro research variables of sustainable Tourism	Questionnaire based	Managers of Tour Operating Companies in India	180

Table 4: Research Framework for Opinion Survey Method Adopted for the Study.

Research Analysis Techniques	Objective of the Analysis	Author(s) Reference
Factor Analysis	Procedure was used to reduce factors for the study and validate constructs.	Malhotra Hair et al. Babbie
Univariate Analysis	The analysis was carried out to analyze each of macro and micro variables in terms of descriptive statistics viz. mean, standard deviation, range etc.	Nargundkar Hair et al.
Bi-Variate Analysis	Two Variables at a time were also analyzed by identification correlation amongst macro and micro variables of the research study	Nargundkar Hair et al.
Regression Analysis	In continuation of correlation, regression analysis (step-wise) was carried out to test hypothesis of relations to identify whether dependent variable i.e. project performance is explained by identified independent variables.	Nargundkar Hair et al. Babbie

Table 5: Description of Research Analysis Techniques Used.

All the three macro independent variables- Economic, Environmental and Socio-cultural Factors- are significant predictors of the dependent macro variable Sustainable Tourism Development, thus accepting all three macro hypotheses.

While 'environmental factors' and 'economic factors' are perceived to be critical predictors of 'Sustainable Tourism Development', Socio-cultural factors, though significant, are not perceived to be very strong by the respondents.

Among the three Economic Factors, Sustainable Infrastructure (SI) and Employment Opportunities (EOP) has been perceived to be the critical significant predictor of all the three dependent variables i.e., Sustainable Tourism Development (STD), Sustainable Management Practices (SMP) and Extent of Sustainable Development (ESD) by the Tour Operators.

Benefit to Local Communities (BLC), however, is a significant predictor of only two dependent variables i.e., Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) and Sustainable Management Practices (SMP) implying that while it is considered important for sustainable tourism and have been included in the Sustainable Management Practices roadmap, it has not been adequately implemented.

Among the two Environmental Factors, Conserving Resources (CR) has been perceived to be the most critical significant predictor of all the three dependent variables.

While Reducing Pollution (RP) is a stronger predictor of overall sustainable tourism development and is considered important in the Sustainable Management Practices roadmap, it does not significantly affect the Extent of Sustainable Development (ESD), thereby indicating a major implementation gap.

Both micro socio-cultural variables - Community Participation and Development (CPD) and Preserving Cultural Heritage (PCH)- emerged to be significant predictors of Sustainable Tourism Development, they are not a very strong predictor as they explain variation only up to 6.6% (R Square Value: 0.066).

Out of the two Socio-Cultural variables, Community Participation Development (CPD) predicts significantly but not strongly Extent of Sustainable Development (ESD). Further, Preserving Cultural Heritage (PCH) exhibits significant relationship with Sustainable Management Practices but not with Extent of Sustainable Development (ESD), thus, indicating a major implementation gap.

Results and Discussions

Supply-chain effects - purchases of domestic goods and services directly by different industries within Travel and Tourism as inputs to their final tourism output.

A survey method has been used to empirically validate the conceptual research model representing hypothesized relationships among the variables of sustainable tourism development, by taking the response of Tour Operators (TO), using a questionnaire. Some related aspects of the survey such as questionnaire development, its administration, validity, descriptive and related statistics are summarized before enumerating the key findings.

- For pre-testing, five experts were interviewed, using a pretesting template based on the Questionnaire Appraisal System (QAS), after which the number of items in the questionnaire reduced from 40 to 34.

- In all 449 tour operators (both Inbound and Domestic) have been registered, out of which 400 were sent the questionnaire. Finally, 185 questionnaires were received of which 180 were found to be valid for analysis.

- For construct validity, the EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis) was performed using PCA (Principal Component Analysis) method for which a factor loading of 0.50 has been used as cut off point. Finally, six items with loadings less than 0.5 were dropped, thus confirming twenty nine items for the final analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measures of sampling adequacy values were well within the acceptable range of 0.5 to 1.

- The overall Cronbach's Alpha value of the questionnaire is quite high (0.795), indicating that the research instrument used is adequately reliable. The Cronbach's Alpha values of all the macro and micro variables are within the acceptable range, that is, more than the cut off value of 0.6.

Some of the key findings and conclusions of the survey are enumerated as follows:

- An analysis of the univariate statistics of the macro variables of the study, indicate higher mean and median values for economic and socio-cultural factors, reiterating our conjecture that economic and socio-cultural factors, gets higher precedence than environmental factors, which is often compromised in the tourism sector. The standard deviation and variance are within permissible limits.

- Results of correlation analysis of all micro variables suggest that there is significant correlation among most of the variables. A stronger relationship is exhibited among the micro constructs of independent and dependent variables.

- All the three macro independent variables- Economic, Environmental and Socio-cultural Factors- are significant predictors of the dependent macro variable Sustainable Tourism Development, thus accepting all three macro hypotheses.

- While 'environmental factors' and 'economic factors' are perceived to be critical predictors of 'Sustainable Tourism Development', Socio-cultural factors, though significant, are not perceived to be very strong by the respondents.

- Among the three Economic Factors, Sustainable Infrastructure (SI) and Employment Opportunities (EOP) has been perceived to be the critical significant predictor of all the three dependent variables i.e., Sustainable Tourism Development (STD), Sustainable Management Practices (SMP) and Extent of Sustainable Development (ESD) by the Tour Operators.

- Benefit to Local Communities (BLC), however, is a significant predictor of only two dependent variables i.e., Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) and Sustainable Management Practices (SMP) implying that while it is considered important for sustainable tourism and have been included in the Sustainable Management Practices roadmap, it has not been adequately implemented.

- Among the two Environmental Factors, Conserving Resources (CR) has been perceived to be the most critical significant predictor of all the three dependent variables.

- While Reducing Pollution (RP) is a stronger predictor of overall sustainable tourism development and is considered important in the Sustainable Management Practices roadmap, it does not significantly affect the Extent of Sustainable Development (ESD), thereby indicating a major implementation gap.

- Both micro socio-cultural variables- Community Participation and Development (CPD) and Preserving Cultural Heritage (PCH)- emerged to be significant predictors of Sustainable Tourism Development, they are not a very strong predictor as they explain variation only up to 6.6% (R Square Value: 0.066).

- Out of the two Socio-Cultural variables, Community Participation Development (CPD) predicts significantly but not strongly Extent of Sustainable Development (ESD). Further, Preserving Cultural Heritage (PCH) exhibits significant relationship with Sustainable Management Practices but not with Extent of Sustainable Development (ESD), thus, indicating a major implementation gap.

Conclusions

It may be recalled that the key objective of this research journey was to evolve a validated framework for sustainable tourism development in India. For this the preliminary phase of the study concentrated on the identification, validation and deeper understanding of the research variables and their relationships as discussed in chapter 2 and 3. Chapter 4 presented a descriptive analysis of the status of sustainable tourism in India and the role of key stakeholders were also analyzed based on published data, reports and journals. Also, a qualitative study based on expert inputs using TISM tool, analyzed the inter-relationship among the variables identified from the literature, and presented in the last section of chapter 4. The subsequent chapter 5 was devoted to report the analysis and findings of the empirical survey of the Tour Operators envisaged for the study. Chapter 6 summarized the major findings and synthesized the learning of the study from across different methods used, followed by the recommendations and implications of this research for its stakeholders. Finally the significant contributions of the research, its limitations and suggestions for future research is also laid down paving way for further valuable additions in the field.

Thus in the end, this research work can at best be considered a step forward in laying the foundations for a more tangible contribution to the domain of sustainable tourism and stakeholders analysis.

References

1. (2014) World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Travel and Tourism Economic Impacts.

2. United Nations World Trade Organization Report, UNWTO (2014). New Political Economy 12: 1-12.

3. UNWTO (2002) Tourism and Poverty Alleviation.

4. UNWTO-United Nations World Tourism Organization (2013) UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2013 eds. Madrid, Spain.

5. UNWTO-United Nations World Tourism Organization (2014). UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2014 eds. Madrid, Spain.