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Covid-19 and Tourism: Threats and Strategies as Perceived by Tourism Stakeholders of Sikkim

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The ongoing pandemic has restricted human mobility to only essentials. Inevitably, tourism which survives on temporary movement of human not for essential but mostly for recreation and leisure, will suffer the most. Sikkim is majorly dependent on tourism for employment and income generation and has bagged many tourism awards for its excellence. In 2017, it has received 6.96 lakh tourists from March to May. Under the ongoing pandemic for the same season tourist flow has reached to 0, needless of saying that the well thrived tourism industry of Sikkim is threatened now. The aim of this study is to explore the major threats of COVID19 on tourism business as identified by tourism stakeholders of Sikkim and their perception of these threats and Post-COVID19-Strategies (PCS). Total 32 stakeholders have been interviewed through an online survey who identified 9 potential threats. The uncertainties related to reopening of tourism business is the mostly feared threat followed by loss in tourist arrival longer time to recover. Stakeholders are least worried about threats like leaving the sector or decreased stay duration of tourists. Strikingly, stakeholders who receives tourists in bulk, owns bigger and well-equipped accommodation, dining and entertainment facilities, bears high maintenance and overhead costs are more tensed than small players. 18 PCS have been identified and respondents were enquired about their level of agreement on implementing, practicing or morally supporting these PCS using a 5-point Likert scale. The most agreed strategy to practice is an onsite precautionary health practice i.e. 'proper sanitization of every room and cars availed by tourist every time they leave'. The least supported (recovery) strategy is 'arranging fairs and festivals right after reopening the tourism sector to boost up tourist flow'. This study is an initial exploratory attempt that has outlined the spirits of tourism stakeholders under a pandemic condition which may further build a ground for confirmatory and theory building studies on these issues.

Introduction

The present world is witnessing how a microscopic organism called Novel Coronavirus has threatened not only the life of human being but also an intrinsic human feature called mobility. In order to ensure minimal contamination, states have imposed several non-pharmaceutical measures (NPMs) or initiatives (NPIs) to limit mobility which further has affected different sects of life ranging from visiting marketplaces daily to a delicately and long-planned holiday. The impact of worldwide quarantine, lockdowns and alike not only has affected individual travel plans but its impact is quite serious than that. Industries like transportation and tourism which are built on "human mobility" are completely inert now and even their future directions are unknown, not to mention that, the life of people linked with these sectors are in question. Even, scholars feared that although tourism has proven to be resilient to external shocks like SARS or global economic crisis, this

time the forthcomings in tourism industry is incalculable (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). As reported by UNWTO almost 100 to 120 million job are at risk and a drop in 60% to 80% of foreign tourist arrival in 2020 are leading to a huge economic loss worldwide (UNWTO 2020a). During 2019, in India, 9.2 % of the total GDP, 8.1% of employment originated from travel and tourism. Over the last half decade every 1 in 4 jobs have been created form this sector (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020). This attests India's dependence on this sector and under the ongoing situation this sector is going to suffer along with the economy linked with it. World travel and tourism council (WTTC) has predicted that Indian tourism industry will grow at an annual rate of 6.9% and eventually by 2028 it was supposed to contribute 9.9% of India's GDP (World travel and tourism council, 2019). However, after the unexpected pandemic a projection given by CARE Ratings, a credit rating agency, suggests that it is expected to encounter a revenue loss of Rs 1.25 trillion in 2020 due to closure of hotels and suspension in flight operations due to this pandemic (Dash, 2020). Sikkim is one of the Indian states which is majorly dependent on tourism for employment and income generation and has bagged many tourism awards for its excellence in the past years. For instances, 'India's Favorite Hill Station' title by HolidayIQ, 'Most Responsible Tourism Destination' by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT GoI) (Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, 2017b). In 2017, it has received 6.96 lakh tourists from March to May (Tourism and Civil Aviation Department, 2017a). Under the ongoing pandemic for the same season tourist flow has reached to 0, needless of saying that the well thrived tourism industry of Sikkim is threatened now. Under such circumstances, life of Sikkimese people dependent on tourism are at stake and if they are bothered, they must be panicking for some sound reasons. This study attempts to gauge that level of panic among stakeholders as well as their response against the potential recovery and Post-COVID19 precautionary plans. Studies bridging pandemic and tourism have manifold scholarly aspects. The most debated aspect is the effect of pandemics like Avian flu, SARS or COVID19 on tourism (Jonung and Roeger, 2006, Page and Yeoman, 2007, Kuo et al., 2008, Kuo et al., 2009, Yang et al., 2020). Their findings indicated that tourism industry have elasticity towards these external tremors. However, Gössling et al. (2020) pointed out how COVID19 as a pandemic might have different impacts on tourism than any other pandemics and outside global shocks. On the other hand, few studies pointed out how tourist spots and tourist activities may transfer pandemic viruses from human to other species (Köndgen et al., 2008) or from one human to another (Correa-Martínez et al., 2020) and become the trigger rather than the target of pandemic. Nonetheless, none of these studies has captured the thoughts of ground level stakeholders during an ongoing pandemic. Ground level stakeholders basically encompass the whole range of stakeholders who owns and runs various tourist enterprises and deals with tourists in person (not state enterprises who centrally decides policies but the local accommodation owners, members of community-based organisations.) This study attempts to identify the major threats incurred by pandemic on tourism sector as perceived by these ground level stakeholders along with their level of worry about these threats. Besides this research also attempts to record their perception on different proposed Post-COVID19-strategies (PCSs). The research efforts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the major COVID19 induced threats on tourism as perceived by the tourism stakeholders of Sikkim and how much worried the stakeholders are?
2. How the stakeholders perceive the proposed PCSs and how prepared they are to exercise these PCSs?

Answering these questions will help fill up the gap in literature about stakeholder's perception of pandemic induced threats and mitigation strategies as well as it will also indicate what recovery and precautionary measures they support and what measures are wanted and thus should be avoided by the state while making recovery and reopening plans. This study will also unveil their level of preparedness to practice those options. In order to answer these questions following objectives have been designed.

1. To identify the major threats of COVID19 on Sikkim tourism as perceived by the stakeholders.
2. To measure the level of worry the stakeholders possess about each of these threats.
3. To measure how strong a stakeholder agrees to practice, implement or morally support the suggested PCSs.

Figure no. 1 Sikkim an its abundant tourist destination
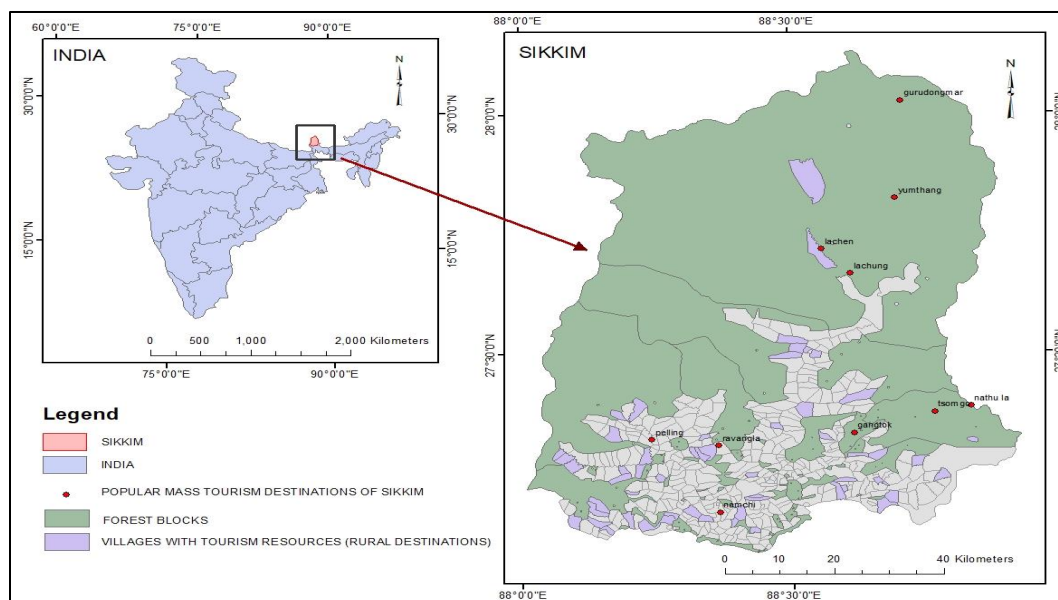
Methodology

A descriptive approach has been undertaken for the present study. Tourism stakeholder who are interviewed are mostly individuals operating at ground level. Among 42 Sikkimese stakeholders, who were communicated using an online questionnaire, 32 participants have responded. These 32 stakeholders were interviewed using a structured questionnaire. some of the respondents requested to keep their identity confidential so all of their names are coded as R1, R2, R3 and so on to avoid any conflict (table no.1). The interview procedure had two stages. Firstly, the stakeholders were asked to note major threats of COVID19. After gathering the possible list of threats, in the second round of interview the stakeholders were further asked to rate their level of fear or worry on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from okay or not worried at all (1) to panicking (5) and these threats were further ranked according to the average weightage given by the stakeholder on this 5-point scale (Table no. 2).

During the second round of interview, it has also attempted to gauge how strong a stakeholder agrees to practice, implement or morally support the suggested PCSs. The list of proposed PCSs (Table no. 3) has been prepared mainly from the guidelines to recover and reopen tourism sector as suggested by UNWTO (UNWTO, 2020b, UNWTO, 2020c, UNWTO, 2020d) and the general health related guidelines as per WHO (WHO, 2020). Only 1 recovery strategy mentioned here was taken from a newspaper report stating that the Government of Sikkim is planning to organise a mega-event right after reopening the sector in October 2020 if possible (Borah, 2020). To assess the level of support these PCSs received, respondents were asked to again rate these PCSs on a 5-point agreement scale (1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree). These were further categorised into 5 major categories and group average for each category was calculated to compare the level of support each group of strategy received. Average score for each strategy and their respective standard deviation are mentioned to see the level of support and the level of divergence in opinion respectively.

Table 1: respondents and their involvement in tourism business

Respondent no.	Involvement in tourism business
R1	Homestay owner
R2	Homestay owner
R3	Homestay owner, bird watching guide, tour operator
R4	Performer and aspirant accommodation owner
R5	Homestay owner
R6	Homestay owner
R7	Homestay owner and tour operator

R8	Tour operator, lessee of tourism property
R9	Tour operator, lessee of tourism property
R10	Tourist cab driver, guide
R11	Homestay owner
R12	Homestay owner
R13	Homestay owner, tour operator
R14	Homestay owner, CBO (community-based organisations) head
R15	Hotel owner, tourist taxi owner, tour operator
R16	Tourist cab driver, guide
R17	Homestay owner
R18	Homestay owner, CBO head
R19	Farmstay owner
R20	Homestay owner
R21	Homestay owner
R22	Hotel owner, tourist taxi owner, tour operator
R23	Homestay owner, tour operator
R24	Hotel, restaurant, bar and karaoke owner
R25	Aspirant accommodation owner and vegetable supplier in hotels and homestays
R26	Hotel owner, tourist taxi owner, tour operator
R27	Hotel owner, tourist taxi owner, tour operator
R28	Homestay owner
R29	Guide
R30	Booking clerk at tourist spot
R31	Workers in hotels
R32	Workers in hotels

Results and Discussion

Stakeholder perception on potential threats:

During the first round of interaction with the tourism stakeholders of Sikkim has reported 9 major potential threats shaped by the COVID 19 and consequent NPIs (Table no. 2). The subsequent ratings given by the stakeholders has unveiled their level of worry about certain problem.

Table 2: Suggested Post-COVID-19 strategies (PCS) and level of support from stakeholders

Broad categories of PCS (group average)	Suggested Post-COVID-19 strategies (PCS)	Weightage given by stakeholder (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree)	Ranks	Std. Deviation
Precautionary measures off-site (4.266)	I am going to check the background information of the tourist (travel history, about their TGR, history of Covid19) before entertaining them.	4.438	3	0.75
	I believe that thermal checking of tourists at the entry point should also be done at the time of departure	3.75	11	0.68

	I think thermal checking the tourists at entry point should be a mandatory precautionary measure	4.688	2	1.17
	I will ask tourist to download "Arogya Setu" app	4.188	6	1.04
Precautionary measures on-site (4.230)	I will request tourists to use face mask whenever they are out in public (even within the village)	4.438	4	0.83
	I will ensure santization of every room (or car or restaurant tables) after departure	4.781	1	0.76
	I will try to reduce touch areas and regularly sanitize high touch surface	3.867	10	1.18
	I will ensure social distancing among tourist groups (if more than one group visits at a time)	4.032	9	0.9
	I will try to restrict the number of tourist arrival in my homestay at a time	4.094	8	1.07
Knowledge about recovering business and precautions (3.563)	I believe that this lockdown phase is best time to learn skills about how to restart, recover and run business once the lockdown is over	4.438	3	0.75
	I am aware of the proposed business recovery and reopening suggestions given by UNWTO and I believe those are helpful for us	2.688	15	1.16
Strategies to recover and re-promote business (3.481)	I am planning to diversify my products to attract new market and boost tourist arrival	2.969	13	1.33
	I believe that collaborative efforts are best way to fight Post-COVID19 problems and we may also adopt collaborative measures	4.156	7	1.18
	I have a plan in my mind about how to re-promote my products	3.031	12	1.26
	I think after opening-up we should arrange festivals as earlier as possible	2.312	16	1.8
	I am going to assure tourists about the health facility available at my destination as a part of promotion	4.25	5	0.71
Booking and refund strategies in Post-COVID19 world (3.297)	I will encourage tourist for e-booking and contactless payment	3.75	11	1.09
	In case of cancellation under present scenario, I support 100% refund on cancellation	2.844	14	1.03

The uncertainty of the future of tourism business has scored highest. Stakeholders are somewhere between worried to really worried when it comes to thinking about the uncertainties. The graph showing daily cases of COVID 19 affected in India is not showing any suggestion of a falling trend soon despite a nationwide lockdown of over 70 days. In this situation not a particular problem but the overall uncertainties are the major threat that is bothering tourism stakeholders in Sikkim. According to respondent R8:

"the graph of daily cases of COVID affected people are not showing a downward bent, despite of more than 2 months of lockdown. So, it is quite possible that after the opening of the economy the number is indeed going to rise rather than falling. In such situations, I doubt the state will further try to restrict the movement of people, especially the movement for leisure by imposing another lockdown. Even if the state allows the movement, I doubt how willing our tourists will be to come and visit their favourite tourist destinations. Thinking of this makes me panicked, because my livelihood is very much dependent on my business in Sikkim. A lion's share of my tourists visits Sikkim."

59.37% of the participants are unsure about entertaining tourist even if the government opens up tourism sector, 50% of the respondents believe that domestic tourist flow might be restored in March 2021 and restoration of foreign tourist flow will take longer, 62.50% of the respondents believe that it might be restored in October 2021. In a rapid assessment, Gössling et al. (2020) mentioned the need for studying the role of domestic tourists to recover tourism business, stakeholders of Sikkim are somehow echoing the same chant. They believe that domestic tourists will be first to bring tourism in Sikkim back to normalcy. Although all stakeholders are somehow worried about the uncertainties of opening up and restarting tourism business, it is noted that people who are accommodation owner and receives bulk tourist at their lodging facilities or people who are now not anymore dependent on agriculture or any other sources but solely on tourism for their livelihood are much more worried about the uncertain future of their tourism businesses.

Sikkim has been a very celebrated choice of tourists. During 2017, 13,75,854 domestic and 49,111 foreign tourists flooded Sikkim. This Indian state even earned headlines on leading newspaper like *The Telegraph* for witnessing foreign tourist surge in 2019. The report states that according to the official data 1,33,388 (2019) foreigner has paid a visit to Sikkim (Ravidas, 2020). Within a span of two years the foreign tourist arrival gas gone almost 3 times higher suggesting the huge and rapid growth of tourist demand of Sikkim. Consequently, the next major threats to tourism business as perceived by the stakeholders are major dropping in tourist arrival, longer span to recover back to normalcy and overall loss in income. However, while they are worried about these threats, they also mentioned that how they must accept this loss for their own good. For instance, respondent 1 who is a homestay owner and the "sarpanch" (head of gram panchayat) of the village has mentioned the following:

"I am actually panicking even about thinking the reduced flow of tourists, because our destination is a pretty off beat one and it took me years to attract tourists flow towards our village. I really don't know how long it will take to restore back to the normal and indeed we are going to face huge loss. However, just because I have a homestay and I may face huge loss I cannot risk the life of my fellow villagers. Being a responsible elected panchayat member, I wish no matter how long it takes, only when the cases reaches to 0 or to minimal, then only we should restart the business. Besides I also believe that even after reopening the business in order to maintain social distancing for safety, I will practice by myself as well as suggest other homestay owners to entertain as small number of tourists as possible."

This topic of entertaining small number of tourists is further discussed in the following precautionary measures sector. Talking about overall loss of income, it was strikingly found that there are two types of people who are not much bothered about income loss. The first group is dominated by people who might have done well in tourism business, but it is not their sole and primary source of income. Out of 9 people who said they are not all worried or a very little worried about income loss, 7 people are still dependent on agriculture, 2 of them is vegetable supplier to the nearest homestays, hotels and restaurants and 1 is performer in tourism festivals. It is probably won't be exaggeration to say that small players in tourism business perceive themselves to be much more resilient to the effect of ongoing pandemic provided they have a second source of income. The second type includes 1 person appointed as booking officer at tourist spots. According to him it is the job and income security of government employees which makes him believe that despite of reduced tourist arrival or longer recovery period his income is not going to be affected.

Unlike the previous business threats, the fourth most worried peril is rather a health-related threat, the fear of getting infected. Stakeholders have mainly reported the fear of getting infected from the tourists who are outsiders to Sikkim. There is a general fear among the people that Sikkim is one of the least affected states of India and it is tourists who can break this

record. Stakeholders who maintains proximity to the tourists like hosts at accommodation sectors, drivers, guides, and workers in hotel (sweepers) are mostly worried about getting infected.

The next two threats are related to costs and prices of tourism product. Tourism stakeholders were planning to increase the price of their products in order to compensate the reduced flow of tourist, small number of guest to practice social distancing and the loss already incurred but they fear due to the upcoming depression in the economy the tourists might not agree to pay more which might further lead to rigorous bargaining and also further tourist loss. However, no stakeholder was found to be panicking about this threat at all. The next threat is mostly frightful for stakeholder who has luxury cars or luxury accommodation facilities, naturally they had to bear a huge overhead cost. However, for most of the stakeholders this threat is worth a range between worried to a very little worried mainly because the fiscal measures taken by the state government to ease the load of these expenses.

Stakeholders are a very little worried or okay about 'leaving the sector'. Only a few people have found panicked about leaving this sector. Both respondent R31 and R32 are employed as hotel workers away from their village, during lockdown they came back to their respective village away from famous their workplace and they both believe that due to the upcoming depression and reduced demand their employers will never call them back to their previous job. They are either really panicking (5) or worrying (3) a lot about being fired from their jobs.

Analysing the overall position of stakeholders regarding their perspective of threats reveals that stakeholders (R3, R22, R24, R26, R27) who used to receive tourists in bulk, owns bigger and well-equipped accommodation, dining and entertainment facilities, bears high maintenance and overhead costs are more tensed than other players. They are more than worried (more than 3.5) and almost panicking (less than 4.5) at certain problems. Some of these stakeholders (R31 and R32) are worried because of lack of alternative source. While R25 despite being a small and aspirant player in this sector is worried because of his investment that he already made for his upcoming plan to enter tourism sector. Stakeholders with low level of concern either have a stable source of income other than tourism (R4, R14, R29) or being a tour operator (R8, R9) are confident enough to overcome the situation with their well-developed network in the market.

Stakeholder perception on proposed Post-COVID19-Strategies (PCSs):
The second phase of the analysis deals with recording stakeholders' perception of strategies to adopt in Post-COVID-19 world. The strategies were further categorised into four broad categories (table no. 3). The group average number is indicating on scale of 5 how strong an actor is agreeing to practice, implement or morally support a practice (if he or she is not directly related to that activity). PCSs are ranked according to the level of the support they received with their respective standard deviation values suggesting the lower the value the more agreement exists among stakeholders regarding that point (Table no. 3).

Stakeholders have mostly supported the off-site precautionary measures which include 4 strategies. Thermal checking of tourists at the arrival points (4.688) (possibly at Melli and Rangpo checkpoints) has scored highest in this category, overall, it is the second most supported strategy. However, the standard deviation values suggest that stakeholders cannot keep faith on thermal checking unitedly. The asymptomatic nature of the disease is keeping them from fully trusting the thermal checking procedure. Background checking of tourists (4.438) before arrival is the next most promising PCS followed by requesting tourists to download "Arogya Setu" app (4.188). this PCS has earned strong supports from stakeholders. Yet, across the stakeholders, disagreement exist regarding how trustworthy "Arogya Setu" is (SD = 1.04). In this context, R3 stated that-
"an app cannot fully assure you about their health condition. It is you (the tourists) who are feeding the data, we don't know how reliable their inputs are. Plus, Sikkim is a mountainous destination, communication networks are not always strong, I doubt how an app is supposed to work under such circumstances!"

The least supported off-site precautionary practice is thermal checking of tourists while they are leaving the state. Few stakeholders like R3, R10, R25 and R28 questioned the infrastructural adequacy to check all the tourists travelling in and out of Sikkim. Rather they believe in prioritizing, according to R28
"thermal checking is definitely a very important step and I support it. As a stakeholder it is the primary checking based on what we are allowing tourists and risking ourselves and our state too. But if the state must check the tourists while they are leaving, I think that will be an extra pressure on the Government as well as the workers at the check post because huge

number of tourists travel to Sikkim every year and checking them for twice is huge work. So, I think with only 2 entry points presently and with limited number of workers we should prioritize "thermal checking at arrival' first.

The second most agreed category deals with the on-site precautionary measures. Sanitizing the rooms or cars after departure of tourists is the most strongly agreed measure (4.781) among all which fall under this category, 84.38% of the respondent strongly agreed to practice it, only a few stakeholders who does not own a homestay or tourist car were unsure about this practice. As mentioned earlier, this study will try to gauge how stakeholders to different types of threats and strategies which is expected to ascertain their level of preparedness for the future.

Table 3: Potential threats as identified and perceived by stakeholders

Potential threats identified by stakeholders	Weightage given by stakeholder (1 = okay, not worried at all 5 = panicking)	Ranks
Complete uncertainty about reopening	3.69	1
Loss in tourist arrival	3.62	2
Longer time to recover	3.53	3
Overall loss in income	3.50	4
Fear of getting infected from tourist	3.16	5
Must bargain harder with tourists about increased tariff	2.72	6
Bearing tax and other costs	2.50	7
Leaving the sector completely	2.16	8
Decreased duration of stay	1.84	9

However, asking only about the level of agreement to a strategy is not fulfilling for this purpose, so additional questions on how they are planning to implement the strategy has also been asked. So, stakeholders were further asked that how they are planning to sanitize their rooms or cars after the departure of tourists. To which, they agreed unitedly (28 out of 32) to arrange sprayer machines, chemicals and protective gears and clean the rooms and cars on their own. Only 2 tourist-cab drivers were found agreeing to practice this measure but were completely perplexed about how to do so and they reported that they will ask their respective drivers' union for assistance in sanitizing cabs. among onsite precautionary practices the next popular PCS is 'asking tourists to use face mask in public' (4.438). Only one stakeholder R3, who used received bulk tourists in pre-COVID time and refused to reduce the number of guests even in Post-COVID19 seasons, doubted this PCS stating-

"tourists come here for fun. They take photographs while they are out in the village or at any tourist spot, how can I ask them to always wear a face mask whenever they are out in public! It might ruin their enjoyment. Besides, they are staying with us, eating with us, we are providing room services, cleaning up their mess, do you think a mask can save us from infection?"

Given the same number of tourists flow at his place he has also doubted practicing social distancing among tourist groups. The rest of the stakeholders has agreed to both restricting the tourist flow at their places (4.094) and maintaining social distancing among different (4.032). among the on-site precautionary measures, the most argued (SD = 1.18) PCS is reducing the number of touch zones and regularly sanitizing them. The score (3.867) suggest that stakeholders are somewhere between neutral to agreed (3.00), the main reason is that stakeholders agreed to regularly disinfect those touch zones but according to them reducing the number of touch surface zones is an impractical idea e.g. R24 stated she will try to sanitize the furniture in her bar, restaurant and karaoke not every time a customer leave but at least 4-5 time a day but it is unfeasible for her to reduce the number of furniture and interiors (touch zones) inside those facilities.

The next category deals with strategy to acquire knowledge about Post-COVID19 recovery and precautionary measures. Stakeholders were asked about their perceptions of developing skills and knowledge. They agreed to strongly agreed to the fact that lockdown phase is best time to learn skills about how to restart, recover and run business once the lockdown is over

(4.438). However, 81.25% stakeholders have reported that they have not yet received any intimation or notification from any state-run or private organizations about skill developing training programme or alike within these 3 months long lockdown period (upto mid-June), the rest of the stakeholders are self-informing or self-training themselves. 65.62% of the stakeholders told that they do not have any idea about the guideline proposed by UWTO to recover and reopen businesses and consequently, they are caught between disagreeing and being neutral (2. 688) about the strategy to follow UNWTO guidelines for business recovery and reopening.

Next, contributors were asked about their Post-COVID re-promotion, reopening and recovering strategies. Participants largely agreed to 2 strategies, first, they have agreed to promote their destination by using the local health facilities available as a selling point. To quote R4

'Sikkim is one of the least affected state in India, I think this will assure the tourists while they are selecting their travel destinations. Besides if we can assure tourists that we have enough and efficient health facilities available in and around the destination this might act as an attracting feature. So, we should definitely inform and assure tourists about the local health facilities available while they are booking. Even travel agents who are from outside should learn about the local health facilities to inform tourists and use it as a selling point"

Unfortunately, the graph of COVID affected is rising in Sikkim, and it is no more a zero-affected state. So, the stakeholders were further asked how they are planning to deal with guests if any of them are found to be infected. 15 respondents informed that they would contact nearest health centre on their own and inform about the tourist (state run primary health centre, dispensary, hospital etc.), 5 people (stakeholders in rural areas and member of community based rural tourism) planned to inform the local panchayat, 4 respondents (2 hotel workers and 2 guides) planned to inform the hotel or homestay owners first, 3 respondents have agreed to manage and (even sanitize) the immediate scene on their own and later inform other, 1 has proposed to inform the district collector as well as health department officials, 1 stakeholder is looking for government to release guidelines and planning to act according to it, while 3 respondents have reported to have no clue regarding this.

Stakeholders were also asked whether they believe and morally support that Post-Covid-19 problems can be handled better if tackled collaboratively. They agreed to this point (4.156) but divergence in opinion is large (SD = 1.18). This point brings out the everlasting and most argued dichotomy of tourism operation i.e. collaborative welfare driven operation vs individualistic profit driven operation, for instance, R3 who formerly was member of a community based rural tourism initiative, faced conflicts regarding several matters, now is completely cynical about collaboration, he has strongly disagreed to this point. UNWTO has recommended re-promotion of destinations and packages and have suggested diversification of the already existing tourism product as new way of this repromotion. Tourism stakeholders of Sikkim have a nearly neutral stance about these strategies (3.031 and 2.969 respectively) mainly for two reason. Firstly, except a few stakeholders no one have any knowledge that re-promotion and diversification of product could be a recovery and re-opening method, secondly, even after knowing these PCS they are confused whether and how they should exercise them. The least supported recovery method is to arrange festivals and events right after reopening tourism sector to attract mass tourists (2.312). This PCS has remained the least supported strategy among all the 18 PCS. A newspaper report states that the government of Sikkim may organize a mega event in the coming October right after the reopening the tourism sector possibly to boost up the tourist demand. (northeast today) Respondents have majorly opposed to this PCS stating it could be very hazardous for health of both the hosts and guests.

The last category dealt with booking and refund strategies. About e-booking and contactless payment (3.750) stakeholders could not agree to one point because being a mountainous state Sikkim has telecommunication network problem which makes online transactions difficult, besides the paucity of ATM and cash availability actors in this business tend to prefer cash over e-money. The last strategy to be discussed here is the cancellation policy. Participants were found somewhere between disagree to neutral about this PCS. 62.50% of stakeholders disagreed or are not sure about this practice, some of them suggested deducting a smaller cancellation fee instead of 100%.

Conclusion
The present study has effectively answered questions about how threats and non-pharmaceutical interventions are perceived by tourism stakeholders in Sikkim. The uncertainty of reopening is the most disturbing threat as reported by the stakeholders. Big players in tourism business who entertain tourists in bulk, owns bigger and well-equipped accommodation,

dining, and entertainment facilities, bears high maintenance and overhead costs are more tensed than small players. Although, the state government has taken several fiscal measures to ease the burden of these costs, stakeholders are not fully comforted except for their economic worries. The most supported PCS category deals with off-site precautionary measures, but the most supported PCS is an on-site measure. Stakeholder have strongly agreed in unison to sanitize the rooms or cars (or restaurant tables) after the tourists are left. The least supported PCS is a recovery strategy to organize mega event right after re-opening the sector. This implies that stakeholders are confident about practicing the non-pharmaceutical precautionary practices and are more unsure about recovery, re-promotion, and re-opening strategies. This study has also found that actors in tourism are aware about 'what to do's but are unsure about how to accomplish those plans. Overall, the tourism stakeholders in Sikkim have helpline numbers in their mind to contact in case of emergency, this network of connection makes them a little well equipped. Again, the lack of preparedness is found majorly in the field of recovery and re-opening. Although the findings of the study may seem insufficient for generalisation mainly because of limited sample size. Poor tele-communication network is mainly responsible for this small response. Similar questions could be asked from a broader sample to produce more consistent findings. Yet, this study as an initial attempt that has successfully outlined the spirits of tourism stakeholders under a pandemic condition.

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