

**NEPAL IN THE AFTERMATH OF 2015 EARTHQUAKE:
POST-QUAKE IMPACT AND THE RISE OF TOURISM
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA**



SHINAKARN WONGBHUMIWATANA

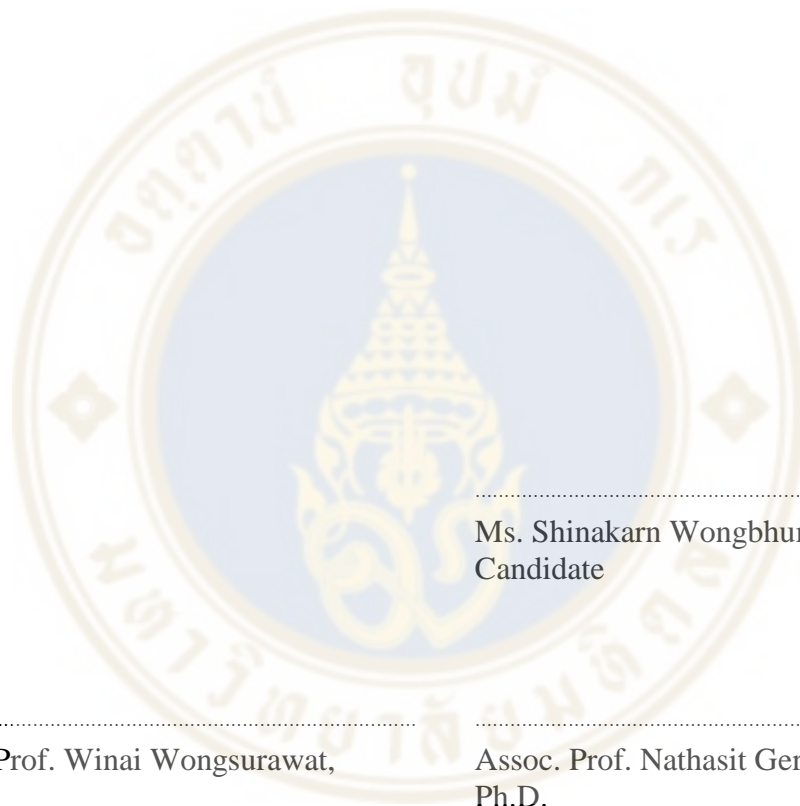
**A THEMATIC PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF MANAGEMENT
COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT
MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY
2021**

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Thematic paper
entitled
**NEPAL IN THE AFTERMATH OF 2015 EARTHQUAKE:
POST-QUAKE IMPACT AND THE RISE OF TOURISM
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA**

was submitted to the College of Management, Mahidol University
for the degree of Master of Management

on
August 29, 2021



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After an intensive period of three months, it has been a period of intense learning for me, not only in the marketing arena but also on a personal level. I would like to use this part to first reflect on the people who have supported and helped me throughout this paper completion.

I would first like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Winai Wongsurawat, PH.D. of College of Management of Mahidol University (CMMU) for his continuous support, guidance, patience, and immense knowledge. His insightful comments and encouragement definitely helped me in all the time of research and writing of this paper.

Nobody has been more important to me in the pursuit of this research than my most significant interviewee, who is not only my boss but work mentor, H.E. Mr. Ganesh Prasad Dhakal, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Nepal to the Kingdom of Thailand that not only supported me with useful resources but also guided me through the story of his missions in Nepal and his personal experiences. Also, the members of my family and friends especially my lifelong companion (Tadpoles), SSJP, Online Game teammates, and indeed my ride or die namely: Irin, Nattha, Natcha, Kanyakorn, Poonyaporn, Natharin, Supitcha, Ornjira, Tiparpar, Kwankamol, Kotchakorn, Nattamon, Sirada, Arun, Norman, and Arman. Having you all shall keep my sanity ongoing, and this work would not have been possible without you all.

Shinakarn Wongbhumiwatana

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is opportunities to travel the world, to absorb culture, and to experience lifetime journey. This particular industry continuously striving; however, it is considered as one of the most fragile industries when it comes to unprecedented events such as politics and natural disasters. In 2015, Nepal was entirely affected by the major earthquake crisis. Businesses got crashed and people ultimately lost their jobs, these repercussions were mostly on tourism sector. Immediately after the earthquake, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and cooperate with Nepal Chapter stepped in to rescue tourism. Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Social Medias were utilized, yet, inadequately for which explains the current sluggish recovery. Therefore, the present study aims to understand the conundrum and the efficacy of social media in terms of reopening Nepal tourism businesses and markets.

Keywords: Nepal 2015 earthquake, tourism recovery, social media marketing,
tourism marketing, PATA in tourism recovery

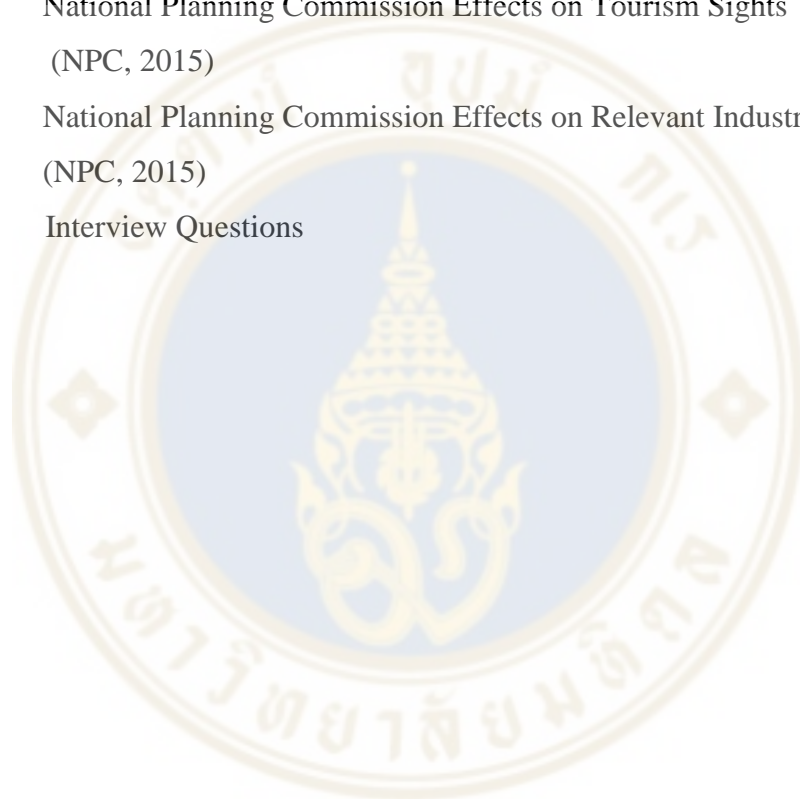
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered as a global phenomenon in which continuously expanding, it plays a crucial role in the realm of the world business either small or large sector, both government and private. Out of 44 landlocked states, Nepal is recognized as a landlocked by two powers: People's Republic of China and Republic of India. While its first initiative in boosting tourism started in 1959 with the establishment of a new "Department of Tourism" through a series of hospitality reconstructions namely hotels, and world's heritage tourist destinations; trail of Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest), and Boudhanath Stupa (Bodhnath) at the heart of Kathmandu Valley (Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee, 1987). Still, one cannot exactly argue about tourism in Nepal as a lifetime experience without first discussing the fact that tourism in any countries considered to be fragile to crisis events (Weaver & Lawton, 2014). Political factors, epidemics (not delve into in this study), and natural disasters; earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides, and volcano eruptions, these are concurrences which could interrupt the flow of services, tourism, and marketability (Beirman, Upadhayaya, Pradhananga, & Darcy, 2018).

A major earthquake crisis on 25th April 2015 occurred in Nepal and entirely affected the nation especially tourism industry. It was recorded at 7.8 on the Richter scale and approximately 9,000 people lost their lives (Lama & Pradhan, 2018). For Nepal, tourism is regarded as soft power through a perspective of international relation standpoint with their breathtaking natural sites. Prior to the event, tourism in Nepal represented 4% of Nepal's GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015), while after the 2015 earthquake – 32% reduction was recorded as the largest fall of Nepal's tourism history. International organizations' arrivals of aids were flows into the country with countless donations, regardless of these medical helping hands – the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and cooperate with Nepal Chapter stepped in to rescue tourism depletion (Beirman, Upadhayaya, Pradhananga, & Darcy, 2018).

Rapid recovery is necessary for the nation as Nepal's tourism industry employed more than 500,000 Nepalese and the industry grown in the above-mentioned rate of 4% steadily since the establishment of the Department of Tourism in 1959. While earthquake brought about series of unique challenges to Nepal, government and community agencies were required to partner up to coordinate with disaster management plans (Ghimire, 2016) to appropriately leading Nepal out of this no warning and unpredictable circumstance. Yet, the lack of concrete solutions for recovery have left the destruction prolonged. The Tourism Department of Nepal struggled with Nepalese leaving the nation as migrant workers to seek for opportunity abroad in Gulf countries (Lama & Pradhan, 2018) and by the time that programs were initiated, the country could not reach its highest capacity to meet up with the expected growth rate.

Tourism in Nepal not only drives the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but it contributed to the livelihood of the local communities (Shrestha & Tamang, 2016), for which explained the importance of tourism. In late 2015, with the implementation of PATA Nepal's plans, these allow Nepal to recover at its steady pace but said to be deficient, however, before such implementation the re-developing of primary infrastructures took time (Beirman, Upadhayaya, Pradhananga, & Darcy, 2018). The number of international visitations that declined affected the tourism operation in all levels (Lama & Pradhan, 2018) while Volunteer Tourism was introduced to serve as an alternative (Wearing, Beirman, & Grabowski, 2020) form of tourism to draw in this niche sector of tourism. The usage of Information Communication Technology (ICT) was also encouraged to partake an essential role in recovering Nepal's economy, but the lapses were there (Shrestha & Jeong, 2016). PATA's plans alone drew attention of international tourists to one point while eight team roles; Business to Business non-Asian Recovery of Sales, Business to Business Recovery from Key Asian Source Markets, Nepal Tourism Accessibility, E-Media and Social Media, Traditional Media and Travel Industry, Business to Consumer Social Media Promotion, Redefining Brand Nepal, and Traditional Media Platforms Targeting Consumers, proved their achievements with six main outcomes.

Primary motivation of this subject got off the ground as the initial interest is surrounding the concept of tourism as soft power (in the conundrum of international relation) along with diplomatic path which tied to PATA during the recovery session of

Nepal in 2015. The substantial part of this paper involves with the interview of PATA team member who now on a mission in Bangkok reviewed the information of inbound tourism recovery in 2016-2017 that it was significantly improved, however, suggested that it could be doubled with better strategies. Coupled with recent studies analyzed the prominent roles of ICT for which shall be endorsed to coexist with PATAA's framework as an overall disaster management plan. Yet it fell flat to fill in gap of when and where these two should be coexisted. Thus, based on this gap, this thematic paper seeks to argue that proper usage of ICT (social medias), Volunteer Tourism Promotion, and PATA team roles in the long-term shall shine the light on visitors' confidence and regaining trust from its own citizen to move back home for full recovery with its highest capacity. Considering the existence of ICT, the paper will further delve deeper into the details of what will be the potential uses of ICT, what are the recommended contents that should be tailored to tourists, and when was the right timing to promote marketing messages and information. This will be examined to assist not only for Nepal to continue its recovery from earthquake in 2015 but optimistically also for the current facing COVID-19 outbreak that people began to lose trust and loyalty again.

1.1 Value of the Research

Value of this research shall be useful for national marketing with a connection to how diplomacy could play a part in this marketing. As it is important for one to be mindful of the fact that marketing is not only serve as a tool to boost sales of products or objects but feasible to also be adopted into the realm of country marketing especially in country's inbound tourism. The research will answer how tourism industry changes Nepal's economy and creates chaos to its people while utilizing the coexistence of ICT (social medias), Volunteer Tourism Promotion, and PATA team roles exercised by different organizations could recuperate its previous state. This coexistence addresses the importance that recovery of tourism industry will certainly bring back the livelihood of the local communities.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to set a context for understanding impact on tourism industry in Nepal after the unpredicted and no warning earthquake in 2015, this literature review first emphasize on the tourism development of Nepal prior to the destruction. Here the paper will also introduce how tourism create jobs to reduce the unemployment rate. The literature review then highlights the destruction incident on how it took away visitors and jobs from Nepalese. In the third section, the paper discusses the role of PATA, and the deficient used of ICT. Finally, the aftermath of 2015 earthquake and results of attempts to promote Nepal Tourism will be illustrated. Concurrently, the paper also seeks to analyze the potential of PATA combine with ICT, marketing, and social media tools in recovering national economy and tourism from this crisis event, which might be a valuable contribution for the present time pandemic.

2.1 Nepal Tourism Development

In Nepal, many industries are limited by external market namely China and India. Tourism is considered as one of the industries which is not limited and least threatened by the external market competition. Local food, culture, products, and unique natural beauty set Nepal on a different sphere of other countries in South Asia. Prior to the introduction of Nepal's first "Department of Tourism" in 1959, the country remained isolated, and visitors were not familiar at all with Nepal and its mundane beauty. The new department promptly initiated Nepal's firsts ever tourism promotion and research and development were conducted to collect visitors' data to enhance the industry (Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee, 1987). Tourists' attractions in Nepal are mostly its diverse natural environment and its rich traditions (Beirman, Upadhayaya, Pradhananga, & Darcy, 2018). During the first decade of tourism promotion, developments were surrounding the basic infrastructures; hotels and activities with the

locals. Within the period of 10 years along with the formation of “Nepal Tourism Development Board”, the Master Plan¹ was implemented (Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee, 1987). Figure 1 elucidates the constant growth of tourism from 1962, it displays the number of tourists almost up reaching its first 100,000 arrivals in the first ten years of infrastructures development plan (Beirman, Upadhayaya, Pradhananga, & Darcy, 2018).

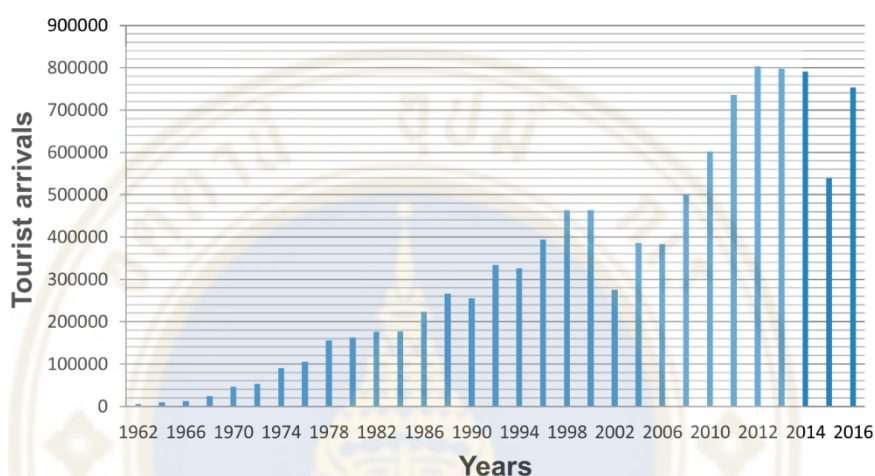


Figure 2.1 International Tourism Arrival to Nepal 1962-2016 (The Nepal Department of Immigration)

Following the Master Plan, “Hotel Management Training Center” lays the foundation to develop manpower to work in the recently introduced careers in tourism and hospitality. The initiation creates job opportunities for people not only to those literates but also those illiterates (Ghimire B. , 2014). Tourism in Nepal generated both direct and indirect opportunities; direct beneficiaries are tour companies, tour guides, trekking guides, and etc., while hotels, restaurants, airports, transportations, and etc. are indirectly benefited (Shrestha & Tamang, 2016). These served as sources of public and private income and foreign currencies exchange.

During this period, international flights received permits to enter Nepal, domestic flights were more available to make it easier for visitors to explore natural

¹ Master Plan was introduced on the basis on His Majesty’s Government to extent tourism services through the encouragement of private sector in promotional activities and hospitalities.

sites. The Royal Nepal Airlines Corporate (RNAC) also started operating its flight to Bangkok, Thailand. Following the flight operation, the creation of the Ministry of Tourism helped step up the tourism industry in Nepal. With the ongoing market promotion, this began to encourage more development, research, and private sector to achieve further standard. By 1985, RNAC launched 47 new destinations international and domestic combined with new terminal built at Tribhuvan International Airport. Nepal witnessed its started point at 6,179 tourists in 1962 and the increase was recorded a growth of 102.7% after the Sixth plan was introduced with \$198.1 million earned, which previously was only \$78,000 in 1962. Nepal maintained this growth and the strategy should be to increase tourist as well as extend the duration of stay. Together, tourism will remain income generator for Nepal and eventually will create a spread effect to its own people (Panchayat Policy and Evaluation Committee, 1987). Up until 2014 to mid-January 2015 4 months prior to the \$390.6 million, 790,118 tourists arrived in Nepal with average spending per tourist was \$46.4 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, 2016).

Table 2.1 Total number of tourists visited Nepal from 2000 to 2014 (Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Aviation, Nepal, 2015)

Year	Total		By Air		By Land		Average Length of Stay
	Number	Annual Growth Rate (%)	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
2000	463,646	-5.7	376,914	81.3	86,732	18.7	11.88
2001	361,237	-22.1	299,514	82.9	61,723	17.1	11.93
2002	275,468	-23.7	218,660	79.4	56,808	20.6	7.92
2003	338,132	22.7	275,438	81.5	62,694	18.5	9.60
2004	385,297	13.9	297,335	77.2	87,962	22.8	13.51
2005	375,398	-2.6	277,346	73.9	98,052	26.1	9.09
2006	383,926	2.3	283,819	73.9	100,107	26.1	10.20
2007	526,705	37.2	360,713	68.5	165,992	31.5	11.96
2008	500,277	-5.0	374,661	74.9	125,616	25.1	11.78
2009	509,956	1.9	379,322	74.4	130,634	25.6	11.32
2010	602,867	18.2	448,800	74.4	154,067	25.6	12.67
2011	736,215	22.1	545,221	74.1	190,994	25.9	13.12
2012	803,092	9.1	598,258	74.5	204,834	25.5	12.16
2013	797,616	-0.7	594,848	74.6	202,768	25.4	12.60
2014	790118	-0.9	585981	74.2	204137	25.8	12.44

The above figure illustrated ups and downs in number of arrivals both by air and land. From 2009 onwards the country witnessed constant growing reached up to 803,092 in 2012. In 2012, 74.5% of visitors entered by air while another 25.5% entered Nepal through its land border, both ways benefited its people by a considerable amount of income, while the decrement in 2013 and 2014 went down relatively small by only 0.7% and 0.9% (Shrestha & Tamang, 2016). Regardless of the decrease, from year 2000 towards 2014, Nepal constantly faced with the fluctuation in the number average stay period. However, since 2016, the pattern tended to indicate that the tourists were inclined to stay in Nepal more than 10 days per visit for which disclose the fact that most tourists were in Nepal for adventurous activities that long-stay period is necessary.

2.2 Destruction and Chaos to its People

Nepal is initially one of the World top 20 disaster-prone nation (Ghimire H. L., 2016) and with all milestones achieved, unfortunately, Nepal's economy was struck by the biggest earthquake recorded at 7.8 Richter. The earthquake caused major economic fell down and tourists' attractions were destroyed. The quake immediately resulted in the declination of tourists, Nepalese in trekking field lost their jobs and many tourist companies collapsed. Tourism activities ceased, arrival of tourists dropped down to 538,970 or 32%, the nation recorded its loss at \$5 billion (Lama & Pradhan, 2018) (Beirman, Upadhayaya, Pradhananga, & Darcy, 2018).

Table 2.2 National Planning Commission Effects on Tourism Sights (NPC, 2015)

Subsector	Disaster Effects (NPR Million)			Share of Disaster Effects	
	Damages	Losses	Total	Private/ Community*	Public
Heritages sites in 16 districts	7,875	1,409	9,284	-	9,284
Monasteries & historic structures (older than 100 years)	5,300	530	5,830	5,830	-
Monasteries & historic structures (less than 100 years)	2,835	283	3,118	3,118	-
Temples in remote areas	900	90	990		990
Total	16,910	2,313	19,223	8,948	10,274
*Almost all the monasteries are under community ownership and management					

Properties of heritage sites; pagodas, shrines, and temples were affected and mountaineering, and trekking trails were wrecked, Nepal reported total of over 2,900 structures with thousands of private residences destruction along the traditional lines. Heritages sites in Nepal recorded damages at 7,875 NPR million and losses at 1,409 NPR million which made up to the total cost of 9,284 NPR million. While for monasteries and historic structures damages were noted at 8,135 NPR million and 813 NPR million for losses, made up to the total of 8,948 NPR million. Other damages were noted at 900 NPR million and losses at 90 NPR million on temples in remote areas. Nepal suffered from many physical damaged in touristic cities 16 districts of Kathmandu and other touristic provinces such as Chitwan and Pokhara.

The reduction of average spending eventually affected the industry revenue, largest damaged was recorded in three subsectors: hotels and others, homestays, and eco-lodges. Overall reduction was estimated at 40% for the following 12 months and 20% revenue reduction shall remained after 12-24 months. With the vast majority of revenues decreased, this ultimately resulted in the collapsing of many private businesses. Figure 4. Hotels and others alone recorded its damages at the total 16,295 NPR million, while homestays recorded its total damages and losses at the total of 1,720 NPR million and eco-lodges recorded its total damages at the total of 415 NPR million (all on private sector) (Ghimire H. L., 2016).

Table 2.3 National Planning Commission Effects on Relevant Industries (NPC, 2015)

Subsector	Disaster Effects (NPR Million)			Share of Disaster Effects	
	Damages	Losses	Total	Private	Public
Hotels and others	16,295	-	16,295	16,295	-
Homestays	1,720	495	1,720	1,720	-
Eco-lodges	415	-	415	415	-
Trekking trails	426	5,711	6,137	-	6,137
Tour operators	7	4,924	6,137	-	-
Tourism revenues	-	47,013	47,013	47,013	-
Air transport revenues	-	4,720	4,720	4,720	-
Restaurant revenues	-	11	11	11	-
Total	18,863	62,379	81,242	75,105	6,137
Losses under homestays are included under the housing sector and not included in the total					

The negative impact coupled with the lack of concrete plan to tackle the disruption led to chaos to its people. Thousands of locals were left unemployed which resulted in a wave of migration for both literate and illiterate. People left for countries in gulf areas those connected to seas and oceans for lower salaries with hopes to obtaining more back. The government later roughly calculated that the full force recovery plan shall take up to \$9.4 billion – these were supported by foreign countries and international organizations for only \$4.2 billion which left the Nepali Government with \$5.2 billion to tackle on their own (Lama & Pradhan, 2018).

2.3 Role of PATA and Primary Utilization of ICT

Fortunately, prior to the destruction, Tourism Department of Nepal registered over 4,819 organization to operate with the supervision of primary associations: Nepal Association of Tour and Agents (NATTA), Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN), and Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN) together with Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MoCTCA) in 2014 (Lama & Pradhan, 2018). These major organizations played significant roles in tourism recovery, jointly with the 2015 Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) started their mission 1 month after the earthquake. Series of brainstorming sessions were held with over 100 Nepalese tourism leaders focusing on specific element with the resilient core market that assumed an important role discussed by the PATA was “Volunteer Tourism” (Beirman, Upadhayaya, Pradhananga, & Darcy, 2018).

Volunteer Tourism was introduced on behalf of the 2015 PATA Nepal Tourism Rapid Recovery Taskforce which established right after the earthquake. The PATA project was a collaboration between Nepal Tourism Board, Nepal Ministry of Tourism, and PATA Nepal Chapter. Besides volunteer tourism, accessible tourism was implemented as a supporting approach. Volunteer tourism was a traditional form to encourage tourists to seek out new experiences, it is the process of having tourists aware of travel opportunities to involve further in volunteering. Nepal in 2015 reduced travel barriers which resulted in more middle classes coming out for new adventures (Wearing, Beirman, & Grabowski, 2020).

PATA Nepal Chapter further divided into 8 teams: Business to Business non-Asian Recovery of Sales, Business to Business Recovery from Key Asian Source Markets, Nepal Tourism Accessibility, E-Media and Social Media, Traditional Media and Travel Industry, Business to Consumer Social Media Promotion, Redefining Brand Nepal, and Traditional Media Platforms Targeting Consumers. Business to Business non-Asian Recovery of Sales focused on generating positive promotion message towards non-Asian tourists' market, Business to Business Recovery from Key Asian Source Markets worked on testimonial message from those visited Nepal, Nepal Tourism Accessibility renovated and upgraded Tribhuvan International Airport and the exemption of visa was selected to be their core support to attract travelers. E-Media and Social Media encouraged people to visit Nepal to the utilization of bloggers to post on social media, coupled with Traditional Media and Travel Industry which worked on marketing campaign on traditional platforms such as radio and television media. Business to Consumer Social Media Promotion upgraded tourism website and Facebook site to more informative which ran by market expert from private sector. Redefining Brand Nepal was utilized in the rebranding of Nepal as the nation wanted to redirect their values and highlight the essential importance of Nepal in global tourism, the slogan "*Nepal Back on Top of the World*" was launched to repositioning Nepal in the post-quake era. While Traditional Media Platforms Targeting Consumers team worked closely with Nepalese diplomats on foreign missions to enhance the accuracy of travel advisories.

2.4 Consequences of Tourism Promotion Attempts and How it Could be Better

PATA reported 6 key outcomes after the completion of two years plan:

1. Facebook site www.facebook.com/nepaltourismboard and website on positive recovery was launched describing the recovery journey and experiences from volunteer tourists.
2. Hollywood celebrities Actors and Actresses: Susan Sarandon and Jacky Chan promoted supportation through visiting Nepal same year after the earthquake.

Prince Harry's five days visit broadcasted on British television boosted not only tourism but British-Nepalese bilateral relations.

3. Collaboration of diplomatic missions and tour operators, those professional in tailored made journey for consumers' preference in hosted offline and online media in China, India, Japan, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and others.

4. Trips hosted for world's leading travel journalists, such trips started in the late 2015 and enforced throughout 2017. It generated positive features for media all around the world in both printed and online channels.

5. Seminar program, "Samarth-Nepal Market Development Program" initiated to brainstorm further works and strategies needed in order to come up with paramount solutions.

6. Volunteer tourism was highlighted as the core visitors accelerated the growth of Nepal during the recovery period. Not only tourism sites were promoted but also culture, and locals' products.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) was used in various disaster management, it has been proved through the used in Africa, India, Afghanistan, Japan, and etc. Twitter posts can be an excellent supplement to radio and television in terms of publishing news and information real time. However, it is feasible to use ICT tools more in tourism recovery besides Facebook and Tourism Board website. If so, the recovery could be better and improved in an effective way (Lama & Pradhan, 2018). On top of ICT, researcher from the Business School of the University of Queensland from Australia highlighted that in order to limit the damage and encourage positive opinions towards a destination, common steps are required to take place in order to work more efficaciously (Walters, 2016):

1. **Media Management:** Encourage journalists to understand what was happening and what is the nature of this particular disaster. Then educate journalists with necessary information that shall be promoted and coordinately work to achieve balance of news coverage. Encourage further coverage on positive outcome that were achieved rather than reporting about losses and tragedies. Allow journalists to involve in formal roles of tourism to bring about the better communication with the public media.

2. Utilization of Social Media: Having social media is similar to having market research tools. It allows you to research what people's opinion and what are the emerging trends worth looking at. To promote destinations or any attraction sites, trends and opinions are key. Social media should focus on counter damage contents, presenting adventurous stories and images which contradict the crisis. Illustrated the content, showing everything at its normal operation. Also encourage tourists to post their own photos on their social media accounts.

3. Factual Information: Information that is up to date on safety tips and the current situation. Utilizing applications such as Twitter to constantly update the status of the attraction sites, hotels, restaurants, and others in this related field of tourism. These facts also have to inform tourists clearly regarding areas that are not affected by the crisis, therefore, they have alternatives to choose from. Information shall also be re-evaluated constantly and must be most reliable that helps tourists make the most informed choice.

4. Stand Unique: During a crisis, beautiful hotels and full options facilities are not sufficient enough to draw the attention of tourists. The promotion of destinations has to be competitive in order to compete with other destinations in other countries.

5. Discount is Unnecessary: Existing studies revealed that tourists are not tempted by the price cut due to the crisis. Instead the discount communicates a different message that the country is devaluing their attractions. Coupled with that is the complication of putting the price back up, this will also be challenging to the country. Fickle Consumers², who bought services at lower price are also not ideal for Nepal as the country is seeking long term loyalty and those long-term stay periods.

6. Do Not Force It: This point suggested that if the hotel facilities, labor in services, and other stakeholders are not ready, there is no reason to force it to happen. Opening too soon could resulted in the issue of distrust and marketing the destinations that were ruined would not be good for the business. Instead the country should promote areas that are not affected and targeting the existing tourists to reassure to them that the country still capable to offer the lifetime experience.

² Consumers who hard to connect with, as they listen more to each other rather than company message

7. Prepared at All Time: Plans are always necessary, as the country was discussed to be in prone location, plans are essential. This should come in all aspects including individual household projects, evacuation plan, cancellation policies (booking, and visa). Business should also be prepared to operate during the low-income situation and how to survive.

8. History is a Lesson: It is important for one to be mindful of what had been done in countries faced such similar crisis and look at what they did. This will prove the effectiveness of plans, while many researchers of studies in the past suggested that holding a national festival usually brought about exceptional outcome in terms of boosting seasonal tourism.



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since the nature of this subject could be fully supported by qualitative research methods, explorations of primary and secondary sources, observations, and interviews on focus groups were deemed to be suitable data collection methods. The interviews allow respondents to share both of their direct and indirect experiences with the 2015 earthquake. Questions are open-ended for respondent to give information as much as they are willing to open up to the author. Aside from interview sources, the paper also utilizing secondary sources retrieved from existing contents such as national reports, websites, books, news, and articles in academic journals. Observations from author are also included in this paper to share what the author witnessed during the recovery. Thus, finding and analysis of this paper comprises of these responses complements with findings from literature review section.

3.1 Interview Sources

The reasons justifying the use of interview as the main sources of information are first, author's own observation was insufficient to obtain valuable information, second, one interviewee is Nepalese Nationals who affected directly with the earthquake, and third, remained interviewees are Diplomats who involved in the PATA teams of Nepal Tourism Accessibility and Traditional Media Platforms Targeting Consumers.

Total of three interviews were conducted in late May towards early June 2021 as the subject of tourism, crisis recovery, and diplomatic roles in recovery are author's own interest. It is crucial to duly note that three interviewees were considerate enough to provide author with their valuable time, knowledge, and experiences on this particular subject. Two interviews were scheduled in accordance with the interviewees' free schedule at office while another interview was scheduled at a café. All interviews

took approximately 1 hour. As the subject of confidentiality is equally matters, short introduction will be given below to lay foundation for readers to understand the rational of three selections, however, names will be withheld.

3.1.1 Introduction to Interviewees

The first interviewee is the current chief of Bangkok diplomatic mission, who in 2015 implemented the visa exemption. He was responsible for risk assessment division. He works full-time with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1995 and enjoys his time involving with PATA in its recovery mission.

The second interviewee joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1998, who joined the United States mission in 2012-2016. He worked closely with the Traditional Media Platforms Targeting Consumers team in mainland Nepal in hosting tourism promotion events and communicated to journalists with travel advisories.

The third interviewee is the co-founder of a private travel company, with headquarter in Bangladesh. The company was established in earlier 2014 and by the end of 2014, branched were opened in Bangkok, Kathmandu, and Kuala Lumpur. He enjoys his childhood in Nepal and his deep affection of Nepal tourism encouraged him to work as country manager for the company.

The interview questions were divided into four groups: interviewees' introduction, tasks identification, procedures and markets achievements, and recommendations. The questions were designed to fulfill the research question on what has been done to recover tourism industry and unemployment rate, what the marketing strategies applied and what could be done to expedite the tourism recovery.

Quotes from three interviewees shall be included in analysis and findings to identify not only strength of solutions put in place but also highlighting the weakness of the responses to tackle earthquake in 2015 by the Nepal Government.

Table 3.1 Interview Questions

Topic	Questions
1. Introduction	<p>1.1 Please kindly provide us some background information of yourself.</p> <p>1.2 Please share an experience on what you were doing when the destruction took place.</p> <p>1.3 What was your main role at your work prior to the incident?</p>
2. Tasks Identification	<p>2.1 What was the first thing that the Government of Nepal decided to do to after the crisis?</p> <p>2.2 What were the tasks assigned to you or the mission that you are with after the crisis event happened?</p> <p>2.3 Do you think the work which you were assigned to helps the economy? If so, in what way? If not, why?</p> <p>2.4 Which sector you considered to be most damaged from the destruction?</p> <p>2.5 Do you think tourism should be the first industry to tackle, why or why not?</p> <p>2.6 What were the key damages you observed or happened to your business?</p> <p>2.7 What was the most important tasks you considered should be fixed at the earliest? And did the Government pursue in similar way?</p>
3. Procedures and Achievements	<p>3.1 Please illustrate on the plans conducted by PATA?</p> <p>3.2 To what extent you consider these plans effective to revive the tourism industry?</p> <p>3.3 To what extent you consider these plans effective to recuperate its previous growth rate of tourism?</p> <p>3.4 What were the feedbacks obtained from the implementation of the PATA's plans?</p>

Table 3.1 Interview Questions (cont.)

Topic	Questions
4. Recommendations	4.1 What do you think about the usage of ICT in recovering tourism industry? 4.2 Are there any further tasks you would like to add on, which you convinced will lead to a better outcome?

3.2 Primary and Secondary Sources

To answer the research question further regarding Nepal's Economy by highlighting the subjects of GDP, overall national revenue, unemployment rate and similarly with the utilization of new media, applying both primary sources and secondary sources are essential. Primary sources were obtained from interviews while secondary sources include national reports, national official website, books, news article, and articles from journals and existing studies.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Prior to the destruction in 2015, the discussion that there were 20 disaster-prone nations, and Nepal was considered as one among these states was not as frequently mentioned, until the earthquake proved to its people that solid plans and precautions are necessary in all aspects. While all agreed that precautions and programs should have been initiated immediately after the crisis to set forth the recovery journey. In fact the tourism industry recovery was overdue, and methods were lacking long-term potential. Interviewees revealed that total of 125 programs were initiated by mid 2016, and budget was allocated in various percentages to each program. As more than 2,900 structures (public and private) were destroyed, necessary budget was allocated to the reconstruction, however, fell flat to parallel with the international visitors' plans Nepal initiated along the end of 2015 towards 2016.

4.1 Nepal Recovery Programs with Emphasis on Tourism

Out of the total of 125 programs, these could be divided into 6 thematic areas: tourism promotion programs, trade promotion programs, foreign employment programs, reconstruction support programs, and language training programs. 33 programs were dedicated purely to tourism industry with most budget allocation, for interviewees and with him pointing out this information, the paper then summarized that tourism in Nepal is playing an essential role in contributing to the nation and its people. From the total of 66 programs of tourism, 27 programs are related to tourism, arts, and cultural promotions with 27.9% total budget, 4 programs are for familiarization trips with 3.5% total budget, 2 programs of mobilization of tour operators with 1.2% total budget, which made up to a subtotal of 33 programs of tourism promotion with a total 32.6% total budget (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, 2017).

After the initiation of these tourism plans, the sector expended and improve the overall activities of the nation throughout 2016. As the number of visitors dropped down to approximately 500,000 due to the earthquake crisis in 2015, the number of tourists after tourism promotions reached up to 753,000. Interviewee revealed further from his records that top ten visitors were from India, China, Sri Lanka, the United States of America, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, France, and Germany respectively. With this statistic, most tourists are staying for an estimated average of 13.4 days of each visit with a total spending of \$53 per day. GDP achieved from tourism in 2016 scored at 2.1% which considerably reasonable for country which faced recent natural disaster crisis. Programs were looked after and advised closely by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation to well pull out each program. Diplomatic missions: Beijing, Bangkok, Brussels, Ottawa, and Islamabad worked on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation to promote tourism, arts, and cultural promotion, familiarization trips, and mobilization operators. Each of these programs reached out to almost 9,100 people overall.

Following 2017, the Government of Nepal decided to increase their programs right after the satisfied feedback. The country introduced a total of 195 programs from 2017 through 2018 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, 2018). Out of 195 programs, 74 programs were for tourism promotion with 30% of budget allocation. The expansion of tourism reached up to 940,218 people for which scored highest since the opening of Nepal for tourism in 1962. Interviewee revealed that top ten countries visited Nepal in 2017 were India, China, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Sri Lanka, Thailand, South Korea, Australia, Myanmar, and Germany respectively. After the review of these visits, Nepal reported an average length of stays to be at 12.6 days, contributed to 2.3% of GDP and the growth rate was back on the plus side.

4.2 Tourism Promotions Methods and the Inadequate Efforts

After this 2015 earthquake, it is worth taking in an account that many nations warned their citizens to avoid visiting Nepal, as the country remained prone to these temblors. Many foreign visitors were reminded that Nepal is menacing and not the

destination to visit unless for relief or rescue mission. As the impact remained devastating to its people, the Government decided to turn these negativities into opportunities. The Government invited guests from all around the world such as goodwill ambassadors, UN Secretary General, Hollywood Stars, and Bollywood Stars, however, interviewees suggested there were more suitable ways to effectively promote Nepal tourism. Flaws from diplomatic missions' promotions of tourism were also there due to the absence of preparation of such crisis, missions were required to perform tasks that they have not been acquired about hence the success from tourism promotion through foreign missions were not as satisfied as it should be (Ghimire H. L., 2016).

In Nepal, interviewee revealed that *“there are 8 common steps studied by Dr. Gabby Walters and her colleagues that should be taken into account more...”*, interviewees argued further that these steps were enforced, however, not to any extreme for which explained why the country still in recovering stage until this day. Journalists were encouraged to participate in events and news released but never been invited to partaking any roles. Social media were used but only Twitter for reported aftershocks and recent news without effectively utilized in promoting business. Information was released yet fell flat to inform the situation accurately as they were too broad and vague. Social media were overused by business to encourage visits to places which were not ready and resulted in information distrust. While discounts were often used and if the industry wish to avoid using discount now, the interviewee suggested it might be long overdue.

Immediately 2 weeks after the earthquake crisis, Nepal rushed into tourism plans of PATA, promotion campaigns, and volunteer tourism were enforced. However, the PATA overlooked the fact that rebuild, and destruction of heritage sides are taking a long time. These shall prove that it is important to have both process parallel, the balance of reconstruction and tourism promotion through new media platforms should well aligned. Here, one cannot exactly argue about tourism in Nepal and tourism promotion without discussing the reconstruction programs. Today, interviewees mentioned *“Unfortunately, in touristic cities such as Chitwan and Pokhara which were heavily injured remains in the stage where reconstruction process was in freeze.”* This shall reflect the fact that the balance of destination being ready and tourism promotion were never line up. *“Total of 4 reconstruction programs were introduced, the*

Government called it 'National Reconstruction Support' with 2.5% budget allocated to it and programs were mostly rationed out to main capital of Kathmandu.” Interviewee revealed that the budget for reconstruction in late 2015 towards 2016 is 30.1% lower than budget for tourism. Aside from the number which confirmed the unalignment, interviews reflect similar fact that due to the failure in creating this balance, Nepal tourism is not yet on its rising back to its previous stage and employment rate is also lacking.

4.3 Nepal Tourism Marketing in the Lights of Social Media

According to the theory of marketing SWOT analysis, Nepal knows its value and strength of tourism and consider the industry as one of the main strengths of the nation which comes second to water renewable energy or hydropower, which Nepal sells to India. The Government of Nepal, therefore, sees the need to keeping the tourism market continuously in active even after crisis. For Nepal, tourism remained least handicapped industry since 1950 then once the Department of Tourism was established after the main political change in 1951, Nepal starts promoting tourism in the most conservative way, increasing access through air channel. Since the discontinue of isolation policy, tourism industry in Nepal recorded more than 100,000 people employed in the first ten years and counting, however, the increase rate was struck by the 2015 earthquake.

Interviewee mentioned *“Eventually, Nepal’s strategies for tourism required immense change to come back stronger in the eyes of the tourists and the Government should acted faster right after the quake and two weeks after that may not be quick enough...”* Another interviewee added *“Weaknesses of the policy initiated by PATA were obvious, the urgency to recover tourist destination were not there, still, luckily the Social Tours Community were there presented their idea of turning to Social Media.”* Techniques on social media such as content marketing on Twitter and Facebook, hashtag, pantone content, and etc. had been introduced and utilized by the Social Tours Community and the Department of Tourism. The Founder Director of Social Tours, Mr. Raj Gyawali put forwarded the utilization of two social media platforms: Facebook and Instagram as main communication channels. However, this suggestion which similar to

the abovementioned second step by Walters was the promotion channel that the Government paid least attention to as they encouraged tourism through traditional promotion particularly tourism events more. “If the Government pursue the social media theory, the possibility of tourism growth would be much bigger...”, it was pointed out here that for tourism promotion, social media and tourism events shall be on the same line.

While Nepal Government had ICT as their channel to reflect current information primarily on Twitter, unfortunately, without being aware that tourism could be marketed in this same platform. Major hashtags: #stillinNepal, #stillNepal, and #stillsmiling were used to make search of information easier and for those who got frightened feel the safety existed. Private organization reported in late 2015 that once they took the advantage of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, contents regarding Nepal Tourism were flooded in. Attractive photos and videos contents were encouraged to be used by tourists and those who planned to visit Nepal. Social media contents: for instance, “I am in Nepal now.” and “I am going to Nepal.” were another two primarily used phrases in the group of existing tourists. Social Tours Community started first in Thamel District, Kathmandu’s touristic district, asking tourists to support the campaign. Towards the last quarter of 2015, more than 500,000 photos were posted by tourists all over Nepal, with more than 2,000 contents shared monthly on the three platforms.

Member of tour operators felt the urge to promote tourism from the inside out which contradicted the tourism promotion plan of the Nepal Government which were aiming for those from outside to visit Nepal. Aside from the tourism sites which were not damaged by the earthquake, the team members also market tourism products: Singing Bowl, Thangka Painting, Pashminas, Nepali Tea, Prayers Flag, Jewelry, Rice Paper, and Khukuri Knives, through online platforms. Gyawali and other tourism entrepreneurs not only pushed existing tourists for support but also set up their new official communication channel called “Nepal Tourism Recovery: Strategy and Action” to support the tourism sectors on top of what the Government had been doing. Their recovery plan to combat the catastrophe started with group meeting and proposing new potential strategies. Online photobook was also uploaded on Facebook and Instagram, towards the end of 2015, the group expanded to more than 2,000 members with further advisory website consisted with safe hotels and touristic destinations.

4.4 Negative Advisory and Social Media Responses

Regardless of the Government's efforts through foreign missions and the Social Tours Community, it remained difficult for the cooperation to encourage positive news coverage. By the end of the day interviewee argued "*It was tricky, and it did challenge us in all aspects to compete with international media, which highlighted only the devastated contents...*" Nepal Government and tourism organization were aware of this fact, yet, understood that it is their business and from such angle, Nepal did seem dangerous. "*Media sensationalized the crisis in the way that it scared prospective visitors and at that time international tourists remained intact with this echo chamber, which is why the idea of pushing forward users generated contents was our best suitable plan...*", here, the Interviewee gave us an insight further that the intention was right, still "*...we knew that it was not sufficient to tell people how safe it was...*" In the United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand, these countries did not only portray Nepal as an unstable nation but further lifted their travel restrictions for which made it difficult for citizens to visit Nepal. Regardless of the British's assistance in terms of medical, financial, and disaster assessment aids, British Foreign Office warned their citizen "a general threat from terrorism" as a worst possible situation that could happen in Nepal, Interviewee mentioned "*such communication is strong and kept prospective tourists away...*". Swiss Geologist, Mr. Ervin Scheibert's message was immediately published in combating negative advisory "Apart from Langtang, Rolwaling and Manaslu, we do not see much problem in other trails such as the Everest Base Camp Trek." As trekking is one of the most drawn to activities among tourists, it was this message that the Government decided to make use of.

Towards 2020, Nepal Government dedicated their mission primarily on promoting tourism for travel agencies. Digital Marketing was introduced and tourism marketing for Nepal shifted to a new arena. Purposes of digital marketing integration in Nepal were stand out from rivals, attract tourists, generate awareness, gain traffic to website and destination, and growing tourism related businesses. Tourism marketing in Nepal via SEO (Search Engine Optimization) was one of the first method used in order to boost awareness in groups of trekkers and those seeking adventures.

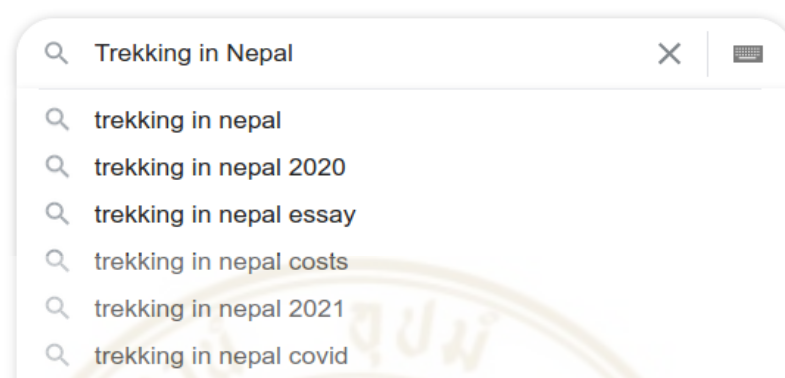


Figure 4.1 Trekking and Related Contents as Top Ranking on Google Search

Source: Google Search Engine (Retrieved 15 July 2021)

Trekking in Nepal, and trekking costs, these are for the top ranking on Google, therefore, search engine displays above illustrated the tourism in Nepal stepping into ranking arena on Google search. On-page, Off-page, Technical and Local SEO techniques are there and almost complete website management.

4.5 Future of Nepal Tourism Marketing

While integration Digital Marketing is existing, Interviewee pointed *“Content Creation, Ad Campaigns on Social Media like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, A/B Testing, Retargeting, Social Listening are the future that Nepal Government as well as private sector must explore further in details...”* Google Ads shall be one of the first, showing ads with the same photos, banners, and videos are suggested type of contents which could easily grasp the attention of those who see the ads. It was studied and considered as one of the most effective way to increase traffic to the website and possibly effective enough to convert that awareness into prospective or actual tourists.

As the number of online social media users continuously increasing and holding an uncountable information and insights, which users could potentially make

use of in order to consider visiting Nepal. Tourism in Nepal certainly will open up to new opportunities, which will further enhance tourism industry (Devkota, 2016). By utilizing the content to match with platform is considered most essential, as posting long descriptive information similarly travel blog may not match with Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook. Photo contents are most suitable for Instagram, video contents are most suitable for YouTube, and balance of videos, photos, and description are appropriate for Facebook. Unfortunately, Ghimire mentioned in 2014 prior to the theme crisis of this paper that tourism for Nepal associates with social media comes late (Ghimire H. L., 2014). Interviewee added relevant information “...if the integration started earlier, it would significantly contribute to the Nepal’s economy and tourism activities would be a source of employment for those disadvantages...”

Here, the paper shall prove that social media applications: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, would play essential roles in recovery of Nepal Tourism Market and unemployment rate after the earthquake crisis in 2015. As continuously stated along this paper by interviewees, social media holds a distinctive relationship with tourism. The image of security and the touristic destinations depend on how they are tailored to the eyes of prospective tourists on the base of up-to-date safety protocols. Base on this growth of tourists, new revenue generated would be the source of budget for future reconstruction that were misallocated in 2016 towards 2017.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

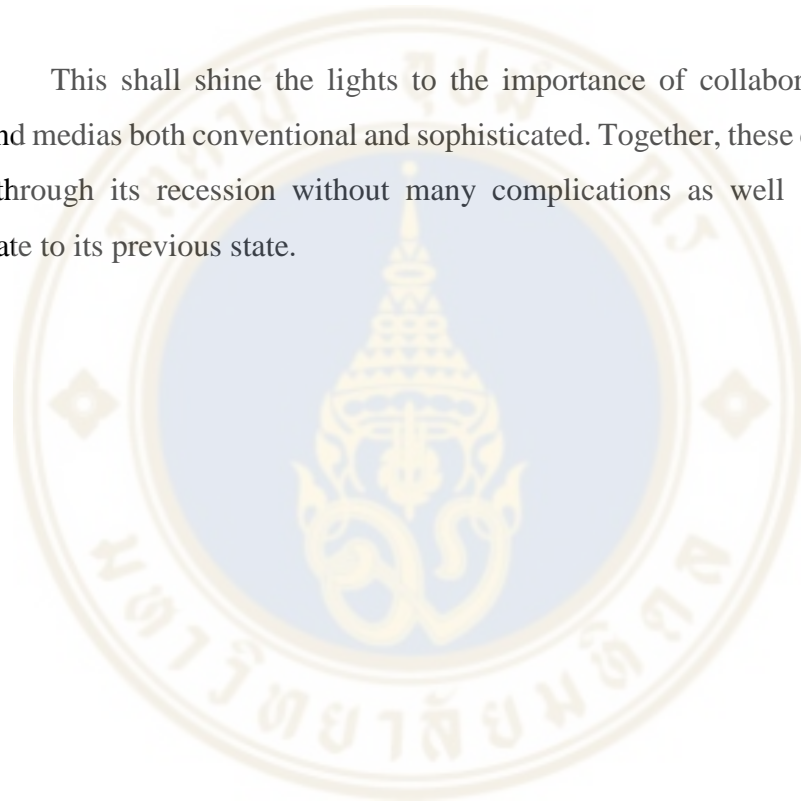
In this century, utilizing policies and media for marketing should be coexisted in balance. The role of tourism in terms of Nepal's GDP has been restated throughout this paper as it led to economic disruption; extreme unemployment, decrease of international visitors, and attraction sites damaged. Tourism visits in Nepal dropped down to only 500,000 and the revenue were deducted gravely. The Government of Nepal decided that the role of PATA was important and PATA's team roles are the core resolutions.

PATA was divided into 8 teams in order to work on different tasks: Business to Business non-Asian Recovery of Sales, Business to Business Recovery from Key Asian Source Markets, Nepal Tourism Accessibility, E-Media and Social Media, Traditional Media and Travel Industry, Business to Consumer Social Media Promotion, Redefining Brand Nepal, and Traditional Media Platforms Targeting Consumers. Here, we witnessed different ways of media utilization, however, the question of efficacy remained. Interviewees raised important points of timing, the failure to comply with the social media used, and tourism marketing resulted in the ineffective recovery. Suggested common 8 steps of manage the media, make use of social media, provide factual information, differentiate your destination, do not discount, beware of being "open for business" too soon, be prepared, and learn from the past were merely considered by the government and PATA's team roles, together led to the unprecedented outcome.

Although the plans were followed to a certain degree, and the result from a total of 125 programs from the first-year post-quake satisfied to the team to the point that more programs were initiated to follow in the same line in 2017 still those partaking in the field work considered that the result could be better. Field staff highlighted that it is essential to go extreme on the utilization of social media and certain platforms cannot be used for only one purposes. For instance, Twitter was used for news and instant updates rather than for an on-point marketing, and straight forward tourism advisory as

it could be the trend setter for topic of discussion. Facebook, Instagram, and their features were neglected in tourism promotion for Nepal after the earthquake. Traditional media such as official website, bloggers' posts, and journalism pieces were put into place without the Government awareness of the emerging new media. This gives rise to the argument of what would it be if the new medias were used more. Interviewees contributed on this in the same line that the result would be a lot more fulfilling to not only tourism sectors in Nepal but also to the overall stakeholders: workers, labors, hotels, and other services, involved in the industry in terms of reducing unemployment rate.

This shall shine the lights to the importance of collaboration of people, ideas, and medias both conventional and sophisticated. Together, these could help Nepal power through its recession without many complications as well as its people to recuperate to its previous state.



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