

CONFLICT, TOURISM AND TECHNOLOGY: DEVELOPING COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN KASHMIR VALLEY**Gowhar Ahmad WANI***School of Economics, Central University of Kerala*
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waseemnaik750@gmail.com**Abstract**

This paper studies the fallouts of insurgency and its impact upon the growth of tourism in Kashmir Valley. As a part of study, role of technology to promote sustainable tourism growth and negatives of internet blockades are extensively explored. Famous for its tourism destinations and unmatched hospitality, Kashmir offers a wide range of religious places, natural resources and abundant flora and fauna to its visitors. The cycles of violence as a result of protracted conflict over the territory of Kashmir has emerged as serious hurdle in the path of sustainable tourism growth in the region. The simple trend analysis shows that the Tourist Influx increases in years of normalcy and falls drastically in years of disturbance. The Tourists worldwide are enthusiastic about exploring paradise on earth. Nevertheless, continuous and unexpected disturbances do not allow them to utilize such an opportunity. The use of technology and innovation will bring significant employment and economic benefits not only to tourism industry but also to other allied sectors of industry. However, the shutdown of internet frequently is paralyzing the day-to-day life. As a result of which an environment of fear and uncertainty is created. The study suggests that policy makers need to take broad overview of situation and a rule-based policy needed to be followed with regard to internet shutdowns. The article recommends that the institutions and stakeholders should try for comprehensive steps to ensure peace, security, and stability. If done aptly will promote sustainable growth of tourism in Kashmir Valley.

Key words: *Conflict, Technology, Internet blockades and inclusive measures***JEL Classification:** Z30**I. INTRODUCTION**

Conflict leads to disturbances and comes as hurdle in the path of peaceful life. It is widely seen that the nations under the trauma of armed conflict perished their economies harshly around the globe (Buultjens et al., 2015; Upadhayaya et al., 2011). Loss of human lives and a blatant threat to human development is a common phenomenon (Franco et al., 2006). It had turned conflicted economies into hell and has ruined their shape highly (Lopez & Wodon, 2005; Ali, 2013). Initiation of insurgency never projects how long it will survive and when it will end (Bapat, 2005). However, at the very first end, it states publicly that the conflict will ruin the peace, stability, and sustainability of a nation's economic growth (Canetti et al., 2017). A peaceful environment is a pre-condition of sustainable growth and strong support for realising sustainable development objectives (Wong & Heijden, 2019).

The economic growth of a nation majorly depends upon the resources it contains and the technology for exploitation (Adeola & Evans, 2019). Countries rich in scenic beauty owing to its geographical locations and environmental setting tend

to depend upon tourism sector and the suitable conditions for realising its true potential (Marti & Puertas, 2016). In this context, tourist influx is a pre-condition for the exploitation of tourism growth and is positively associated with each other (Brida et al., 2020). However, armed conflict is a significant cause of the decline in tourist inflow and is related negatively (Pokharel et al., 2018). It is a common observation that tourists prefer areas rich in natural fascination and unique in structure. Nonetheless, stability and peace of mind highly matters for attraction and revisit (Buckley et al., 2021).

In India, states rich in natural tourism products receive good tourist inflow under normal circumstances (Shaukat, 2018) and declines drastically under abnormal conditions (Kumar, 2020). So, the prevalence of stability, absence of ambiguity and peace of mind predicts high tourist inflow and vice-versa.

In India, Jammu and Kashmir is highly famous for natural assets like gigantic mountains, green lushing meadows, and beautiful rivers (Dar, 2014). The climate of the region varies from hot to very cold, it is sub-tropical in Jammu and temperate atmospheric conditions in Kashmir valley (Romshoo,

et al., 2020). Beautiful Lakes like Dal Lake, Wular Lake, Anchar Lake, Hokarsar Lake, and others appended more to the union territory's fascination (Ito& Rather, 2014). All these blessings of God catch people's attention from various parts of the world to enjoy here (Raina, 2002). Destinations like Srinagar, Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg, Daksun, Kokernag, Yusmarg, Aharbal, Watlab, Verinag, and Lolab Valley comes under the ambit of Kashmir valley and possess colossal tourism potential, which, if aptly channelised, could pave the way for sustainable tourism growth (Naik, 2008).

In the last 25 years, the Tourism Industry suffered severely during the years of insurgency and lost billions of rupees as revenue (Islam, 2014). Time and again, conflict caused extensive damages to infrastructure, employment, means of livelihood and the social consensus (Mahapatra, 2009). Uprisings and hartals ruin the tourist season entirely and cause severe damage to local business, particularly those involved directly with this industry (Khan et al., 2015). Most of the stakeholders over the period switched over to other businesses inside and outside of the state. The prime concern for the business community is an unexpected conflict with unpredicted time dimensions. Furthermore, it is mostly experienced that the political instability emerged in the mean period that devastated people's hope engaged with this sector. The peak season of tourism starts from the beginning of April and lasts till the end of October.

Due to natural fervour and attractions, visitors around the globe are ready to look at paradise in days and nights (Naik, 2008). However, the hindrance that demotivates them is the violence and conflict that continuously happened over 70 years. Political instability, strikes and demonstrations caused the downfall of tourist inflow and businesses, particularly from 1989 to 2003(Sharma et al., 2012). Armed conflicts compel tourists to cancel their travel plans and visit the destinations ensuring peace and security. So, the provision of security and assurance of a peaceful environment is positively associated with the tourist inflow.

In this context, this study attempts to explore the negative externalities of insurgency and the impact of armed conflict on tourist inflow. It is projected that the study will contribute positively to the existing body of knowledge and specifically in the context of ensuring peace and progress of the tourism sector of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Further, technology can play an important role in promoting the tourism industry due to network and positive externality effects. Therefore, the study argues for rule-based policy for internet blockade. As blocking internet is akin to collective punishment and is violation of human rights punishment (United Nations, 2019) besides creating uncertain business environment.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURES

Tourism has a multi-faceted impact on various aspects of human life, from emotional and health rejuvenation to sustainable development in the global environmental risk (Biagi et al., 2016; Fayissa et al., 2008; Balsalobre-Lorente et al., 2020). The interplay between war, conflict, political instability and tourism has been studied in many aspects. Sönmez, 1998 studied the link between political conflict, terrorism and tourism. The targets of tourists by terrorists and state's deliberate use of tourism sector for projection of normalcy figure up in Sonmez's work where he pays equal attention on impact of instability upon tourists visiting that place. Sonmez suggest that the impacts can be managed through crisis management. Further exploring this relationship, in the context of Jordan, Buda (2016) finds that there is an intimate interconnection among tourism, conflict, safety and security.

Interestingly, security is not a hurdle for steadfast tourists, even in conflict-ridden zones. Tourists' potential of domestic and international nature is determined by various factors at the destination like infrastructural facilities, mobility, security, and the inherit touristic qualities of a spot. Selvanathan, 2007 studied such factors influencing the international tourist flow and found that disturbance due to the conflict had a significant negative impact. In contrast, free trade policy had a significant positive impact on tourist arrivals, while world consumer income had no impact on tourist arrivals.

The tourist arrivals and the optimum utilization of the tourism potential of any region is influenced by various socio-economic and political factors. The impact of conflict on the tourist region is significant and has been explored by Alvarez & Campo, 2014 who studied that a particular conflicting event can effectively influence a country's image and the willingness of tourists to visit the conflicting parties. The study further demonstrates that affective components rather than cognitive ones determine tourists' perception, and conflict can increase the prevalent animosity about a particular country. This impact of conflict on the tourist sector is manifested in various ways like reduced economic activity and job losses. As such, Álvarez, 2018 studied the Catalan separatist challenge's economic impact in the last quarter of 2017 on the region's tourism sector. The study uses counterfactual analysis and artificial neural network to estimate the number of tourists that would have travelled to Catalonia and consequent revenue loss had the issue not propped up. The study estimated that Catalonia lost revenue to €200 million due to international and €27 million due to domestic touristic shortfall during the study period. Tourism, however is not always a causality of conflict but can be a means for conflict resolution and restoration of peace in a region. Sonmez & Apostolopoulos, 2000 provide a conceptual framework for how tourism can be a

useful conflict resolution tool in inter-communal conflict. The study demonstrated that tourism-based community interaction and collaboration, joint ventures and free tourist migration could bridge the conflict between the stakeholders. Tourism can overhaul not only the polity of a region but also direct its socio-economic development. In the aftermath of conflict social and economic reconstruction is spearheaded by the tourism industry while other sectors fail to take off has been demonstrated by Causevic & Lynch, 2013 using primary data sources Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H). However, the study found that the governance and administrative negligence could neither result in optimum socio-economic development, including the tourism sector, nor cement the collaboration between the conflicting communities. Hence, such restoration is to be taken in a holistic way. Dissanayake & Samarathunga, 2020 also qualitatively demonstrate the requirements like professionalism, institutional planning, infrastructural development, and tourist activities to develop post-conflict tourism in a region.

In the Indian context, Barbhuiya & Chatterjee 2020 used panel data at state level to study the impact of natural disasters and conflict on the domestic and international tourism demand. The study found that domestic tourism demand is negatively impacted by political unrest; however, foreign tourist demand remains unaffected. Moreover, alternatively, natural disasters negatively impact foreign tourist demand while not effecting domestic tourist demand. In Jammu and Kashmir, Ahamad and Hussain, 2011, studied the impact of turmoil on the tourist industry in Kashmir. They collected data from houseboat, shikara and hotel owners and found that turmoil has negatively impacted the tourism sector, which has resulted in the region's economic loss. This

relationship was further studied by Islam, 2014, who found a significant negative relationship between armed conflict on the one hand and the tourism sector and Jammu and Kashmir's economy. The study uses several fatalities and net state domestic product as proxies representing conflict and economy correspondingly. Each unit increase in armed conflict suppresses the tourist sector and economy by 0.065 units and 0.232 units, respectively. Further, Chauhan & Khanna 2009 studied the perception of tourists and residents regarding the tourism industry's contribution towards peacebuilding in the Kashmir valley and found a significant relationship between the two.

III. STUDY AREA

Jammu and Kashmir is one of the Union territories of India and has the latitudinal and longitudinal attributes of 32° 17' and 37° 05' N and 72° 31' and 80° 20' E respectively (Fig. 1). Jammu and Kashmir is located in the Himalayan range with Kashmir valley between the greater Himalayas and Pir Panchal range. Jammu and Kashmir has a total area of 42,241 sq. Kms and a population of 12,267,013 persons (Census of India, 2011). Climate of the Jammu and Kashmir is usually classified into sub-tropical Jammu and temperate Kashmir (Romshoo, et al., 2020). Kashmir valley is blessed with varied forms of tourist destinations ranging from natural to heritage which have become hub of tourist attractions from all over the globe (Aslam et al., 2018). While during summers the green pastures and favourable climate attracts the tourists, snowfall during winters not only attracts the ordinary tourist but also provides ideal base for winters game like Alpine skiing, sledging, all-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) race and snow cycling (Ehsan, 2020).

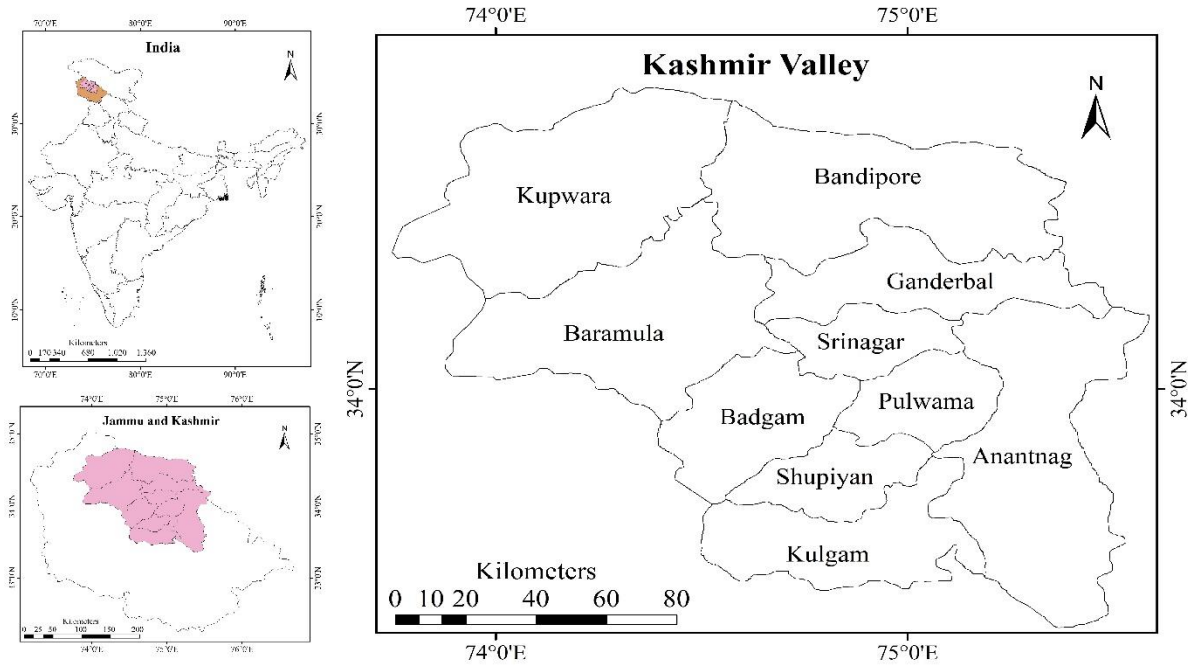


Fig. 1: Location of the study area.

IV. METHODS AND MATERIALS

Data of 24 years has been considered, and the whole period was further divided into two sub-periods. The period from the 1990s till 2002 is considered significant years of armed conflict in Kashmir Valley. However, 2002 onwards, that is from 2003 to 2013, considered as significant years of normalcy. Data required was gathered from secondary sources published by researchers and the Department of Tourism, Govt of Jammu & Kashmir. Besides, reports and surveys, past studies, newspapers and direct observations are also utilised to support the facts and figures. Literature available in the respective area is critically analysed, and inferences are derived to support explanatory arguments. The projected values are then calculated via linear regression analysis. The same has been plotted on a graph to

analyse the tourist influx trend in both periods. Role of technology in Tourism industry is widely discussed and negative impact of internet blockades briefly explored through supporting literatures.

V. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

5.1. Pattern of Tourist Inflow: Trend Analysis

Bloodshed started for the most part from 1990 onwards and sustained up to the commencement of 1998. As the conflict hilted the roof, domestic and foreign tourists changed their plans to visit India's states other than Jammu and Kashmir. Consequently, the inflow of tourists remained very stumpy during the uprising period compared to the years of normalcy, which is pictured by the data sets of the Department of Tourism, Govt of Jammu & Kashmir (Feb 2012).

Table. 1. Year wise tourist arrivals in Kashmir from 1987 to 2013

S No.	. Year	Home	Foreign	Total
1	1987	664081	57537	721654
2	1988	662097	59938	722035
3	1989	490212	67762	557977
4	1990	6095	4627	10722
5	1991	1400	4887	6287
6	1992	1175	9149	10324
7	1993	-----	8026	8026
8	1994	500	9314	9814
9	1995	322	8198	8520
10	1996	375	9592	9967
11	1997	7027	9111	16131

12	1998	99636	10247	109883
13	1999	200162	17130	217292
14	2000	104337	7575	111912
15	2001	66732	5859	72591
16	2002	24670	2686	27356
17	2003	182205	8959	191164
18	2004	358095	18234	376729
19	2005	585702	19680	603582
20	2006	412879	20009	432888
21	2007	417260	24576	441836
22	2008	551041	21588	572629
23	2009	577348	23904	601252
24	2010	710504	25984	736488
25	2011	1282360	32110	1314470
26	2012	1274674	37166	1311840
27	2013	1142865	29143	1172008

Sources: Department of Tourism, Govt of Jammu & Kashmir (Feb 2012)

In the pre-rebellion era, the tourist arrival was 7216541, which declined abruptly to 10722 once the armed conflict began in the Kashmir Valley. Earlier, during the high range of armed warfare, the inflow further decreased to 8,520 in 1993. Nevertheless, in the years of normalcy that followed 2003 greatly improved. Armed forces occupied government buildings and hotels at the time of active fighting, and most of the buildings were lost in

encounters. Most of the spots stayed off-limits because of violence in the area. It demotivated and drove foreign tourists away from the valley. Multiple attacks on Srinagar's international airport deterred foreign tourists, which subsequently dropped to shallow levels. Familiar valley people also shortened their trips because of their fear and life risks. The number of visitors slowly improved due to the restoration of stability and normalcy after 2002.

Table. 2. Year wise tourist arrivals in Kashmir from 1987 to 2013

Major Years of conflict (1990-2002)				Major Years of Normalcy (2003-2013)			
Year	Tourist Arrivals	Projected Value		Year	Tourist Arrivals	Projected value	
1989	557977	113559	Slope= -3194.52 Intercept= 6467476.76 r= - 0.097 R=a+by a=intercept b= slope y=years	2003	191164	180264	Slope = 104944.94 Intercept= - 210024460.8 r= 0.89 R=a+by a=intercept b= slope y=years
1990	10722	110364		2004	376729	285209	
1991	6287	107170		2005	603582	390154	
1992	10324	103975		2006	432888	495099	
1993	8026	100781		2007	441836	600044	
1994	9814	97586		2008	572629	704989	
1995	8520	94392		2009	601252	809934	
1996	9967	91197		2010	736488	914879	
1997	16131	88003		2011	1314470	1019824	
1998	109883	84808		2012	1311840	1124769	
1999	217292	81614		2013	1172008	1229714	
2000	111912	78419					
2001	72591	75225					
2002	27356	72030					

Source: Computed by authors

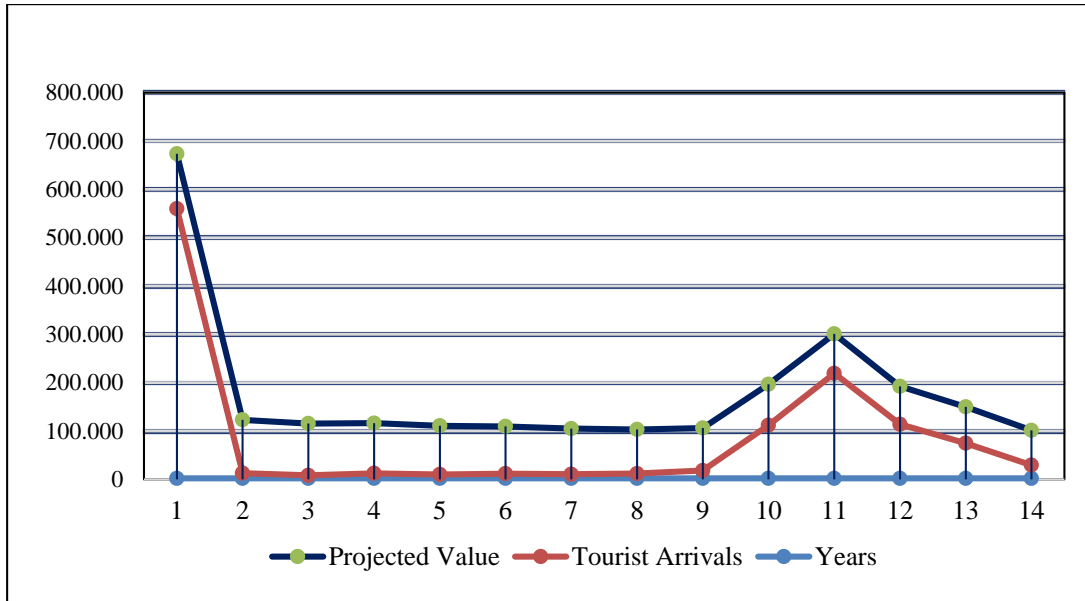


Figure 5.1.1. Trend of tourist arrivals from 1989-2002

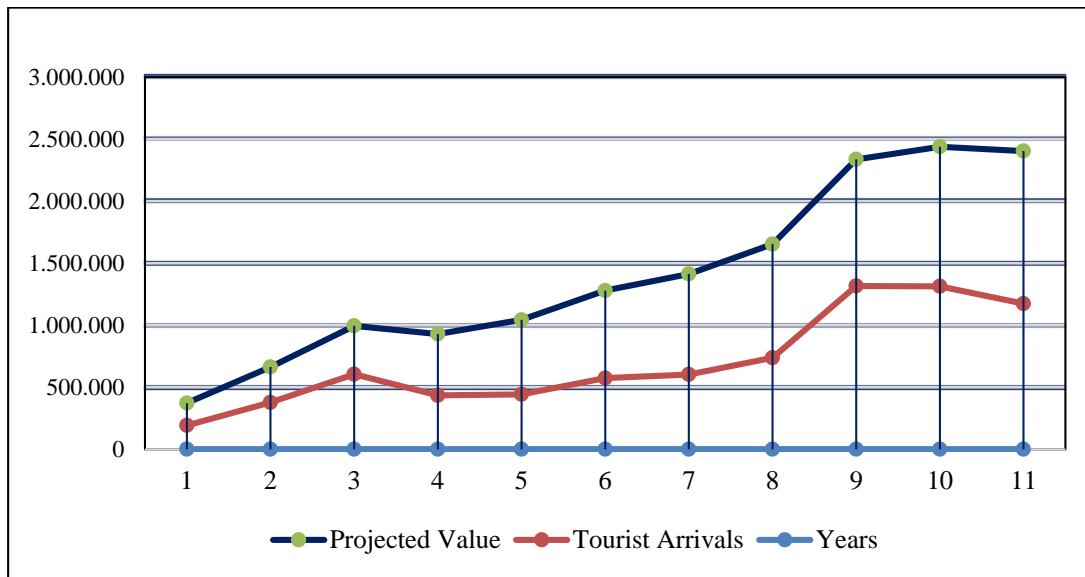


Figure 5.1.2. Trend of tourist arrivals from 2003-2013

Before the 1990s, visitors worldwide use to come and enjoy real natural enthusiasm, high peaked mountains, forests, and snow-capped valleys in Kashmir. However, the rise of armed conflict after the 1990's compelled them to cut their visits and turn their travel plans to other famous destinations of India. The declining trend is evident in the graph, and the slope measured is negative during the period from the 1990s to 2002. On the other hand, the increasing trend begins as the circumstances become routine in most of the years from 2003 onwards highly visible in graph plotted above. The slope measured is positive in the same period.

Role of Technology and Impact of Internet Blockades on Tourism in Kashmir

Technology and innovation have metamorphosed the tourism industry and has brought significant employment and economic benefits in various sectors of both host and home economies. It is one among the five main export categories for four-fifth of total countries and is also primary source of foreign exchange earnings for at least 38% of countries (Hojeghan, et al., 2011). Digital technologies are also hold exceptional prospects for tourism related industries who recurrently face challenges of low productivity and inefficiencies. These micro-businesses were often characterized by the low level of digitalization and business practices when compared to leaders of global tourism sector. The internet and other technologies are helping these small

and medium tourism businesses to access new markets, develop creative tourism services, build innovative business models, and integrate into the digital ecosystem. Thus, allowing them to bridge the gap between connectivity and productivity for small and medium tourism enterprises. Improving productivity can promote environmental sustainability and inclusive development that can further boost global tourism value chains across the digital network. For example, in Lebanon research shows that the internet can maintain a highly competitive value chain between numerous small tourist businesses, where they can use crowd sourcing to develop marketing strategies to benefit from online users who are separated by geographical areas (Azouri A. et al., 2016).

The multimedia technologies such as digital sound and voice recording were initially considered crucial in promoting tourism both locally and internationally. Over time, a vast array of emerging technologies such as data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), Augmented reality/Virtual Reality (AR/VR), or cloud computing are gaining more importance in reshaping the tourism ecosystem. However, these productivity-enhancing technologies have generally received a low uptake in tourism on average, while innovative technologies are generating, customizing and delivering ever more novel ways, new visitor products, services and experiences (OECD, 2019). Augmented reality technology could resolve the number of challenges of the tourism sector, namely paper-based marketing and delayed booking at the travel destination by exhibiting virtual objects in the real world. One of the applications of information technology (IT) specific to tourism is advancements in transport systems that have played a pivotal role in tourism physical infrastructure. Magnetic levitation, fast trains and aeroplanes (faster mode of transportation for travelling), and airships and hot-air balloons (other modes of transportation for scenic views) have been identified to meet the diverse needs of tourists (Hojeghan, et al., 2011). A collaborative step to fund the further innovative advancements for IT infrastructure is need of an hour for driving economic development through the tourism industry.

Blockchain is a newer technology that could further bring long term gains across the entire supply chain in the tourism businesses through smart contracts, which are based on blockchain technology to ensure an end-to-end transparency and connectivity, especially by introducing user-friendly smart apps that could benefit the whole tourism industry. So, the influence of new emerging technologies and innovation on tourism is boundless, with no less importance to social media that also play a substantial role in advertising and marketing the touristic spot of any region. Besides this, governments can build the proper framework for the technological advancement of the tourism ecosystem by integrating

the requisite policy approaches needed to leverage digitalisation benefits for sustained tourism development.

The internet has a profound impact on business in general (Wirtz, Schilke & Ullrich, 2010) and tourism sector in particular (Law, Qi, & Buhalis, 2010). Internet has altered the means through which information related to tourism sector is distributed among different stakeholders (Buhalis & Law, 2008). The advent of social media and digital news outlets provide the latest information on real-time basis. One unique feature of social media with regard to tourism is it allows stakeholders to share their personal experience and information about the services available at a particular place. This information comes handy to the future tourists. Similarly, the digital media outlets can help to promote the particular place by spreading positive news about the hospitality of particular place.

In the case of Kashmir valley, however, the internet blockade has negatively impacted the tourism industry. The government shuts down the internet without following any due process of law. According to Internet shutdowns, out of 525 internet shut downs in India since 2012 to April 8 2021, 305 shutdowns happened in JK. Out of which majority of shutdowns happened in Kashmir valley. The longest of which remained for 213 days (4th August 2019-4th march 2020) followed by 133 days in 2016 (8th July 2016-19th November 2016). According to Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) as cited in the report by APDP the average loss of business is to the tune of at least Rupees 175 crore due to the restrictions imposed by the authorities. The major loss was suffered by tourism and related industries. The normalcy in Kashmir projects growth of tourism and education sector. But the irony is that these two sectors faced the severe brunt of internet blockade. Further, the negative portal of Kashmir by mainstream multimedia further complicated the woes of tourism sectors. Most of the tourists who were going to visit the valley postponed their plans and number of countries issued travel advisory to their citizens against visiting the Kashmir valley.

Sustainable Growth in anticipation of Stability: An option to End Conflicts

Feeling free from the tensions and anxiety of everyday life is perhaps the main motive of travelling to natural tourism attractions in the present times. To get pleasure and feel free from the dull environment, every individual desire to visit a place devoid of conflict or otherwise wants to see and sleep in the lap of nature sometimes. Simultaneously, entertaining, enthusiasm, and a visit to natural attractions can probably play a significant role. Development processes produced much pressure on modern man, and as a result, modern life is seen full of trauma and sprains. Therefore, day to day life full of stresses and strains needs various kinds of leisure's and demands to

let go in an atmosphere that is peaceful and free of human disturbances.

In the present world, hectic work culture, stressful jobs, and substantial economic desires forced people to get involved in tensions and become patients for a lifetime. However, people full of confidence and good habits to lure themselves in the lap of nature most likely succeed in escaping from monotonous life and stressed methods. They know how to tackle such difficulties and how to enjoy nature in its real sense. Visits to mountainous places help them live a life of success and reach the ultimate destination with fanaticism and passion.

To deal with such apprehensions and to lose anxiety widely demands visiting a place full of natural attractions like a paradise on the earth. From history, it is widely evident to whom authors, historians, kings and tourists give the name of heaven on the earth as beautifully stated by Mughal Emperor Jahangir in these words;

"If there is Paradise on Earth, it is here; it is here,

Kashmir from the first remained a centre for travelers, scholars, saints and others from different parts of the world. At the global level, it is famous for its gold mining tourism potentials and hospitality of the people and, at the same time, unique in geography, climate and tourism products (Masroor and Ramachandra, 2018). In India, Jammu and Kashmir's state is considered the crown of the country and every heartbeat wishes to visit this place.

No doubt, Kashmir has rich tourism potential to make feel the tourists like heaven on the earth; however, extensively demands a peace process and adequate facilities in terms of infrastructure and services. Therefore, it demands a passive environment and other strategies to create an atmosphere of peace, prosperity and development of the valley. Confidently

saying, if the authorities are able to do that, the valley of Kashmir will provide peace and pleasure to disturbed minds of the state, country and also to the entire world.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Natural magnetism offers an opening to people from inside and outside the country to lose stresses and strain and to entice themselves in the lap of true nature. Nevertheless, the armed conflict and tourism growth are negatively associated and always putting restrictions to accomplish such ambitions easily and contentedly. Trend analysis depicts that the quantum of tourist influx remained high during normalcy and drastically fell if any untoward situation happens. Deficient information and Communication Technology and more particularly internet blockades doesn't allow service providers to operate efficiently. Consequently, the performance of tourism industry is disturbed and solely responsible for loss of service providers. On the other hand, the negative role of media is creating chaos and confusions among the tourists. That is why; most of the visitors cut their travel plans and prefer to visit other states. It infers that the sustainable growth of tourism is negatively influenced by conflict, deficient technology, internet blockades, and negative propaganda of social media sources. So, to ensure the progress of tourism industry people desire that the conflict should end enduringly, and peace needs to be promoted and guaranteed. With this backdrop, the study recommends better information and Communication technology, reduction in blockades and more specifically adoption of people-friendly measures to ensure peace and security in the region.

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