



Social sanctions of leisure and tourism constraints in Nepal

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Abstract

This study deals with the role of social sanctions in exploring the leisure-tourism engagement in Nepal. It then examines how people respond to societal norms and partake in leisure tourism vacations. The study applies the qualitative method and data is collected through in-depth interviews of purposely selected samples of 18 individuals in Kathmandu. The findings identify that the Nepali conception of leisure is subject to a degree of negative social sanctions, which people negotiate through their religious values and obligations. The paper establishes the centrality of social sanctions on leisure in understanding the incentives for tourism in a non-western society.

Keywords

constraints, leisure, Nepal, non-Western, social sanctions

Introduction

The relationship between tourism and leisure is a close one. There are well-established theoretical explanations of tourism that are based on the articulation of Western leisure culture. Other studies on leisure and tourism relations have focussed on behavioural conceptualisations of tourism and leisure (Carr, 2002; Moore et al., 1995), or leisure as a precondition for tourism (Aitchison, 2001). These discussions are dominated by the Western conceptualisation of leisure that takes local context as given, accepting that the potential for leisure tourism can be derived largely from society's income (Chick, 2006; Collins, 2017; Soule, 1957). However, even when income thresholds are met, not all leisurely pursuits can be transformed into tourism. An important factor that has been overlooked in tourism vis-à-vis leisure scholarship is the role of social sanctions in translating leisure pursuits into tourism.

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The place of local sanction as an essential prerequisite for tourism has been identified in some seminal works on tourism (see Smith, 1989; MacCannell, 1999). In her pioneering work on the anthropology of tourism, Smith (1989) claims tourism as a form of leisure activity that is founded on the three elements: leisure time, discretionary income and positive local sanction. She argues that sanctions for travel are closely linked to motivation and therefore it influences what kind of travel is undertaken. Another theorist of tourism, MacCannell, is strongly influenced by Goffman's idea of self-presentation, a continuous strategic expression of the self, which is constrained by social norms (Uski and Lampinen (2016). According to Goffman (1959), when the self is presented to others in a social context, some aspects are emphasised and others concealed and a tension may occur between what is accepted socially and what is desired personally (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Thus, an individual's leisure pursuit is contingent upon factors outside his own regulation, for example, the freedom to choose travel and tourism as a leisure activity is not independent but is largely conditioned by the social norms one relates to (see Rojek, 1995).

Interestingly, there are few studies that have given consideration to social sanctions in the study of tourism and most of them have focussed on destination choice. For example, Um and Crompton (1990) concluded that the destinations selected by an individual would be coherent with their group's opinion of that destination. Similarly, Beerli et al. (2007) suggested that tourists are likely to travel to destinations that are consistent with their self-image. Other studies reveal the importance of self-identity and social norms in destination selection and conclude that destinations that contribute to enhancing one's self-identity, particularly when they are consistent with one's existing or aspirational social group, are more likely to be visited (Lewis et al., 2010). In all of these studies, the realm of tourism and travel motivation is linked to the Western concept of leisure (MacCannell, 1999). They point out that globalisation, along with the nature and value of recreation, influence people's attitudes and behaviour and can create an urge to travel amongst the lower income population groups (Ghimire, 2001).

The above view ignores that the knowledge of tourism and tourists' experiences is incomplete without accounting for the local environment in which their life experiences are situated (Holden, 2005). It is important to know how social norms inform what is acceptable leisure behaviour within a given local context. Such an understanding can inform us fully of how individuals translate their leisure time into potential tourism activity, which will ultimately help us explain the development or underdevelopment of locally induced tourism in any country. Thus, this study is driven by the following research question: How are social sanctions enshrined in the concept of leisure in Nepal? To what extent does this inform leisure travel amongst Nepalis?

This study makes a useful contribution to establishing the relevancy of local conditionalities in our understanding of leisure and tourism, especially in a non-Western context. It demonstrates that despite being economically independent, people choice of tourism as a leisure activity is contingent upon social approval. The paper challenges the argument that specific groups systematically attempt to legitimise their particular lifestyles, symbols and activities as the natural, obvious and most desirable ones in society (McKay, 1986). Such an argument fails to recognise the concept of leisure as multicultural and diverse; instead this paper advances the view that local sanction is an important

social object in the study of leisure that can help us better understand the proximate causes of tourism in a non-western society. In addition, the paper also provides insights into how social norms inform host-guest relations. MacCannell (1992) argues that relations between tourists and ex-primitives is framed in a somewhat forced, stereotypical commercial exploitation model characterised by bad faith and petty suspicion on both sides. His point is that in the tourists versus ex-primitives interaction, hosts fake themselves to create a more primitive account of themselves. In contrast to the above, this paper articulates how hosts negotiate a meeting ground, to bridge a gap created by social norms and justify their professional role and touristic pursuits.

However, first the background and reasons for carrying out this study on Nepal must be outlined. In recent years there have been significant upward trends in economic and socio-cultural structures, particularly after Nepal adopted neo-liberal economic policies in the early 1990s that have marked the growth of a service economy (Bhandari, 2018). There were also other contributing factors: for instance, the end of a decade-long internal conflict and subsequent social transformations; urbanisation and growth of cities; a growing consumer culture because of foreign employment and remittances, and the adoption of a secular and republican constitution in 2006. The above influences, together with globalisation and access to media and communications, have brought about a huge change in traditional values, practices and the structure of Nepali society which has been documented by a number of scholars (Gellner et al., 2016; Hutt, 2012; Lawoti and Hangen, 2013).

Literature review

Social sanctions in leisure and tourism

Studies on leisure and tourism focus more on their complementarity that views tourism as 'one end of a broad leisure spectrum' (Ryan, 1997: 1). Such a view is very much a Western-centric one, where leisure is defined as an area of relative freedom, and individuals are treated as seeking pleasure, happiness, life satisfaction, wellness, flow and/or the gratifications that arise from a serious long-term commitment to a leisure activity (Roberts, 2010, 2011). However, the proposition that leisure is 'freedom', 'choice' and 'self-determination' is challenged by Rojek (1995) who argues that the object of leisure is subsumed by the subject of culture. According to him, in any culture there are discernible expectations, desires, wishes and habits that condition our leisure, thus the concept of leisure is socially constructed where social norms control and constraint it (Rojek, 1995).

Before delving into the engagement of local sanctions in leisure, it is essential to note the social significance of sanctions. According to Radcliffe-Brown (1933), a sanction is a reaction on the part of a society or of a considerable number of its members to a mode of behaviour which is thereby approved (positive sanctions) or disapproved (negative sanctions). Sanctions may further be distinguished according to whether they are diffused or organised; the former are spontaneous expressions of approval or disapproval by members of the community acting as individuals, while the latter are social actions carried out according to some traditional and recognised procedure (Radcliffe-Brown,

1933): in all human societies the negative sanctions are more definite than the positive. For example, if tourism is understood as 'hedonism' and not seen positively by a society, even if someone has free time and enough money, an individual cannot gain approval in pursuing a leisure activity of their choice.

It is interesting to note that the conditioning of social sanctions or norms in the performance of leisure and tourism is not a well-studied topic in the complex phenomenon of tourism (Lean, 2012); with the exception of one by MacCannell (2011), who takes the view that tourism is about 'crossing the line' (p. 212), where 'line' marks the boundary of normative differences. According to MacCannell, in travelling from place to place tourists pass from one normative order to another where routine behaviour is somewhat or very different from the way things are done back home. Tourists are expected to observe the social norms of their hosts, which is mediated by the institutional structure of modern tourism. MacCannell (2011) provides a very compelling manifesto for the 'moral ethics of tourism', however his concern is largely limited to western middle-class tourists and he does not consider how hosts' own social norms inform their behaviour as tourists and how it compares and interacts with the leisurely pursuits of their guests.

The centrality of social sanctions and implications in the organisation of leisure preferences have not been fully comprehended. It can be argued that the paucity of studies on the role of social sanctions in tourism has been corrected by scholarship on leisure constraints and negotiations to some extent. Studies on leisure constraints are driven by features such as income disparity and inequality and divergent socio-cultural values, both of which can impact peoples' ability to participate in leisure activity or use leisure services (Chung et al., 2017; Jackson and Henderson, 1995). Such leisure constraints can be defined at three levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal and institutional (Anaza and McDowell, 2013; Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Crawford et al., 1991; Doran and Pomfret, 2019; Godbey et al., 2010; Kaas and Çerez, 2016; Shaw, 1994). The first includes the individual psychological states and attributes that interact with leisure preferences, such as stress, depression, anxiety, religiosity, kin and non-kin reference groups, prior socialisation into specific activities and subjective evaluation of appropriateness and availability of various leisure activities. The second constraint involves lack of friends and family members with whom to participate in leisure activity. The third includes the stages in a family cycle, financial resources, season, climate, the schedule of work time, availability of opportunity and reference group attitudes concerning the appropriateness of certain activities.

Insights from studies that apply a leisure constraint model are helpful in understanding tourism participation amidst both societal and non-societal sanctions of leisure (Hinch and Jackson, 2000; Hudson, 2000; Hudson and Gilbert, 2000; Nyaupane et al., 2004; Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter, 2002; Worthington, 2005). They all examine various constraints ranging from factors like time, family, or economic factors (Hudson and Gilbert, 2000); discretionary income, and health (Fleischer and Pizam, 2002) and tourism seasonality (Hinch and Jackson, 2000) amongst others. There are other studies that have dealt with the question of understanding why some people do not travel, or what bars them from travel despite fulfilling all other conditions for leisure travel (see Peterson and Lambert, 2003). Frederick and Shaw (1995) found that societal pressures resulted in constraints by restricting some women from choosing leisure activities for

enjoyment or other benefits. Similarly, Anaza and McDowell (2013) found that gender boundaries and roles influence women's recreational sport participation.

The significant feature of these constraints is that people do find ways to overcome them through a negotiation process (White, 2008). Negotiation of constraints to leisure is complex, and the process becomes increasingly complicated when religious socialisation, beliefs, tradition, doctrine, practices and the norms and values of religious communities become intertwined (Lyu et al., 2013; also see Heintzman, 1996, 2000, 2002). It has been identified that constraints can decrease the level of participation in leisure; however, it can also lead to leisure negotiation which can ultimately help increase the level of leisure participation (Hubbard and Mannell, 2001; Lyu et al., 2013; Son et al., 2008). The most usual leisure negotiation strategies include, amongst others, the acquisition of information and skill; alteration of leisure timing; adjusting to the costs of leisure participation; changing one's attitudes or behaviour; or adopting family-related strategies (Chung et al., 2017). Though studies have looked into various leisure negotiation strategies, there is still a gap in literature in the context of non-European societies (Martin and Mason, 2004; Rojek et al., 2006; Stodolska and Livengood, 2006).

The above caveat on the study of leisure and tourism is equally applicable to Nepal and the existing studies are concerned with the implications of tourism, mainly with the landscape of heritage (Bhandari, 2018, 2019; Nyaupane, 2009; Nyaupane and Thapa, 2004; Nyaupane et al., 2015), nature conservation (Bhandari, 2012; Mu et al., 2019; Nepal, 2000, 2008) and crisis and destination image (Baral et al., 2004; Bhattarai et al., 2005; Thapa, 2003). Interestingly, there are two notable studies that provide very useful insights into the development of Nepalis' perception of leisure and tourism. Outlining the early development of tourism in Nepal, Liechty (2017) argues that tourism in Nepal was essentially an encounter between Nepal and the Western world that subsequently played a major role in shaping how Nepalis perceived and understood leisure and tourism, which is mostly viewed as an undesirable pursuit. However, when it comes to people's understanding of who is a tourist, Nepali understanding is strongly informed by the structure of Nepali society, which is highly stratified. For example, Hepburn (2002) argues that the way Nepalis understand tourists is similar to the way they understand a race, caste or ethnicity and sometimes class category of person or species. She finds that the Western frames of understanding tourists that include ideas of individuality, agency and the wider structures of work and leisure is absent in Nepal. Hepburn's (2002) findings suggest that the local societal norms are important in shaping the way tourists and tourism are perceived, which is a strong precondition for this study.

Research context

Nepal's tourism started after the successful ascent of Mt. Everest in 1953, giving Nepal unprecedented media attention. It took another decade to start the institutionalisation of tourism when in 1962 the government started to keep records of incoming visitors which stood at 6000 that year. However, major policy reforms in tourism only began after 1990, when Nepal ended its decades' old absolute monarchy. Various policy changes introduced at the time included the establishment of an autonomous tourism marketing body, relaxation of regulations on trekking, and the opening of new peaks for expeditions amongst others

(Bhandari, 2018). These changes opened a myriad of opportunities and tourism made significant growth until 1999, the year that saw half a million visitors. But the political turmoil triggered by the violent Maoist revolution which started in 1996 gradually took its toll on tourism and the number of visitors in 2002 fell to the level of 1990 (Bhattarai et al., 2005). However, the resolution of political conflict in 2008 has seen a positive growth in tourism, briefly intercepted by the earthquake in 2015. Since the earthquake Nepal has recovered significantly, achieving 1 million international tourists in 2018 which was a 25 percent increase compared to 2017 (MoTCA, 2019). Nepal's five major source markets are India, China, the USA, Sri Lanka and the UK, which contribute almost 50 percent of the total. Because of the dependence on nature-based attractions for tourism activities such as trekking and mountaineering, the international tourism visitation pattern is highly seasonal.

Study methodology

The study is exploratory in approach, which is very useful when there is little or no scientific knowledge about the research area or group as it can help determine the nature of the problem and provide a better understanding of it (Stebbins, 2001). An important advantage of exploratory study is that it can provide flexibility and open-mindedness in looking for data (Stebbins, 2001). The study applied a qualitative methodology and primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 18 purposefully selected respondents from different fields in Kathmandu. The sample was chosen from the groups who met one of the three criteria: (i) those who belonged to a policy community ($n=7$), that is, those actors who share an interest in a particular policy sector and who interact with one another in order to balance and optimise their mutual relations (Weed, 2001); (ii) the leisure suppliers, or those who identified themselves as tourism suppliers ($n=5$); and (iii) leisure/tourism consumers ($n=6$), though the former two groups were also asked about their leisure preferences and practices. The reason for choosing the three groups of samples was that policy-making and its interpretation is a social activity where various actors, institutions, groups, organisations, and individuals engage and influence perceptions of policies (Bramwell and Lane, 1999). Thus, the sample included a civil servant in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, senior staff at the Nepal Tourism Board; hotel and travel professionals; an airline member of staff; a doctor; a student of leisure and tourism, a conservationist; politicians and public servants. These individuals were identified from the researcher's own long engagement with research on leisure and tourism in Nepal, reports in the media and other documents, and from snowball suggestions made by respondents who were contacted during the early stage of the study. Though participants did not believe they are religious, they all identified themselves as followers of Hindu cultural practices, though not all of them ($n=5$) belonged to Hindu caste groups. The participants were all professionals based in Kathmandu which is the pre-eminent large city with 22 percent of the total urban population of Nepal (Sharma, 2013). Secondary data were widely consulted throughout the research process; these mainly included: Tourism Policy 1995 and Tourism Policy 2008, the Nepal Tourism Board Act 1995, National Culture Policy 2010, Casino Regulations 2013, national tourism strategy plans, and policies related to other entertainment activities such as sports and recreation.

The above selection of participants was informed by the discussion of group member homogeneity that can be defined in a number of dimensions. This study considered applying 'issue homogeneity' (Carfman, 1995) which implies that participants are similar in response to the focal issues, for example, attitude, opinions and values and can be different in other characteristics. The diversity of participants in terms of characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, social class, religion etc. was intended to ensure reliability. According to Guba (1981), triangulation via data sources can increase trustworthiness, which can be achieved through the inclusion of diversity of informants in the study. The participation of informants within several organisations or a wider spectrum of professional fields is helpful to reduce the effect of particular local factors peculiar to one institution or subject areas (Shenton, 2004). The wider inclusion of participants in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity was useful to verify individual viewpoints and experiences against others, providing a rich picture of the attitudes, needs and behaviour of those in the sample.

The interviews were held in Nepal and Scotland between July 2016 and November 2018. Ten interviews were conducted at the participants' offices in Nepal. Two took place in local restaurants in Dhulikhel and Nagarkot when interviewees were on a leisure day trip. Four interviews were carried out in Scotland, during the participants' semi-leisure visit to the United Kingdom. Two interviews were done on Skype. These interviews focussed on questions pertaining to what constitutes leisure in Nepal; what is their preferred leisure tourism activity and reasons for their preference; how their leisure practice has evolved over the last 20 years and the overall leisure tourism environment in Nepal. The interviews were 30 to 45 minutes in length. Notes were taken of the main points discussed during the interviews, which were later expanded. Ten interviews were audio recorded and the remainder were recorded using hand notes. The study complied with the ethical principles of research and the participants were provided with a participant information sheet and were asked to sign the consent form.

The interview data were organised through data transcription. Some researchers advocate analysing texts without transcribing them as this allows researchers to focus on the bigger picture and not get bogged down in the details of what people have said (Gibbs, 2007). However, this was not considered necessary because the sample size was manageable and it was felt small details could provide a useful insight into the study. The transcribed data were applied with inductive thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were thematically analysed, for which the data were selectively coded, looking for themes to emerge. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006), the development of themes and thematic categories is a helpful way to extract meaning from the data. This was done using conceptual analysis, by establishing the existence and frequency of concepts in the text (Flick, 2014). Each emergent theme was organised into and presented under two sub-sections in the Findings section of the paper.

Findings

The concept of leisure in Nepali society

An account of travel culture amongst Nepalis must consider the strong cultural and historical roots of the concept of leisure. Nepali society considers time as a non-essential

concept that has no importance of its own (Bista, 1999). According to Bista, for Nepalis, time is like a flowing river, that is, flowing continuously without any sense of beginning or end or particular divisions. Nepali culture emphasises the theme of spirituality and the meaninglessness of material interests and reckons time as transcendental in terms of this life, the life hereafter and the previous life in a cycle of ages and aeons. Such a concept of time is unfavourable for the development of leisure culture as it negatively sanctions leisure practices amongst the majority of the population. As a result leisure activities in Nepal have been confined to a ruling elite with very few leisure activities available to the general public (Peissel, 1990). For example, a participant (R11) stated,

Leisure is the luxury of the rich. How can a working class ordinary person like me have leisure (*fursad*). I neither have economic resources or surplus time for such a luxury. I cannot afford free time, I have to work.

The term leisure translates into Nepali as *fursad*, meaning 'doing nothing', in common Nepal parlance (Bista, 1999). *Fursad* usually has a negative connotation and is synonymous with 'idleness' in Nepali language. Such an idea of leisure is similar to the one in China (see Wang, 2005); however, it is at odds with the premise of leisure that regards it as an outcome of modernity (Liu et al., 2008; Stebbins, 2005a, 2005b). Modernist concepts primarily regard leisure as the antithesis of regulated and organised work. Such an approach to leisure has two important elements: first, an emphasis on individualism, and second, an association with hedonism. For example, leisure is connected with pleasure, fun, and enjoyment. These concepts are relevant to Western societies that have developed a relative separation between politics, economics and culture which smoothly translates into the liberalisation and diversification of individual conduct, including leisure conduct (Rojek, 2005). However, for Nepalis, core social and religious values are so mixed that even politics, economics and culture are strongly driven by traditional values and religious orientation (Whelpton, 2005).

Commensurate with the above values, Nepal's leisure and tourism legislation does not acknowledge the provision of leisure for Nepalis. According to Nepal's Tourism Act of 1978, Nepalis are not considered to be tourists. The Act originally defined tourists as those non-Nepali citizens coming to Nepal for a visit from a foreign country, though this has been corrected in the second amendment to the Act in 1997 by separately defining Nepali tourists as those Nepali citizens travelling from one place to another in Nepal. However, other leisure-associated Acts such as the Nepal Tourism Board Act 1995 and tourism policies still define tourists as non-Nepali citizens coming to visit Nepal from a foreign country (see MoTCA, 1995, 2008). Consequently, Nepalis are restricted from many leisure activities available to tourists: for example, they are not allowed to enter or play in casinos or use tourist bus services. Similarly, Nepal observes a one-day weekend, limiting people's leisure time.

According to respondent (R5), for those working in the public sector, leisure is not about taking off time from work but time that is free after work. Many respondents acknowledged that utilising one's annual leave for leisure is not socially sanctioned and taking time off for 'doing nothing' would project you as person influenced by foreign, vagabond culture and convey a negative meaning. A respondent (R5) stated,

Travel for leisure is only for tourists. Nepali culture does not endorse travel for leisure. Wandering purposelessly without a reason just for fun or for pleasure-seeking cannot be regarded as civilised and it is against our value system.

The above findings indicate that when it comes to themselves, Nepali society applies an anti-hedonistic approach to leisure and tourism which indicates a degree of negative social sanction to such activities. Under such socialisation, how do those people at the helm of tourism agencies justify the activity of tourism that is based on modern Western thinking? Especially when individuals are members of groups such as family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers and others with whom the individual interacts, sanctions create a moral obligation to the whole group to not engage in the sanctioned behaviour (Mulder, 2018).

Social sanctions of leisure and negotiating desires

Given the above inclination, leisure or travel is not perceived to belong to Nepalis, and there is a general disapproval from society that Nepalis can be at 'leisure'. For the above reason, some of the participants in this study imposed a self-sanction by forbidding themselves to partake in leisure and tourism activities. Respondents asserted their moral duty to comply to societal norms. For example, a participant (R2) said,

I do not use my annual leave or leisure for tourism instead I use it for reading and doing some gardening or household work. I do not think travel for leisure is appropriate for a poor country like ours, as it is wasting your resources for unproductive work.

A further respondent (R4), clarified that making a connection with pilgrimage makes it easy to get permission from parents, stating,

It's easy to get parents' nod when you say you want to visit a temple. Last time me and my friends wanted to visit Chitwan, but I said to my parents that I was visiting *Manakaamana* temple which is close to Chitwan so that they will allow me to go. If I had asked my parents that I want to go on a three-day fun trip to Chitwan, they wouldn't have given permission.'

When confronted with the question of their moral authority to participate in or promote leisure and tourism activities, the participants applied two standards when considering tourism, one for themselves and one for the tourists. A participant responded (R2),

Tourists are different, travelling is part of their culture. They have a highly developed consumer culture and everyone has to work hard to survive. It is essential for them to take a break from their work, travelling away from home to a place which is interesting and unique is a great way for them to switch off at least for a few days.

Other participants of this study justified their own travel by associating it with religion. Many participants, including some of those deploring tourism as an alien concept or Western influence, took refuge in religion to negotiate a desire for leisure and deploy religious values as a 'negotiator' (Hubbard and Mannell, 2001).

A respondent (R18) said,

Whenever I have long break, I prefer to take a Hindu pilgrimage visit rather than going to some trekking area in the mountains. To me it is also very deific. I believe there's some kind of divine vibe in Hindu temples. I feel very happy and blessed whenever I perform my prayers at the temples, it reenergises me and helps me connect with my spiritual self.

The premise of the above is Hindu religious practices that disapprove of a pleasure element in one's life and bars one from the Western hedonistic principles of leisure. According to the *Bhagwat Gita*, the most revered of religious scriptures, 'He who is regulated in his habits of eating, sleeping, recreation and work can mitigate all material pains by practising the yoga system'. This suggests that any form of extravagance in the matter of eating, sleeping, defecating and mating – which are demands of the body – can block advancement in the practice of yoga. The further interpretation of the *Bhagwat Gita* suggests that where work is concerned, a self-aware person's work is always regulated and is untainted by a sense of gratification, and thus there is no place for material leisure.

In this study, the interpretation of yoga by the participants was different from the western conceptualisation of it as a combination of breathing exercises, relaxation, and spiritual rituals amongst others (Berger et al., 2009; Birdee et al., 2008). For the participants, yoga cannot be considered an activity of leisure. A participant (R8), stated the following,

Yoga is a spiritual journey in pursuit of moksha for us, not a luxury of leisure. Nowadays, with the spread of neo-capitalism, yoga has become a commodity for tourists. They come from the western countries to spend their leisure time learning and practicing yoga. This is completely opposite to the original notion of yoga, which is about detaching oneself from materialistic temptation and cleansing the inner spiritual self.

The two different ways participants viewed their own tourism pursuits compared to those of their guests suggested that they interpret leisure and tourism from two different cultural standpoints and philosophical values. As stated by the above participant, according to Hindu philosophical thought, yoga is a way to express their love of God and a path to their pursuit of 'moksha'. This is also attested by Danish (2010) who argues that yoga is the philosophical basis to join the mind, body and spirit through a discipline that involves living a balanced life and joining with the universal divine. This in essence means that the act of homage to pilgrimage shrines is a performance of yoga and cannot be regarded as an act of tourism, whereas the tourism activity of their guests is understood more from a western perspective as a part of consumer culture.

The implication of the above is that there is a difference in the way tourism is understood at the institutional level and at the individual level. At an individual level the participants are informed by their Hindu value system; however at the institutional level they are governed by the western values of globalisation and neoliberalism, which can be seen in the promotional activities of the Nepal Tourism Board, which has deployed a strong association between travel for leisure and religion in its domestic

tourism promotions. The Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) has initiated measures to promote domestic travel culture by associating it with religious pilgrimages, through its promotion tagline, that states, 'Make this *Dashain* memorable by travelling with your families'. *Dashain* is Nepal's national festival. The Board dedicated the year 2016 as *Ghumphir barsha*, or domestic travel year, initiating a campaign to encourage Nepalis to travel within the country. There were various domestic tour packages developed by private providers as part of the *Ghumphir* year, most of them being pilgrimages to religious sites.

However, in contrast to the modern notions of tourism as propounded by the Board, the respondents stated that they would use the festival break to visit a Hindu pilgrimage site for special prayers for their parents or ancestors, not as a tourist but as a means to achieve salvation. A respondent (R8) stated,

My pilgrimage this year was memorable because we got the chance to participate in special prayers. My mom was very happy as she had an opportunity to bathe in the river *Ganges* for the first time. She believes that you will cleanse yourself of sins and your past life's karma when you perform such a pilgrimage. She felt as though she received blessings from her ancestors when she dipped into the waters.

There are Hindu scriptures that command people to take a journey to holy destinations to remove one's sins of past life, and this can open the door to salvation. Such views sanction travel for religious reasons and encourage people to use leisure for pilgrimage visits to Hindu sites.

The above discussions show that participants use religion as a moral agency in order to avoid self-condemnation. According to Bandura (2002), people also commonly experience conflicts in which they are socially pressured to engage in conduct that violates their moral standards. Responses to such moral dilemmas are determined by the relative strength of self-sanctions and social sanctions and the conditional application of moral standards. According to Bandura (2002), moral actions are the products of the reciprocal interplay of personal and social influences. Since the majority of participants stated that they adhere to the Hindu way of life, it is interesting to notice the application of the 'moral disengagement' when justifying their own travel behaviour.

Discussion and conclusions

In this study I have looked into the Nepali concept of leisure through the lens of social norms. This paper has shown that leisure in Nepal is strongly guided by traditional values and hence social approval for participation and enjoyment in leisure and tourism is very important. Interviews with the participants of this study who belong to the tourism industry showed that there is a duality in the interpretation and application of leisure and tourism. They seem to apply different cultural norms to the same action. For example, the participants' opinion about their own leisure and tourism is driven by the value of their culture, and did not consider their own travel as 'tourism' but a journey for salvation. Thus, they distinguished their own purpose of tourism with that of the hedonistic tourism pursuits of western visitors, justifying the westerners' action as 'their' culture.

This suggested that the participants applied different social norms for themselves and the tourists. The above observation provides a good perspective in understanding the nature of host-guest relations. In discussing the interaction between tourists and ex-primitives, MacCannell (1992) takes the view that touristic spaces are ground for encounter between cultures, where communities flourish their distinctiveness. He argues that the ex-primitives claim to be exploited to the point where their value as 'primitive' attraction is not diminished, suggesting that ex-primitives overdose tourists with unwanted pseudo-authenticity. In this sense the idea of primitive is only a response to a mythic necessity to keep the idea of primitive alive in the modern world and consciousness. Thus, according to MacCannell (1992) the separation between the ex-primitive and the modern is not an absolute difference but is more a differentiation of evolving cultural subjects. On the contrary, the findings in this study suggest that the participants' view to justify the touristic endeavour of the western tourist is an indication of inauthenticity, as such a view does not come naturally from their culture but is contrived to justify their action through 'moral disengagement'. Additionally, this act of inauthenticity is not aimed at creating a difference or distinction between them and tourists, but more driven by bridging the gap, and pretending to be similar.

The implication of such a duality in understanding leisure and tourism can be witnessed in both public policy and practices of leisure tourism activities in Nepal. Despite having a strong tourism industry, public policy concerning tourism restricts people's leisure choices by not recognising Nepalis as tourists. This has constrained the growth and development of domestic tourism, and as a result, domestic 'tourism' activities are centred around religious shrines, suggesting that those who take part in these activities are not necessarily involved in 'tourism' but, in some cases, their family duty and are driven by religious obligation. As local social norms forbid any extravagance in the pursuit of tourism, the promotion of domestic tourism follows the same trend, where a national tourism body is seen to encourage domestic visitors to visit pilgrimage shrines. As a result, domestic tourism activities are strongly segregated from the tourism areas popular for western visitors, though there are some common transit areas that they both pass through.

The findings can also be interpreted from the leisure negotiation perspectives. The study provides a very strong indication that participants apply religion as a leisure negotiator and deploy the notion of moral disengagement to justify their action of leisure travel. By expressing their disapproval of certain forms of tourism activities, participants show their adherence to negative social sanctions to leisure. Their denial of leisure travel is a good example of how they exercise moral agency selectively. This study establishes that leisure has an association with moral agency, especially in traditional societies like Nepal where local norms and values hold strong and do not necessarily conform to the modern conception of leisure. To understand such context it would be interesting to investigate people's justification for their indulgence in hedonistic activities in other forms of leisure. Future studies can provide more insights on the above issues.

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