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Pramod Shrestha 2014

**VISITOR EXPERIENCES IN GHANDRUK
VILLAGE, NEPAL**



LAPLAND UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
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Thesis

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NEPAL**

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The aim of this study was to explore visitor experience about the Ghandruk village, Nepal. It highlights the features about Ghandruk that need further development for visitors' meaningful experiences.

The theoretical frameworks used for this study are tourism, rural tourism, sustainability and the Experience Pyramid by Sanna Tarssanen and Mika Kylänen. It functioned as a tool to measure visitors' level of experience in order to analyse and develop the tourism product.

This study is a web-based quantitative research where data was collected and analysed using webropol and Microsoft Excel. The data was collected from November 2013 to January 2014 and seventy seven respondents participated in the study.

The findings reflect that visitors had a good experience on Ghandruk as a product. Similarly, visitors' satisfaction level on personal experiences was also good. However, it suggests that there is need for improvement in product component and personal experience components for providing meaningful experiences and a higher level of satisfaction to the visitors.

The study argues that elements of meaningful experiences lead to a change at the personal level of the visitors and it ultimately contributes to the meaningful experiences through a higher level of satisfaction. The findings reflect that there is importance of harmonizing the needs of visitors by the service providers. It can be done through exploring visitor experiences and this study serves as a basis for this purpose.

Key words: Visitors Experience and Satisfaction, Experience Pyramid, Ghandruk, Rural Tourism, Sustainability

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACA = Annapurna Conservation Area

ACAP = Annapurna Conservation Area Project

MoCTCA = Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation

NPR = Nepalese Rupee

NTB = Nepal Tourism Board

NTNC = National Trust for Nature Conservation

ODI = Overseas Development Institute

OECD = Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

STN = Sustainable Tourism Network

UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNWTO = United Nations World Tourism Organization

VDC = Village Development Committee

WTO = World Tourism Organization

WTTC = World Travel and Tourism Council

1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. The tourism and hospitality industry is an important contributor to the economy of both developed and developing countries. Tourism has played a significant role for the conservation of nature and preservation of cultures. 2012 was a milestone year for tourism; over one billion tourists travelled the globe in a single year. Five to six billion more are expected to have travelled within their own countries. In 2011, the total number of tourists were around 996 million and it increased to 1 billion in 2012. UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to increase in 2013 by 3% to 4%, much in line with its long-term forecast for 2030: +3.8% a year on average between 2010 and 2020. (UNWTO 2013, 2-8.)

In this context, Nepal is also influenced. It is one of the richest countries in terms of bio-diversity including the highest point on earth Mount Everest (8,848 meters) and the lowest point Kechana Kalan (60 meters) within a span of 150 kilometers (Nepal Tourism Board 2012a). Nepal, the birthplace of Lord Buddha is the world's youngest republic. The country is secular and highly diverse culturally and geographically. Along with the population of 26.49 million (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012, 1), Nepal has more than 101 ethnic groups and 92 spoken languages where one can find a rich variety of cultures, different lifestyles, values and traditions (Nepal Tourism Board 2012c).

Nepal is rich in natural and cultural diversity but it is an economically weak country in the world. Despite the weakness, thousands of international tourists come to visit it every year. The different Nepalese culture, rites and rituals in different parts of the country is the main attraction for international tourists. Ghandruk is one of the most beautiful, delightful and natural rural villages in Nepal. The village located in the Kaski district of central Nepal has a very historic, interesting and unique identity. The Gurung (an ethnic group) habituated village is situated at 2000m above sea level. Its location at the base of Mount Annapurna and Machhapuchhre provides scope for scenic beauty. The nearest city is Pokhara 55 km northwest, and thousands of tourists visit this village every year (Gurung 2004, 1).

The visitors experience has been significant in the tourism industry. The needs, services and experiences of the visitors determine further enhancing and meaningful experiences. Therefore, this study is aimed at exploring the experiences of visitors who have visited Ghandruk. Collecting and measuring the experiences are always beneficial in the further development of services. The higher level of experience provides approvals for the trend to continue whereas a lower level of experience provides an opportunity for improvement and development of the services. Thus, the visitor experience survey contributes to the improvements in the region. The information gained from the visitors could provide a new technique to improve the experience level of visitors. The experiences of the visitors affect the decision to repeat the visit as well as recommend it to others.

Therefore, one of the major objectives of this study is to find out the experiences gained by the visitors in Ghandruk by measuring their level of experiences in order to develop tourism. This thesis focuses on the case of the Ghandruk village. This thesis contains information about tourism in Nepal, the Ghandruk region and rural tourism. The main theoretical background used for this study is the Experience Pyramid introduced by Tarssanen and Kylänen (2006). It serves as a tool to measure the level of experiences. Likewise, the research methods and empirical part are discussed which are followed by discussions and conclusion.

2 TOURISM

2.1 Definitions of Tourism

Tourism has been defined in a number of ways by different people and organization from the beginning of the twentieth century. The Tourism Society of England (1976) defined tourism as a the temporary, short term movement of people to the destination outside the places where they usually live or work and their activities during the stay at each destination (cited in Wind Rose Network 2004–2014). Similarly, Mathieson–Wall (1982) defined tourism as the short term movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations and the facilities created to care to their need (cited in Franklin 2003, 27).

Likewise, World Tourism Organization (1991) defined that tourism includes the activities of person travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for less than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes. The term usual environment means travelling to another place rather than the place of residence, common place of education or work and other local activities. As per the definition of WTO, tourism can be categorised in different forms like international tourism, internal tourism, domestic tourism and national tourism. International tourism comprises of inbound tourism and outbound tourism. A visit to a country by non-residents is called inbound tourism. For example, when a Nepalese citizen comes to Finland to visit Rovaniemi, he is an inbound tourist for Finland. A resident of a country visiting another country is called outbound tourism. For example, when a Finnish citizen goes to Nepal to visit Mt. Everest, he is an outbound tourist for Finland. Internal tourism means a resident of a country visiting his or her own country. For example, when a Finnish citizen visits Finland then it is called internal tourism. Domestic tourism comprises of internal tourism plus inbound tourism. National tourism comprises of internal tourism plus outbound tourism. (WTO 1991 cited in Page–Connell 2006, 12–13.)

2.2 Tourism in Nepal

The Himalayan country of Nepal is best known as a natural and cultural destination. The diversities of nature and culture attracts visitors. For the development of tourism, Nepal tourism board (NTB), a national organization was established in 1998. NTB is a form of partnership between the Government of Nepal and private sector tourism industry to develop and market Nepal as an attractive tourism destination. "NATURALLY NEPAL, Once is not enough" is the tourism brand of Nepal. (Nepal Tourism Board 2012b.)

On 12 April 1996 the Government of Nepal declared the year 1998 as "Visit Nepal '98" in order to further enhance the image of Nepal as a special destination to the visitors. The theme for "Visit Nepal '98" was "A sustainable habitat through sustainable tourism" and the marketing slogan was "Visit Nepal '98 - A world of its own" (Agarwal–Upadhyay 2006, 225). Visit Nepal year 1998 was the major step by government and helped Nepal to rebuild its tourism image internationally. The campaign helped to bring awareness among the Nepalese people about the importance of tourism in the country. Similarly, after the declaration of Nepal as a federal democratic republic on 28 May 2008, the Government of Nepal in consultation with the Nepalese travel trade sector and concerned organizations/experts decided on 25 October 2008 to launch a national tourism campaign "Nepal Tourism Year 2011". The target of this campaign was to bring 1 million international visitors to the country. The main objective was to establish Nepal as a premier holiday destination for with a definite brand image, and to improve and extend tourism related infrastructures in existing and new tourism sites (Bhandari 2011, 127).

2.3 Tourism Vision 2020

In May 2009, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MoCTCA) published a long term vision known as Tourism Vision 2020. The theme of tourism vision 2020 is 'Tourism for Peace, People and Prosperity'. The main goal is to increase annual international tourist arrivals to Nepal to two million by 2020 and to enlarge economic opportunities and increase employment in the tourism sector to one million. Tourism vision 2020 focuses on improving

the livelihoods of people around the country by developing intergrated tourism activities and products, creating employment in rural areas for women and deprived communities, distributing tourism benefits to the grassroots level. (MoCTCA 2009, 9.)

Tourism is the most important sector of the economy in Nepal after agriculture. Tourism touches the life of every Nepalese in some way. It has generated employment opportunities and has helped to promote the arts and cultures of the country. The tourism sector has become a large foreign currency earner with a massive contribution in the economy. An old Sanskrit adage 'Athiti Devo Bhavah (Guests are Gods)' (Mukhiya 2012) is still in the heart of Nepalese people that has made foreigners to visit it again and again. The diversity of tourism products in the country has encouraged the first-time visitors to plan their next visit to Nepal. There are more than 20 percent repeating visitors annually. In 2012 the number of repeating visitors were 170,325 which were 21.20 percent of total visitors (MoCTCA 2013, 47–48). The tourist stay longer who visits Nepal second time or more but they spend less money than on the first visit. The repeating visitors are the one who mostly recommend Nepal to their friends and relatives. The average length of stay of tourists was 12.87 days in 2012 while it was 13.12 days in 2011. (Prasain 2013.)

2.4 Economic Impacts of Tourism and Rural Tourism in Nepal

With eight of the world's highest mountains including Mount Everest, Nepal has been an attracting destination for many visitors. The tourism sector has broadly contributed to the economy of Nepal where tourism is the main source of foreign exchange. In 2011, Nepal received 736,215 tourists, and the number increased to more than 803,092 in 2012 (MoCTCA 2013, 18). By 2023, international tourists arrival are forecast to total 1,318,000 (WTTC 2013, 5). The contribution of travel and tourism sector to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2012 and a forecast for 2023 are presented in table 1 below. Similarly, The contribution of travel and tourism to employment including jobs in 2012 and projected jobs in 2023 are presented in table 2 below. The capital investment in the travel and tourism sector was NPR (Nepalese rupee) 12.5 billion in 2012 and this is expected to rise to NPR 20.7

billion in 2023. Tourism generated NPR 36.6 billion in 2012 and this is projected to be 55.6 billion in 2023. (WTTC 2013, 1–5.)

Table 1. GDP Contribution of Travel and Tourism in Nepal

GDP Contribution	2012 (NPR billion)	2023 (NPR billion)
Direct Contribution	67.2	112.3
Total Contribution	147.2	245.6

Table 2. Employment Contribution of Travel and Tourism in Nepal

Employment Contribution	2012	2023
Direct Contribution	553,500	829,000
Total Contribution	1,255,500	1,877,000

2.5 Socio-Cultural Impacts of Tourism and Rural Tourism in Nepal

The social and cultural impacts of tourism are contributing to the change in value systems, individual behavior, family relationship, collective life styles, safety and security, moral conduct, traditional ceremonies and community organizations (Mathieson and Wall 1982, 133). According to Godfrey and Clarke (2000 cited in Aref–Redzuan 2010, 88), the socio-cultural impact of tourism is related with the community's quality of life and sense of place.

The social structures, the cultures and traditions of a certain place can be changed or totally replaced by the influence of tourism. This kind of impact can be noticed by the local communities. A different type of introduction of social and cultural identities has brought several changes to the Nepalese society. The social aspects of people such as living standard, education, occupation are encountered to the modification. In the past agriculture and business were the major occupation of the Nepalese people and traditional type of farming was practiced. There were few schools and road connections were very poor throughout the country especially in the villages. Before the establishment of the road connections people used to trek a long distance to reach the destination. Likewise, the changes has been found in fooding

habits, dressing and housing. Those changes have been brought because of the development of the place as a tourism destination. The growth of tourism has created more jobs to the local people and local businesses are increased. The establishment of hospitals and its pharmacy has saved the time and life of the people and the personal hygiene of the local people is improved. Community infrastructures are growing and cultural changes has been found in many places. A team spirit has been promoted through the development of cultural activities. The local community shows their own cultural exhibition, dances as an entertainment for tourists which helps to preserve the cultural identity. (Khanal 2011, 26–29.)

2.6 Sustainability in Tourism

All tourism activities such as holidays, business travel, conferences, adventure travel and ecotourism should be sustainable. Sustainable tourism is defined as a “tourism that respects both local people and the traveller, cultural heritage and the environment” (UNESCO 2010). When tourism is based on the principle of sustainability, it can be resource in improving the living conditions of mountain communities. Sustainability includes ecological, economic and social factors. Ecotourism plans should not give priority only on resource conservation but should also address issues of equity, community development and social amiability. Sustainable tourism in mountainous region includes three basic factors: conservation of local natural resources on which tourism is depended, improving the quality of life of local community and increasing of visitor satisfaction. (Nepal 2002, 44.)

The growth of tourism is not possible without the proper management of environment. The different sectors such as management, transportation, accommodation, excursions and destination should be sustainable (Himalaya Holiday 2013.) The Sustainable Tourism Network (STN), Nepal is an informal network of individuals and organizations that encourages the practices of sustainable tourism in Nepal. STN provides a forum for the people working in tourism industry to share the lessons learned, increase cooperation between projects and encourage the best practices of sustainable tourism (STN 2009).

Likewise, there are some challenges in the tourism of Nepal. The weak tourism infrastructure such as transportation is one of the major challenges in the tourism sector. The mountainous country is highly dependent on air transport but it is still served by an old international airport (Ellis–Lemma 2013.) The geography of the country itself is the challenge for the country. It is difficult to construct the roads and railways in the northern part because of the landscapes, high energy costs and limited availability. Beside this, there is a conflict between the local people where one group of people wants construction while the other group wants preservation. The nature and trekking trails are destroyed by the construction of roads though the local people are personally benefitted. So, the people are still debating about ecotourism vs. mass tourism that has been a challenge for the country to make a right decision. The climate change impact has brought a greater disaster risks such as landslides and floods with negative impact on infrastructure and greater pollution (Ellis–Lemma 2013.) Similarly, the government services and facilities like transportation, hospitals, personal security, and job opportunities are centralized towards the cities that has caused overcrowding and environment pollution; as a result the tourism sector in Nepal is hampered.

3 GHANDRUK REGION

3.1 Overview of Ghandruk and Ghandruke Culture

Ghandruk is a part of ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Project). ACAP is the first and largest conservation area of Nepal that was established in 1986.

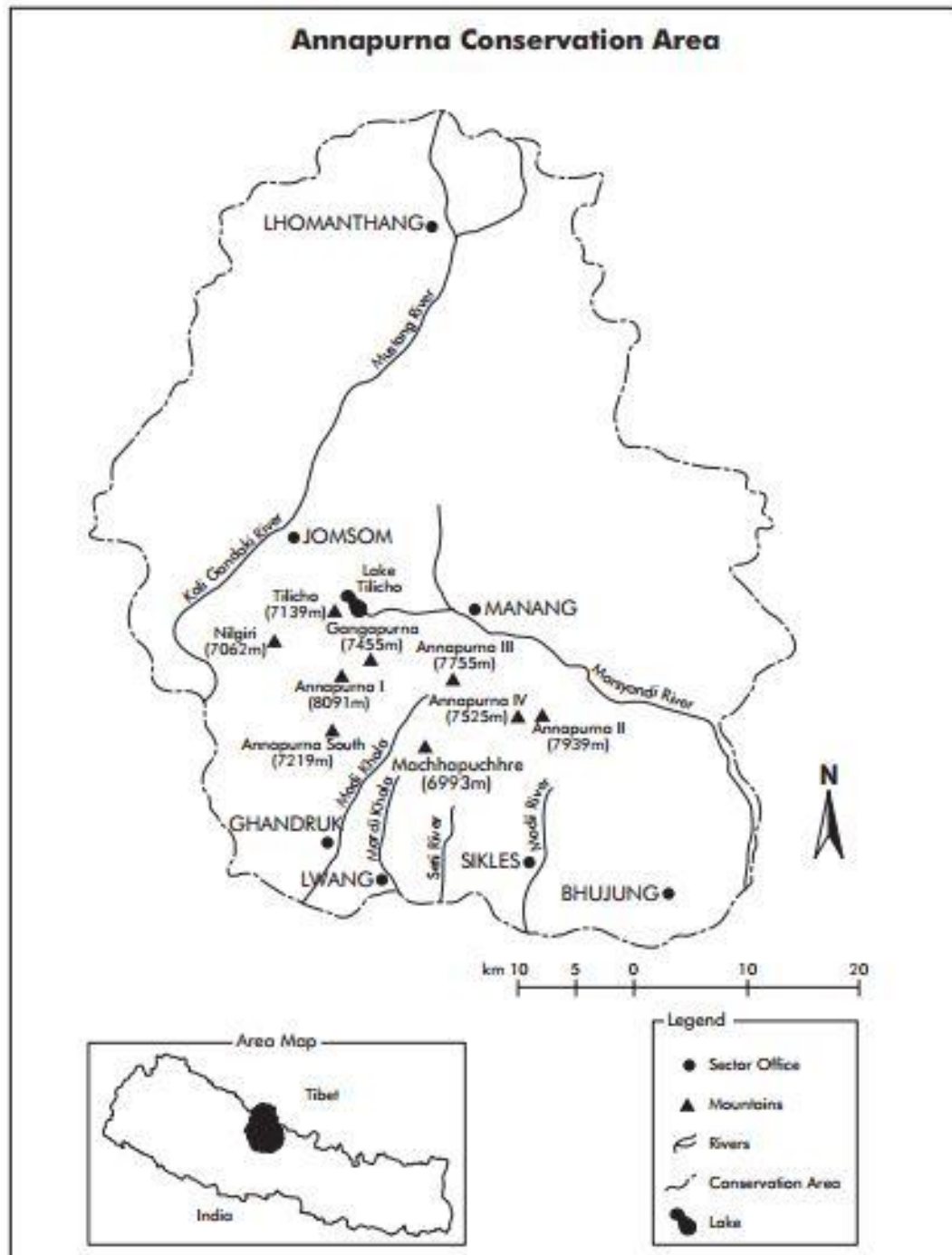


Figure 1. Map of Ghandruk and Annapurna Conservation Area (ACAP 1994)

Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) covers an area of 7,269 square kilometers. The natural and cultural characteristics of the region have made it the most popular trekking destination area of Nepal. This project has been undertaken by National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC). The main goal of ACAP is to achieve sustained balance between nature conservation and socio-economic improvement in the ACA. The main objectives of ACAP are to conserve the natural resources of the ACA, to develop the socio-economic condition of the villagers and to develop the tourism of the area in a way that can bring minimum negative impact on the natural, socio-cultural and economic environments (NTNC 2013.) The first trekkers came to Annapurna area in 1957. The natural and cultural diversity of the area (Figure 1) has made the destination very popular and best in Nepal drawing 60 percent of the country's total trekkers (Forestry Nepal 2013).

Ghandruk lies to the north of the popular tourism destination Pokhara in a distance of 55 km. The total area of Ghandruk is 296.50 sq. km. and is fully filled by diversity. 22.50 percent is covered by forest, 18.50 percent is covered by Himalaya, 5.60 percent is covered by rocks, bare land and hills, 0.80 percent is covered by infertile land, 0.50 percent is covered by residential area and rest of the area 52.10 percent is covered by agricultural land (Gurung 2012). Ghandruk is surrounded by hills full of rhododendron flowers on one side and breathtaking scenery of mountains on the other. The rhododendron forest located between Ghandruk and Ghorepani is considered as one of the world's largest (Ghandruk 2013). The mountainous region was covered by sub-tropical forest in the past and it is believed that the Gurung people migrated there because they were attracted by the forests. The upper grassland is used for sheep herding. (Stevens 1988 cited in Gurung 2004, 37.) There are few families who still have a large sheep herds and the majority of villagers are farmers. The lower elevation areas located near the rivers are used for rice farming and the higher elevation areas are used for cultivating millet, corn, potatoes, and garlic (See Fig. 2 below) (Gurung 2004, 37).

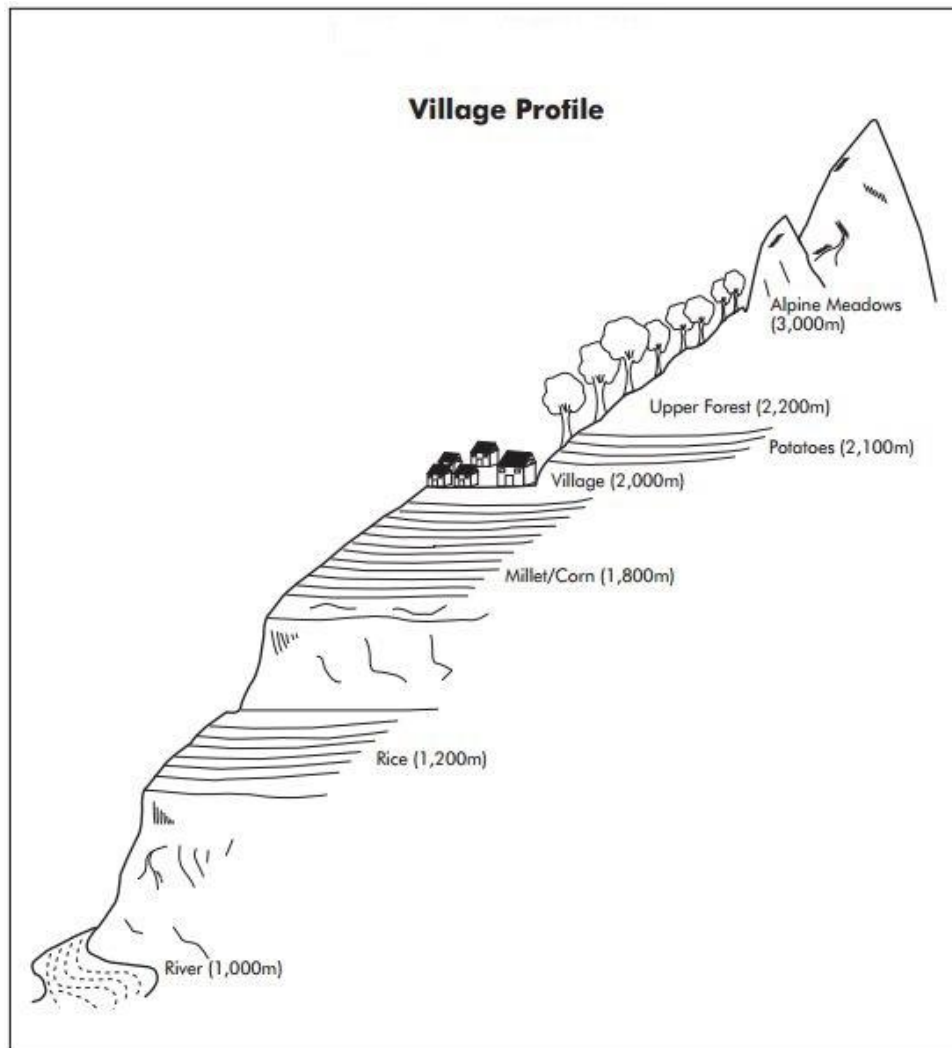


Figure 2. Transect of Ghandruk (Gurung 2004)

Ghandruk has 1,102 houses but the huge migration has caused those houses to be empty with the population of 4,265 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012, 63). The majority of people living in Ghandruk are Gurungs with 55.9 percent. The main occupations of people of Ghandruk are agriculture, animal husbandry and tourism. Beside those the youth of Ghandruk serves in Indian and British armies. The village is a residence of Gurungs who are known as Gurkhas (Nepalese serving in Indian or British army). During the Second World War Gurkhas have made a history of glory where four Gurung men were awarded a Victoria Cross (highest military medal given for bravery to members of the defence force of commonwealth countries and former British Empire territories). The heroic history of Gurung men has created a belief in the village that there is nothing better than joining army and that is the best way to test the man's courage. Other occupation for Gurung men is not equally respected. Meanwhile, the retired headmaster of Ghandruk high

school shares about how the villagers called him the daughter of the family when he decided to become a teacher instead of joining army. (Gurung 2004, 41.)

Ghandruk has a rich and well known culture and tradition. The deep rooted culture of Ghandruk is pure and native. They have their own dialect and tradition which is genuine. It is said that even other Gurung community in other parts of Nepal doesn't use the dialect like them. Ghandruke (people of Ghandruk) culture has its own value and belief that has given a reflection by the broad variety of songs, dances and festivals celebrated all year round. Their own ritual is performed during birth, marriage ceremony and death (Gurung 2013a). The people of Ghandruk have a smiling face, soft voice, respectful behavior and unique lifestyles. The visitors are impressed by their positive attitudes. Ghandruk has been known as a favorite destination not only for its attractive natural beauty but also because of the hospitable people (Guragain 2008). A visitor can enjoy picturesque view of some of the highest mountain of the world from Ghandruk. As per recommended by the travel writers and media persons, the best time to visit Ghandruk are spring (Feb-April) and autumn (Sep- Nov) (Barakoti 2013).

3.2 Tourism in Ghandruk

From 1975 to 1985, hundreds of groups of trekkers and mountain climbers came through the way to Ghandruk for sightseeing and mountain climbing together with their guides and porters. There were no lodges, hotels or homestays in Ghandruk during that time. The tourist and expedition teams used to sleep in tents in an empty land. The group used to purchase the food items and firewood from the villagers. They used to set up a camp fire in the evening and participate in the cultural programs performed by villagers. The villagers used to raise fund for the school by showing cultural dances. After sometime there was an arrival of many individual tourists. The Sherpas (an ethnic group of mountainous region of Nepal considered to be very brave and strong) and guides encouraged the people of Ghandruk to establish lodges and they also taught villagers the way to cook foods for foreigners. In 1976 the first lodge was opened with 10 beds named Annapurna lodge by local

entrepreneur Sankar Man Gurung who was also a teacher of Ghandruk School. (Gurung 2013a.)

Ghandruk lies on the Annapurna trekking trail. According to a survey by Modern Maturity (USA), Annapurna is recognized as one of the world's tenth best trekking trail (Eco walk 2013). The Annapurna region has been a unique place in the world because of various characteristics. The region contains the world's deepest river gorge Kali Gandaki Gorge, the world's largest rhododendron forest in Ghorepani, and the fresh water lake Tilicho situated in the world's highest altitude. The area is rich in terms of cultural diversity, biodiversity and a house for 1,226 species of flowering plant, 102 mammals, 474 birds, 39 reptiles, and 22 amphibians (NTNC 2013.) A magnificent view of three peaks over 8,000 meters can be seen from this trail (Eco walk 2013). Thus, this has become one of the best trekking part and the pleasurable tourist destination. Moreover, this is the most important and popular route for all the Annapurna travelers, mountaineers who choose their destination through this exciting route. It is considered the way from Ghandruk is the easiest and fastest way to reach Annapurna and Machhapuchre base camp. The mountain views of Annapurna and Machhapuchre can be seen clearly from this village (Ghandruk 2013). The basic route ascends from the Modi Khola, a river crossing the suspension bridge at Birethanti. It lies on the eastern side of the village. It is then followed by beautiful trace to forest and hill village. It presents a unique opportunity of median beauty and natural significance. It is said that the visit to Nepal will be incomplete without the visit of Ghandruk (Barakoti 2013). Ghandruk has attracted many national and international tourists. Among the tourists who visits Pokhara (the nearest city of Ghandruk), 60-70 percent go trekking to Annapurna area. The report says that 70,000 foreigners go trekking to Annapurna area every year but there is no data how many Nepalis go trekking in this area (Sharma 2011).

Except the nature, people visit Ghandruk to see the art and culture. Most of the visitors are there to spend holidays and some Nepalese couple for honeymoon (Sharma 2011). The houses are made of stones, muds and the roofs are made up of thin sliced stones. Ghandruk has a peaceful environment and the streets are stone paved beautifully. People have taken care to maintain the cleanliness of the village area and trekking trails. The

effort of local groups, tourists, ACAP and other participants has played a vital role to preserve the natural beauty of the region.

Ghandruk is one of the far western regions of Nepal but is still an important route of tourism. As of 2012 fiscal year, 7.4 percent of GDP was contributed in Nepal by travel and tourism (WTTC 2013, 1). Tourism in Nepalese rural Himalayan villages has been a mileage to the local economy. It is possible that there may not be better example of locally controlled tourism in the country rather than in the Everest and Annapurna regions. The majority of restaurant and lodge owners, guides, porters, staffs are from the local villages (Nepal 2002, 42).

The majority of the people of Ghandruk were serving in military and agriculture and it was the main occupation in the past. . Now-a-days tourism industry is growing in Ghandruk and it has been the source of income for the inhabitants. The local people are getting employment as guides and potters. Because of tourism the occupation of people has been changed from agriculture or military to tourism entrepreneur. The employment opportunity can be found in the village by which the local people don't need to migrate to bigger cities or other countries to work. The local economy of the village and life standard of people has been changed by the foreign exchange earnings. In other hand, when the local people are attracted towards tourism the people don't want to work in agriculture as a result the fertile land turned to barren.

Before the place was introduced to the tourists, its culture was virgin and unspoiled. The people of Ghandruk had attraction, respect and positive attitude. After the development of tourism, both positive and negative effects were seen in the society. For example, a positive impact was seen in the living standards of the local people. They got a chance to establish an income generating tourism business companies such as guest houses, lodges and coffee houses. (Gurung 2013a).

Beside the positive impacts, tourism has also created a gap between rich and poor people in Ghandruk bringing a social partition. The development of tourism has banned access to previously accessible natural resources for the poorer people of the society (Nepal 2002, 42). The negative impact and

influence of tourism was directly seen among the young generation of Ghandruk in terms of clothing, food, language, songs and dances. Instead of wearing the traditional local Gurung dresses they copied foreign culture and dressed in modern western style clothes. The traditional dances and songs were endangered and English, Nepali modern songs and dances were in practice (Gurung 2013b).

Similarly, the growth of tourism has also caused the problem of rubbish such as plastic, bottles were normally found in the trekking trails. To fulfill the demand of tourists, new lodges were constructed which affected the architecture of Ghandruk and the ancient houses turned into modern houses. Ghandruk suffered from a bad situation in terms of sustainability in tourism so an ecologically sustainable tourism was introduced in 1986 together with people of Ghandruk and ACAP. The aim of the project was to save nature and improve the local standards of living by managing the tourism development. To save firewood, water heater and bio-gas were developed and installed for heating and cooking purpose in the hotels of Ghandruk. Now there is a forest management and conservation committee guided by ACAP which was formed to conserve the forest and wildlife of Ghandruk. The ACAP and lodge management committee strongly encourage lodge owners to use the local product and local food instead of importing them from cities. This effort has benefited large number of local farmers who produce and sell local products to lodge owners and improve their living standard. Now, there is women interest group formed in the village in order to encourage young people to protect and continue their ancient tradition and local culture for the future generation. (Gurung 2013b.)

3.3 Special Attraction of Ghandruk

The unique culture with friendly people, the sceneries of the Himalayas, natural landscapes, sunrise view, monasteries are the main attractions of Ghandruk. Beside the spectacular views of mountains like Annapurna III (7555m), Gangapurna (7455m), Annapurna south (7219m), Machhapuchre (6993m) and Hiunchuli (6441m) (Pictures of Nepal 2013), there are also some special attractions of Ghandruk.

One of the special attractions of Ghandruk is traditional old Gurung museum (See Fig. 3 below) that presents the art, culture and tradition. The museum has presented traditional dresses, ornaments, household items and pictures of ancestors (Guragain 2008). Likewise, the traditional styles of dresses used by Gurungs in the past, the culture, history, and the weapons used by Gurkhas (Nepalese as a part of an Indian or British army) can be found in the museum. Moreover, the culture and tradition of Gurung community is demonstrated in the museum. It was opened by Yuktaman Gurung with the help of ACAP in 1998. According the owner of museum, the collection of every item from different sources were his private investment. (Thapa 2010.)



Figure 3. Old Gurung Museum, Ghandruk (Source of picture: Bin 2013)

Another attraction of Ghandruk is the Traditional Costumes and Jewellery Center. The visitor can dress up in a traditional Gurung style in Ghandruk (See Fig. 4 below). Harimaya Gurung, a local inhabitant of Ghandruk is the owner of this center. As per owner, Gurung costumes and jewellerys are hired for photography. The visitors enjoy the dress up in the remembrance of traditional Gurung women. According to the owner, she came up with this idea after her visit to similar destination places. She saw people dressing in local costume for taking photograph. That impressed her for similar business in Ghandruk. As a result, the visitor can collect their memories back home. Likewise, the effort of Ms Gurung is to preserve Gurung art and culture for the future generation. The traditionally dressed photographs are used in

social media like facebook and twitter that urges their friends to visit Ghandruk. This method can be the easiest and cheapest way of advertising Ghandruk.



Figure 4. Visitor Dressed in Gurung Dress at Traditional Costume and Jewellery Center, Ghandruk (author's own photo).

4 RURAL TOURISM

4.1 Defining Rural Tourism

Rural area can be an attractive choice of destination for many visitors. Rural areas can be well known for the relationship between tourism and the environment (Page–Connell 2006, 424). Rural tourism can be a major catalyst to diversify the rural economy by creating opportunities for new business enterprises. It can create opportunities for employment especially for women and youths. The synergies between agriculture and tourism can be developed through rural tourism. It can be a good contributor for preserving and conserving natural as well as cultural heritages. It creates a rural environment for the visitor that offers a combination of natural, cultural and human experiences which have a typically rural character. The visitors can get the authentic and traditional experiences which are the extract of rural life. It includes the expansion of activities and services that showcase rural life, art culture and heritage organised by rural people. Rural tourism is based on sustainability and becoming a wider concept and that the needs and expectations of domestic and international demand are becoming ever more sophisticated. It has great potential because of its wide variety of natural, cultural and special interest activities. (UNWTO 2012, 2–4.)

The definition of rural tourism has been given in many ways with different explanations and controversies. Despite the truth that most of the theoreticians in the field of tourism associate rural tourism with holidays in the countryside, there are series of inconsistencies when trying to limit this type of tourism. Glyptis 1991 cited in Page–Connell 2006, 425) defined rural tourism as anything non-urban, land beyond the urban age. However, Page–Connell (2006, 425) thinks that this definition received a controversy because it defines that rurality has very few special features. The easiest definition of rural tourism is given by H. Grolleau, rural tourism is a concept that includes all tourism activities taking place in rural areas (Barbu 2013, 126). Rural tourism has a multidimensional concept so there are various definitions about rural tourism. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have defined rural tourism as a tourism that takes place in countryside (Kiper–Ozdemir 2012, 126). A broader tradition describes rural

tourism as a series of activities, services, accommodations offered by farmers and inhabitants of rural community to attract visitors to their area that creates additional revenues for their business (Darau et al. 2010, 39). The term of rural tourism has different meanings depending on the national boundary (Bran–Marin–Simion 1997 cited in Darau et al. 2010, 39). In Finland, rural tourism generally means the rental of cabins or supplying service in the rural environment like food and transportation. In Slovenia the most important form of rural tourism is farm based tourism. The visitors either lives with the family of farmers or in guest houses during their visit. In Greece, accommodation in traditionally furnished rooms with a traditional breakfast usually made with home-made products is called rural tourism (Darau et al. 2010, 39–40).

In the past, rural tourism was chosen only by adults in search of peace and rest away from crowd of the city but today this type of tourism has attracted more young people and families who show a greater sentimentality to the environment and nature (Lagravinese 2013, 614). Rural tourism is taken as an alternative option to the mass tourism and some authors has defined it as 'a spiritual experience' (Sharpely–Jepson 2011 cited in Lagravinese 2013) that not only assign rest but also recreates the spirit by the rediscovery of silence, beauty of nature and ancient traditions (Lagravinese 2013, 615).

To become successful, rural tourism requires various factors like other economic development policies. Tourism development factor involves 1) attractions: both natural and man-made structures attached to the community; 2) promotion: marketing of the area and its visitor attraction to the potential visitors; 3) tourism infrastructures: access facilities such as roads, airports, trains and buses, electricity and water services, parking, signs and recreation facilities; 4) services: restaurants, lodging, different types of businesses that takes care of the needs of tourist; 5) hospitality: behavior shown to the visitors by residents and employees of tourism sector (Gunn 1988 cited in Wilson et al. 2001, 133).

The series of rural tourism projects should be able to add diversity and value to the visitor's experience by which the visitors can be satisfied and can serve them to longer stays, increase their spending limit and repeat their

visits (Briedenhann–Wickens 2004, 192). The different forms of rural tourism have been developed depending upon the region. In the rural parts of Germany and Austria farm based holidays are important, but farm based holidays are significantly lower in the rural part of United States and Canada. Rural tourism is a complicated multilateral activity which is not only a farm-based tourism. Farm-based holidays is included in rural tourism but also includes special interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and ethic tourism in some areas. (OECD 1994, 8–9.) Rural tourism is performed in rural environment using local tourism resources (natural, cultural and human) and different accommodation spaces such as inns and rural hotels, shelters, holiday villages etc. Rural tourism includes all forms of tourism that are experienced in rural area such as outdoor activities, knowledge tourism, tourism for discovering natural environment like flora and fauna, understanding local culture, gastronomic tourism etc. (Darau et al. 2010, 41.)

From the definitions above, it is mentioned that rural tourism can be a major contributor for the preservation of nature and culture in the region. The potential visitors of Ghandruk might be the person seeking for authentic and rural experiences. The reason for choosing the above definitions is because Ghandruk is a rural tourism destination. If rural tourism is promoted in Ghandruk, then the nature and culture can be saved and the local resources can be used as a foreign income earner.

4.2 Rural Tourism in Nepal

Nepal as an agricultural country the rural environment is always taken as an important part economically, socially and culturally. The country is well known as a backpacking and adventure destination. In the past, Nepal was centralized only on the trekking routes and mountain but now rural or village tourism has been introduced. Nepal is a country of villages. There are 3915 VDCs (Village Development Committee) and 32,000 villages (Pradhan 2011) where 82.93 percent (Darnal 2013) of people lives. In 1980s a chairman of Kathmandu Research Center Dr. Surendra Bikram Pradhanang developed a concept of village tourism for promotion in Nepal. Village tourism (rural

tourism) was included in the First Tourism Policy of Nepal (1995) by the Government of Nepal. It was proposed and advocated by Dr. Pradhanang in 1994-1995. Now the idea of Dr. Pradhanang is being one of the most popular in Nepal and across the globe. His mission in life is to develop the village of Nepal through village tourism industry. Dr. Pradhanang thinks that village tourism will help Nepalese people to step out of poverty. (Pradhan 2011.) Nepal Village Resorts was responsible to market and manage the programs for the village tourism and was launched in a village named Sirubari in 1997 (Nepal Village Resorts 2012). Local community members were involved in the planning stages and other similar villages joined the program but after sometime unfortunately the country was setback due to the outbreak of civil war. The tourism industry was hampered very badly at the time of insurgency and the number of arrivals in the international tourist declined. In 2006 a peace treaty was signed between the Government of Nepal and the rebel group Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) which brought stability to Nepal and rural tourism started to grow (Simm 2013). Because of the scenic natural beauties, the market of rural tourism in Nepal is very high. For this reason there are many travel and tour companies which offer to stay for a vacation in rural villages.

Therefore, the role of tourism has played a vital role in the development of Nepali villages. When the jobs are created in the villages, rural tourism helps to reduce the need for young generation to migrate in bigger cities to seek for an employment. The money spent by the national and international visitors goes directly to the local community. Though all the villagers don't take part in tourism business they can sell handicrafts, they can work as guides or porters and they can have cultural shows which benefits them. (Simm 2013).

5 EXPERIENCE PYRAMID

5.1 Defining Experience Pyramid

Tourists are the main actors in the tourism industry who travel and visit the new destination in order to fulfill their purposes. The main driving force that makes tourists to go from their home to new destination is the purpose of visit or the motivation for travel. The visitors are looking for a type of destination where they can get what they want (Acharya 2005, 193–206). People pay for experiences which are memorable and long lasting that makes impression forever (Pine–Gilmore 1999).

In order to ensure quality experience, tourism companies need to have qualified persons to be a successful tourism service providers. The tourism services need to be improved by using latest technologies so that they can provide high quality of customer services. It is important to create a versatile and customized product which is difficult to produce. The value of product depends upon the experience that customers gets out of their money (Tarssanen 2009, 17–18). Visitors are in search of meaningful experience. Thus, today's biggest challenge for the destination is to satisfy the visitors with meaningful experiences.

Experience Pyramid is one of the tools which helps in analyzing and understanding the experience content of the product of tourism. The framework of experience production, the Experience Pyramid was developed by Tarssanen and Kylänen (2006) in the Lapland Centre of Expertise for the Experience industry. By this model of framework, service provider can analyze the product and find ways to develop it and design a product that provides customer a true meaningful experience. The framework can be used as a model for experience production in which both the service provider and customer are involved in creating experience (Tarssanen–Kylänen 2006). A meaningful experience is positive and unforgettable emotional experience which can lead to a personal change. The Experience Pyramid (See Fig. 5) shows the meaning of meaningful experience that differs from regular experience and essential elements for a tourism product that provides a meaningful experience to the customer. The base of experience pyramid indicates the elements of products that creates an experience while the

height of pyramid indicates the levels of experience. To be an experience product it must contain individuality, authenticity, story, multi-sensory perception, contrast and interaction. (Tarssanen 2009, 10–11.)

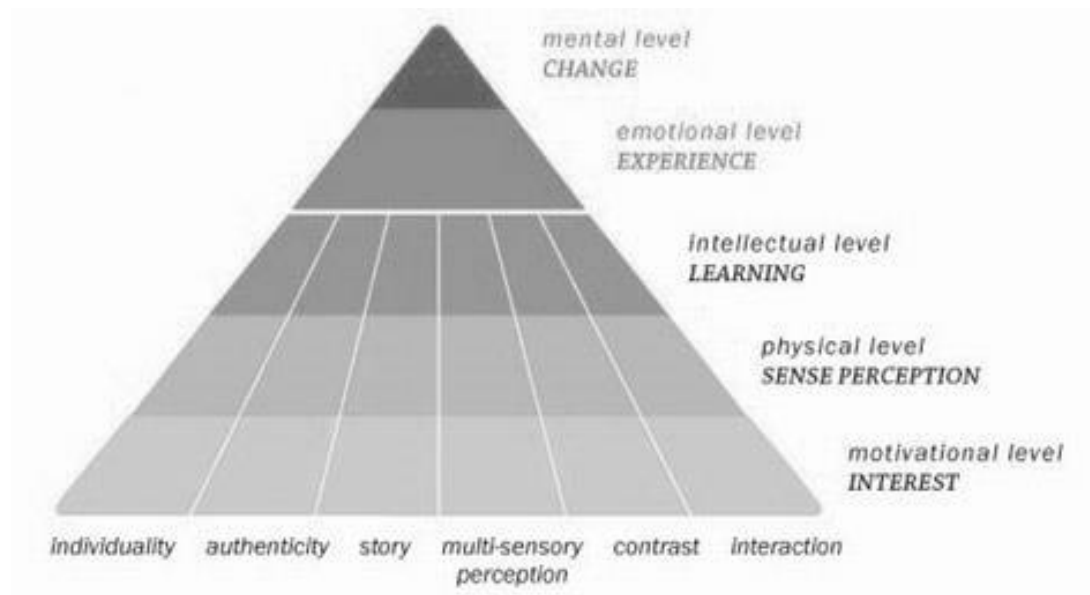


Figure 5. Experience Pyramid (Tarssanen 2009, 11)

The experience pyramid model analyses the experience product from two perspectives: level of the products specific components and level of customer's own experience. The experience differs from person to person so it is not possible to guarantee a meaningful experience. The concept of the model is to include all the elements in a product by which it may increase the possibility of customers to have an meaningful experience. (Tarssanen 2009, 11–12.)

5.2 Elements of Meaningful Experiences

Individuality indicates about how unique the product is and the same or similar type of product is not available elsewhere. Individuality means customers orientation, flexibility and potential to customize the product according to the choices and needs of customer. Individuality makes the product unique, special and tailored to the client. (Tarssanen 2009, 12.)

Authenticity is the credibility of the product. When the customer considers the product as credible and genuine then it is authentic. Authenticity reflects the culture of the region. The meaning of authenticity depends upon the

individual view so the authenticity is always determined by the customer. (Tarssanen 2009, 12–13.)

Story is closely connected to the authenticity of the product. A credible and authentic story adds social significance and content to the product, giving the customer a good reason to experience it. The use of story justifies what is done and in which order. Story is one of main reason that customer buy the product. Similarly, story is one of the important aspect of a good experience product. (Tarssanen–Kylänen 2006, 144–145.)

Multi-sensory perception means that all sensory perceptions like seeing, hearing, smelling and touching are carefully designed to strengthen the chosen theme. When as many as senses are used there will be a more chance that the experience will touch the customer and make the permanent impression on their future memory. (Tarssanen–Kylänen 2006, 145.)

Contrast is the difference from the perspectives of customer. The product should be new to the customer. The customer has to experience something new, exotic and out of ordinary. When producing a contrast into the product, the nationality and culture of the customer should be taken into account. It may be possible that it may be unique for one person but used to for another person depending upon the cultural background, traditions and lifestyle. (Tarssanen–Kylänen 2006, 145–146.)

Interaction means the communication between the service provider and customer as well as between the products and the producers. Experiencing something together with others as a part of group, family gives a better feeling. This is the reason that the customers who are taking part in excursion or different group activities should be introduced to each other. (Tarssanen–Kylänen 2006, 146–147.)

5.3 Customers Level of Experience

On the motivation level the interest of customer is stimulated. In this stage as many as possible elements of meaningful experiences should be fulfilled. The marketing segment of the product should be personal, genuine, multi-sensory, interactive, and contrast. (Tarssanen 2009, 15.)

The product is experienced through senses in the physical level. By using the physical senses, the customer realize where they are, what they are doing and what is happening. A good product gives a pleasant and safe experience. It is the level of receiving, experiencing, feeling the positive service. (Tarssanen 2009, 15.)

On intellectual level the customer makes the decision whether they are satisfied with the product or not (Tarssanen 2009, 15, according to La-Salle & Britton 2003, 9). A quality product gives the customer a chance to learn something new either knowingly or unknowingly (Tarssanen–Kylänen 2006, 148).

On emotional level the experience is taken that depends upon the basic elements of the product. When the basic elements are taken as a success and if the physical and rational level works well it is possible that the customer may experience excitement, joy, pleasure for learning something new that they have never experienced before. This kind of emotional reactions may be difficult to predict or control. (Tarssanen–Kylänen 2006, 149.)

The final level is the mental level. In this level if the customer have a positive experience it may lead to an experience of personal change. The experience may convert into permanent change in customer's physical being, mental situation and lifestyle. The customer may find something new and advance in his mood and may look at the world in different way. The meaningful experience can provide a new way of thinking or discover new resources within oneself. (Tarssanen–Kylänen 2006, 149.)

6 RESEARCH METHOD

6.1 Purpose

The aim of the study is to explore the visitors' experience about Ghandruk. The experience is explored on two aspects as i) about the destination as a product and ii) about the meaningful experiences at personal level. In order to meet the objectives, the two research questions are prepared and they are:

1. What was the visitors' experience about Ghandruk as a destination product?
2. What was the visitors' personal experience about Ghandruk?

6.2 Data Collection

This study uses quantitative research method. A questionnaire was structured into three sections: Part A: background information; Part B: questions for experience evaluation; and Part C: general questions (See Appendix 1). The questions in the questionnaire contained rating options, multiple choice questions as well as open ended questions. Since the survey was aimed at web technology, mostly the questions were close ended and multiple choice. It helps in gathering maximum amount of information in a short period of time. After a series of discussions with the thesis supervisor, the final survey questions were prepared.

The questionnaire was prepared using webropol. The collection of data was done by using a web based survey model. The main advantages of a web-based survey are low cost and quick distribution. The web-based survey provided scope for verification and storage of the responses of survey automatically by using database technology and HTML (hypertext markup language) user interface (Andrews–Nonnecke–Peace 2003, 2).

The web-based survey was distributed using the social media. The social media is one of the fastest and easiest ways to connect with the visitors of Ghandruk. The page about Ghandruk in facebook helped in finding the visitors who had been there. The facebook profile who liked the page and had checked in Ghandruk were identified as potential respondents for this study. It was found from the facebook page that there were thousands of

visitors (17,759 as of 22 January 2014) who have already been to Ghandruk (See Appendix 2). The survey link including the cover letter (see Appendix 4) was sent to randomly selected visitors.

Similarly, TripAdvisor is a social media which provides information and reviews of the travellers to others. The webpage of Ghandruk in TripAdvisor showed the reviews on hotels located in Ghandruk. The travellers who made a review were selected randomly as potential respondents and an email was sent with the cover letter and survey link. Likewise, national and international friends and their friends and relatives who had been to Ghandruk were also identified as potential respondents and were asked to forward the survey questionnaire.

The survey questionnaire was distributed from the middle of November 2013 to middle of January 2014. The estimated time taken to complete one survey was approximately 10 to 15 minutes. The questionnaire was sent to around four hundred visitors. Among them it was seen that the survey link was visited by one hundred sixty four recipients where 77 completed the survey. Initially it was targeted that respondents of the questionnaire would be at least one hundred. But the time limit did not allow to meet the targeted number of respondents. The responses of the respondents in some cases was interesting. They were interested in the survey and they expressed through facebook message that they were happy enough to be a participant of the survey.

6.3 Limitations and Challenges

There are a number of important limitations that need to be considered in this study. First, the survey respondents were only the users of social media. Because of the time limit for this thesis project, social media was chosen to find the visitors. Consequences for this limit could be that the internet user visitors' perception might be different from others. Second, the survey was web-based. The respondents completed the survey when they were back to their home. The opinions and real feelings of the visitors when they were in Ghandruk could fade away with the time. Third, the low number of responses did not meet the set target. There were no responses from the visitors who had a busy schedule. Fourth, the survey questions were prepared in English

language and it was not the native language of the researcher nor that of most of the respondents, though there were some native English speaking respondents. The survey would have been more effective if it had been done at the destination. A face to face survey is easier for the respondent to query about questions that were unclear.

6.4 Validity and Reliability

Validity is the ability of the technique to measure what it is intended to measure (Weiler–Ham 2010, 193). According to Saunders–Lewis–Thornhill (2009), there are two types of validity: external and internal. External validity is about generalization and internal validity ensures that a researcher's research design closely follows the principle of cause and effect (Khalid–Kumar 2012, 23).

The questionnaire was designed only in English language that may not be understandable for all the respondents. Yet different types of methods were taken into consideration in order to assure the validity of the study like i) Survey questionnaire was prepared based on the experience pyramid, ii) data was collected in three months period without any rush, and iii) all the questions of the survey were directly related to the aim of this study. Before the survey, the questionnaire was examined by the supervisor in order to assure that the questions are correctly prepared.

Reliability is the ability of the technique to generate reliable results across time of researchers (Weiler–Ham 2010, 194). Reliability of a questionnaire refers to the ability of the questionnaire to collect data that generates consistent results. In order to assure reliability of a questionnaire, it is important that respondents should give almost same answers to the target statements. (Wong–Ong–Kuek 2012, 214.)

This study was performed to find out the level of visitors experience in Ghandruk. The responses were collected from the visitors after their visit which meant that the data gathered was a true result what visitor experienced and thus the reliability of the data collected can be assured. Moreover, this type of research was not performed before in the village so

there are no other examples. It is recommended to carry out another survey to gain more reliable findings.

6.5 Data Analysis

The data were collected and stored in webropol. The insufficient knowledge on the use of webropol made data analysis process difficult. So, the data from webropol were transferred to Microsoft Excel using the system that helps in this process. The exported data was checked several times.

For the data analysis according to nationality, it was found to be complicated because there were seventeen different nationalities so it was sorted out into two categories as native and international visitors. Likewise, there were four options for the question on frequency of visit and they were sorted out into two: first time visitors and repeating visitors. Similarly, the questions based on gender, age, nationality and frequency of visit from part A was compared with part B and the entry of data was made. Thus the data was processed and the graph was prepared through excel.

7 VISITORS EXPERIENCE IN GHANDRUK

7.1 Profile of Respondents

The total number of respondents who participated in the survey was 77. Of the 77 respondents, 53% were male and 47% were female. The largest age group was of 25-34 (58%) years old, followed by the age group of 15-24 (22%), 35-44 (12%), 55-64 (5%) and 45-54 (3%). 53% were international visitors and 47% were native visitors. 52% of the respondents were the first time visitors while 48% were repeated visitors. In terms of travelling partner, 53% of the respondents were travelling with friends, 18% in a group, 12% with spouse, 7% with couple, 5% with other, 4% with family and 1% alone. 42% travelled Ghandruk to enjoy nature and outdoors, 20% were just passing through on trekking, 17% to spend a vacation, 7% to learn about the culture, 5% others, 4% for general interest, 2% for study/research, 2% visiting friends and relatives and 1% for business purposes. The total number of respondents of this survey is denoted by n.

Table 3. Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Distribution of Answers	Characteristics	Distribution of Answers
Gender (n=77) Male Female	53% 47%	Visiting Partner (n=77) Friends Group Spouse Couple Family Alone Others	53% 18% 12% 7% 4% 1% 5%
Age (n=77) 15-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64	22% 58% 12% 3% 5%	Visiting Purpose (n=77) To enjoy nature and outdoors Just passing through on trekking To spend a vacation To learn about the culture General interest Study/Research Visiting friends and relatives Business Other	42% 20% 17% 7% 4% 2% 2% 1% 5%
Nationality (n=77) International Visitors Native Visitors	53% 47%		
Frequency of Visit (n=77) First time visitors Repeated visitors	52% 48%		

7.2 Experience of Visitors on Ghandruk as Product

The aim of this section is to analyze the level of satisfaction of the visitors about Ghandruk as a destination product. For this, the product components like individuality, authenticity, story, multi-sensory perception, contrast and interaction introduced by Kylänen and Tarssanen in the Experience Pyramid are discussed. A detailed overview for this operationalization with the variables used and what they measured can be found in Appendix 3. The level of satisfaction is measured from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Figure 6 below indicates the overall satisfaction of the visitors about the product. The average rating of each component was around 4 except in story. The higher level of satisfaction rate was 4.44 in multi-sensory perception whereas the lower level was 3.65 in story component. The satisfaction level in story is below the satisfaction level. This result reflects that visitors enjoyed natural views and therefore their rating on multi-sensory perception seems higher.

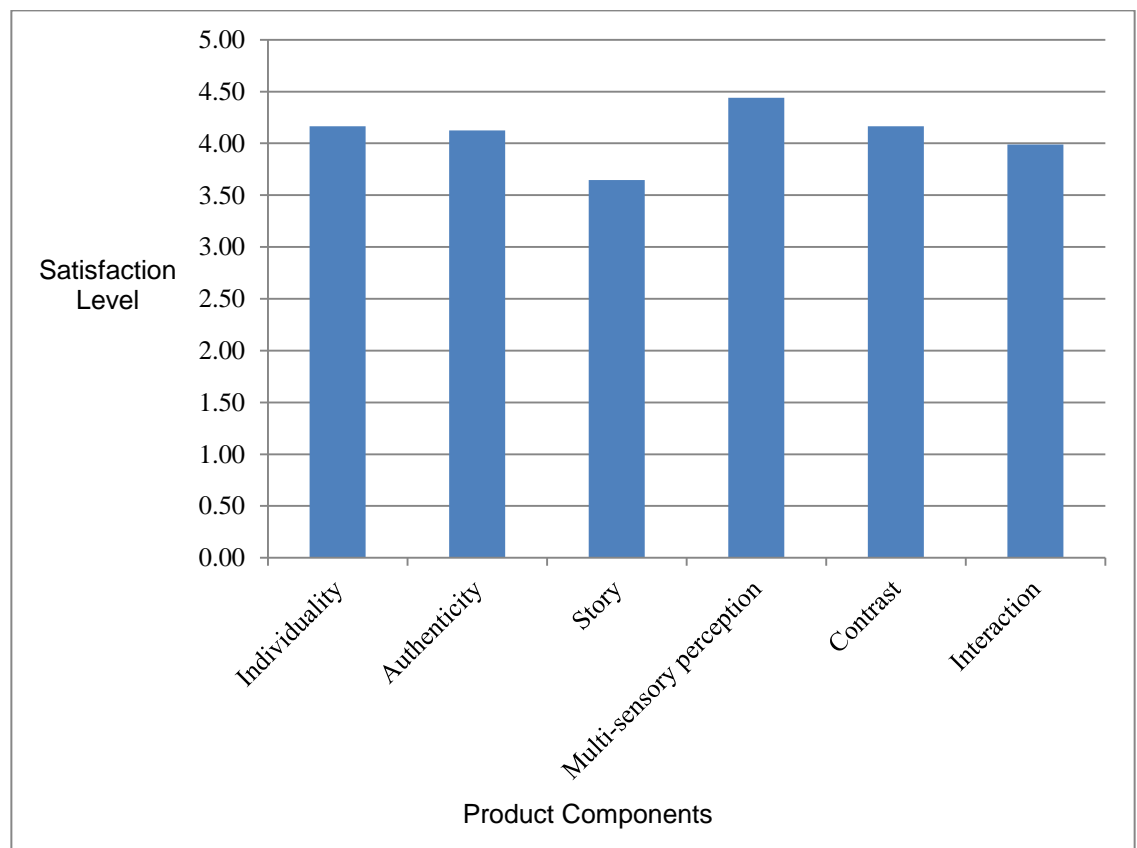


Figure 6. Overall Rating of Satisfaction Level on Product Component (n=77)

Likewise, it also reflects that the visitors did not find sufficient story about Ghandruk and as a result their satisfaction level on story is found to be lower. Beside story, it is found that other components of the product provided satisfaction to the visitors. However, the result in general indicates that the visitors had very good experience on destination as a product.

The above discussed overall rating is supported by the gender based rating. The rating of both male and female is presented in figure 7 below and it also indicates higher level of satisfaction on multi-sensory perception and lower level of satisfaction on story component.

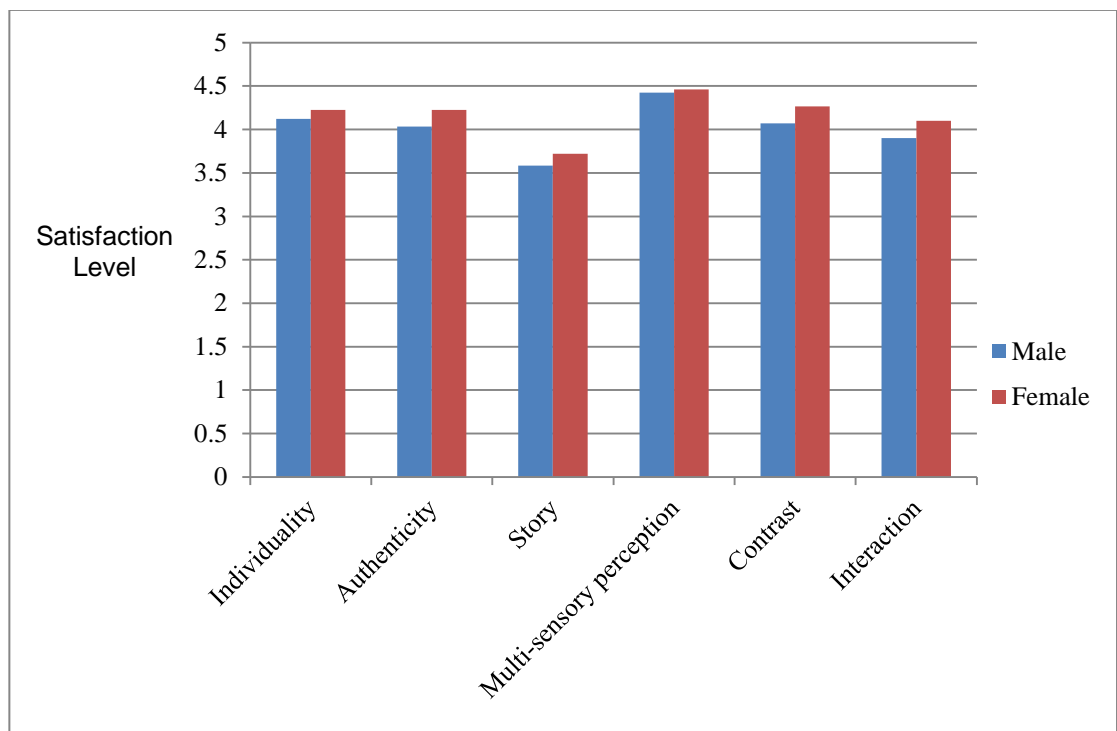


Figure 7. Satisfaction Level According to Gender (n=77)

Likewise, the similar result is found when the data was further analyzed using age group of the respondents (See Fig. 8 below). It is found that the respondent of age group 35-44 years old had higher level of satisfaction with in the multi-sensory perception whereas the age group 15-24 years old had lower level of satisfaction compared to other age groups. Likewise, age group 25-34 years old had higher satisfaction in story and age group 35-44 years old had lower level of satisfaction. In general, all the age group 15-24, 25-34 and 35-44 years old had higher level of satisfaction in multi-sensory perception. It is also found that the age group 15-24 had lower level of satisfaction on interaction.

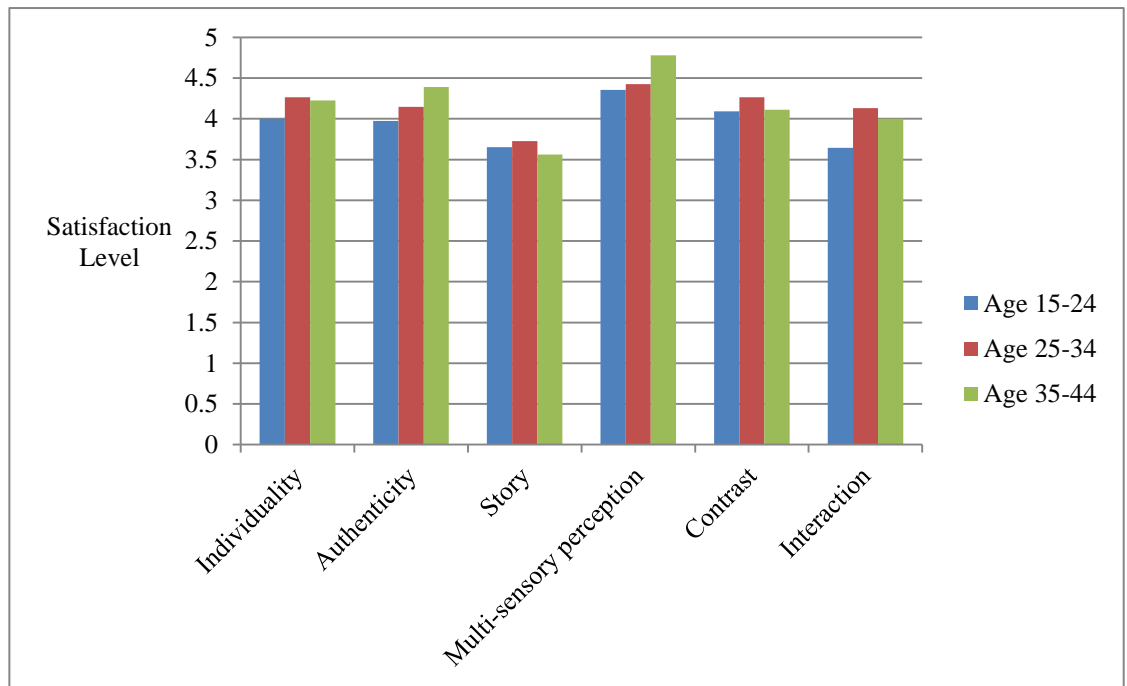


Figure 8. Satisfaction Level Based on Age Groups (n=71)

Likewise, the similar finding was discovered according to nationality as well. The visitors of the destination country were categorized as native visitors and other visitors were categorized as international visitors. It is represented by figure 9 below.

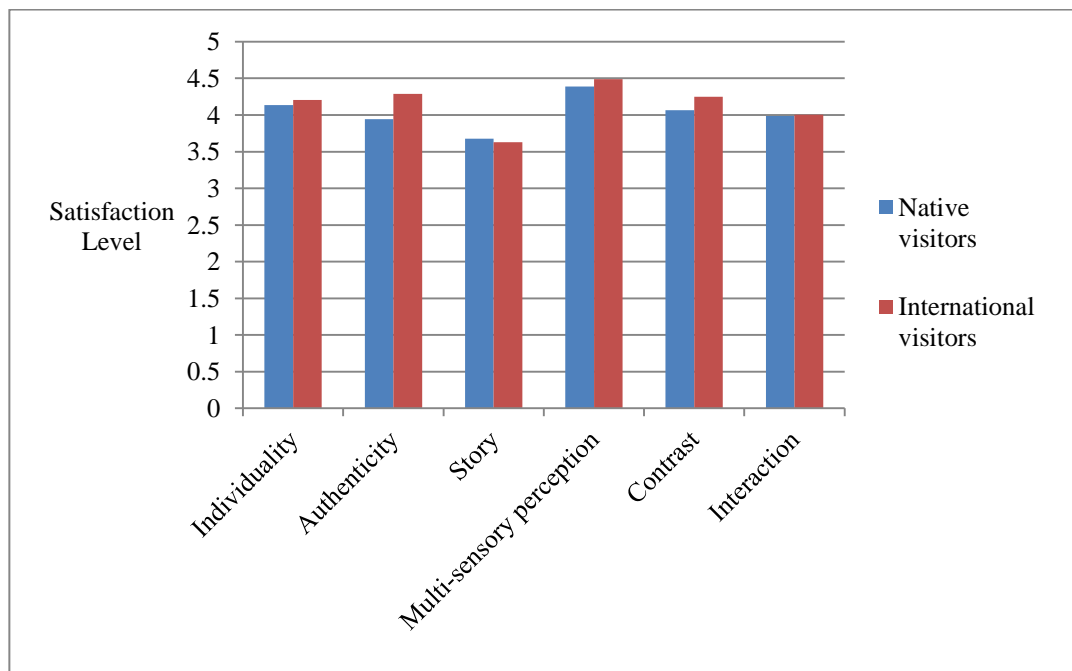


Figure 9. Satisfaction Level According to Nationality (n=77)

Furthermore, an effort is made to analyze the satisfaction level based on the frequency of visit. The visitors visiting for the first time were categorized as first time visitors while the visitors visiting for more than one time is categorized as repeating visitors. It is represented by figure 10 below.

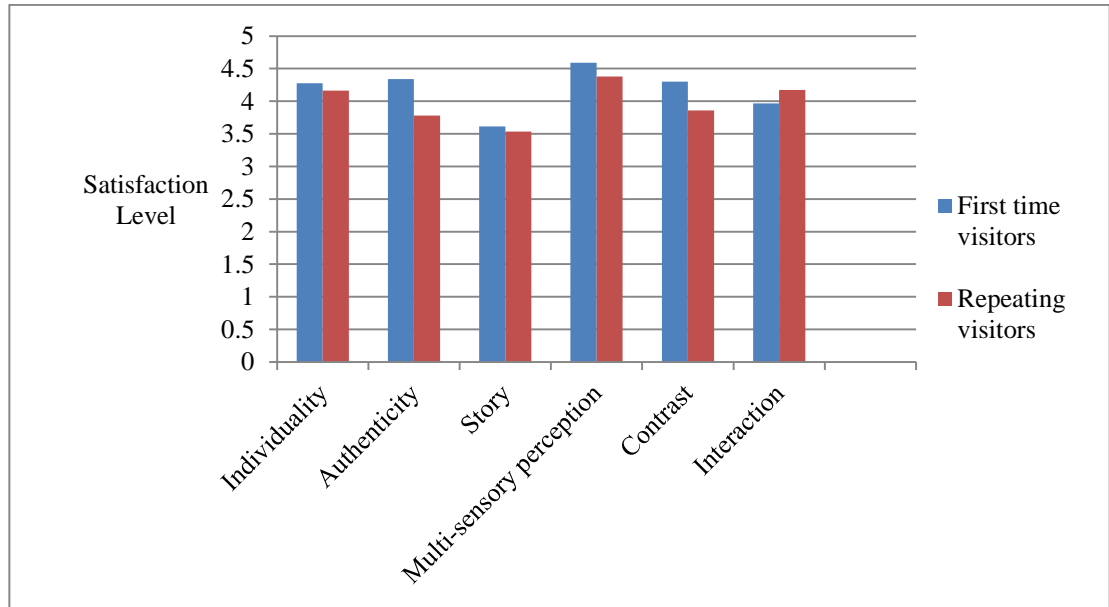


Figure 10. Satisfaction Level Based on Frequency of Visit (n=77)

Like in earlier findings, the satisfaction level of visitors having first time visit as well as repeated visit was higher in multi-sensory perception whereas lower in story component. The sharp variation is found in authenticity in which the first time visitors had comparatively higher satisfaction as compared to repeating visitors. Likewise, as compared to other components the trend is found different in interaction. The satisfaction level of repeating visitors in interaction is high as compared to first time visitors.

7.3 Personal Experience of Visitors About Ghandruk Visit

This section tries to analyze the satisfaction level on experience of the visitors of Ghandruk at personal level. For this, the personal experience components like motivational, physical, intellectual, emotional and mental level as introduced by Kylänen and Tarssanen in the Experience Pyramid are discussed. A detailed overview for this operationalization with the variables used and what they measured can be found in Appendix 3. The level of satisfaction is measured from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Among the five components of personal experiences, it was found that the visitors had higher level of satisfaction at physical level and lower level of satisfaction at emotional and mental level. The emotional and mental level had the rating which was slightly below the satisfaction level. The motivational level and intellectual level were found to be good. Therefore, in general it can be said that the satisfaction level on personal experiences was found to be good. The average rating was 4.24. It is represented by figure 11 below.

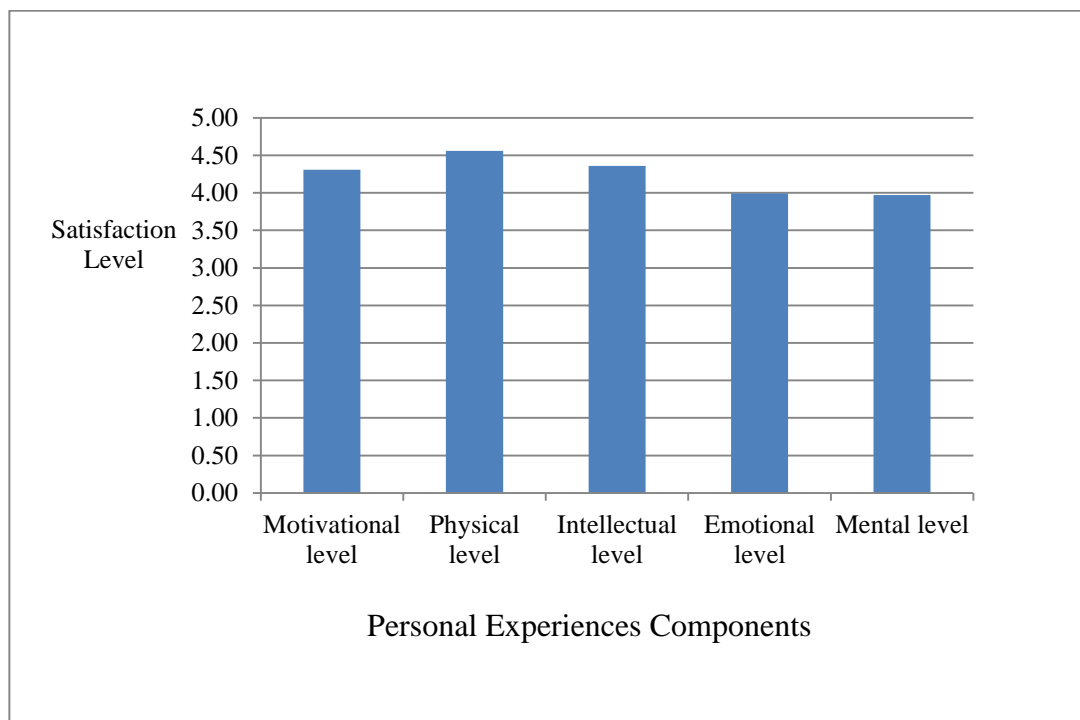


Figure 11. Overall Rating of Satisfaction Level on Components of Personal Experiences (n=77)

The personal experience is tried to explore based on gender perspective as well. In this regard, it was found that male and female both had higher level of satisfaction at physical level. The variation on satisfaction level among male and female was found minimum on physical and intellectual level whereas it was found sharp in motivational, emotional and mental level. Beside other components, male had higher satisfaction on physical level than females. Likewise, it is found that female were satisfied in all components but male were not satisfied on emotional and mental level. It is represented in figure 12 below.

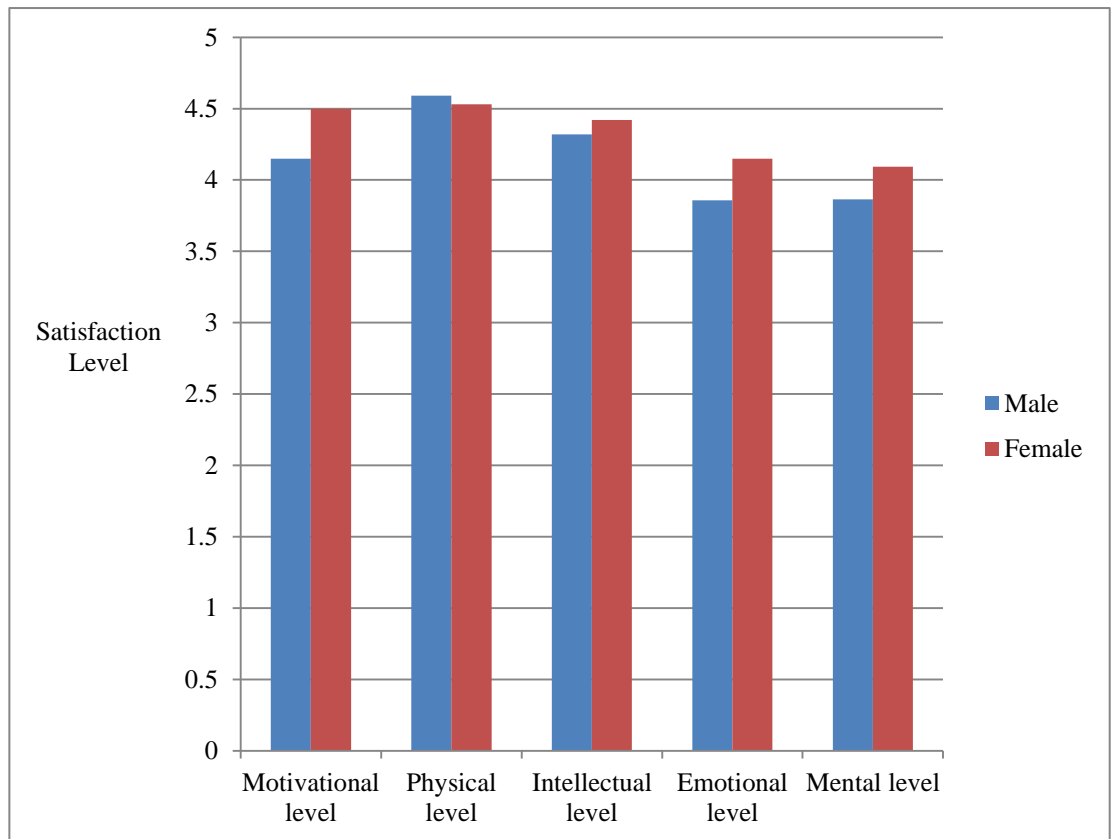


Figure 12. Satisfaction Level According to Gender (n=77)

Similarly, satisfaction of the personal components was explored using age groups of the respondents. For this purpose, the respondents were categorized into three groups as 15-24, 24-34 and 35-44. It is represented in figure 13 below. It was found that level of satisfaction on all components was found to be good for age group 15-24. The average rating for the age group 15-24 in all elements was 4.22. The age group of 25-34 had satisfactory personal experience on all components except on emotional level. Likewise, age group 35-44 had satisfaction on all components except on mental level. The age group 15-24 had higher level of satisfaction at motivational level but lower level of satisfaction at mental level. Likewise, age group 25-34 had higher satisfaction at physical level and lower satisfaction at emotional level. Similarly, age group 35-44 had higher satisfaction at physical level and lower satisfaction at mental level.

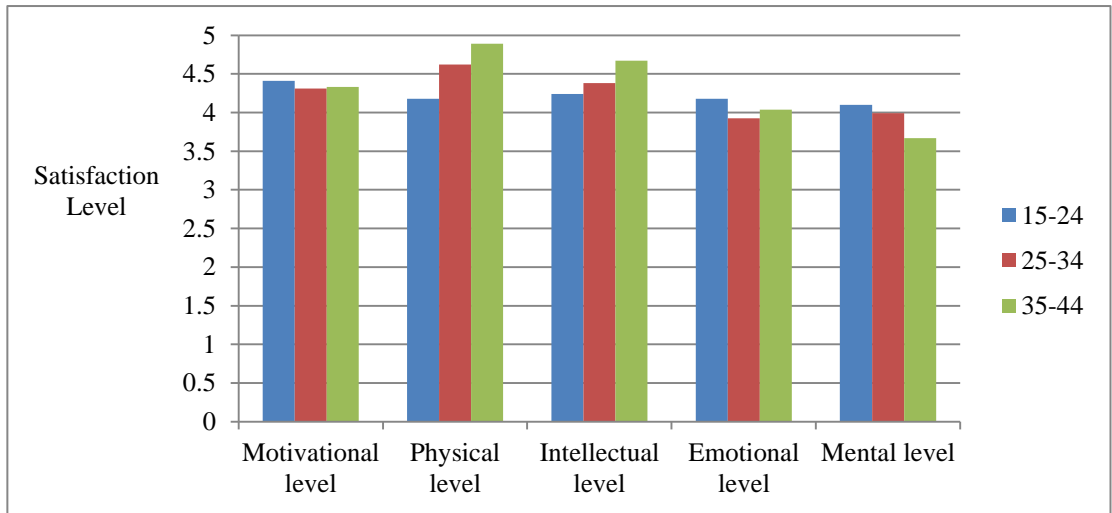


Figure 13. Satisfaction Level According to Age Groups (n=71)

In the same way, an effort was made towards exploring the satisfaction of the native and international visitors. It is represented by figure 14 below. It was found that international visitors had satisfaction on all personal experience components but native visitors were less satisfied on emotional and mental level. International visitors had higher satisfaction on physical level whereas lower satisfaction on mental level. Similarly, native visitors had higher satisfaction on intellectual level and lower satisfaction on emotional level. The satisfaction on emotional level revealed that native visitors were not as satisfied as compared to international visitors.

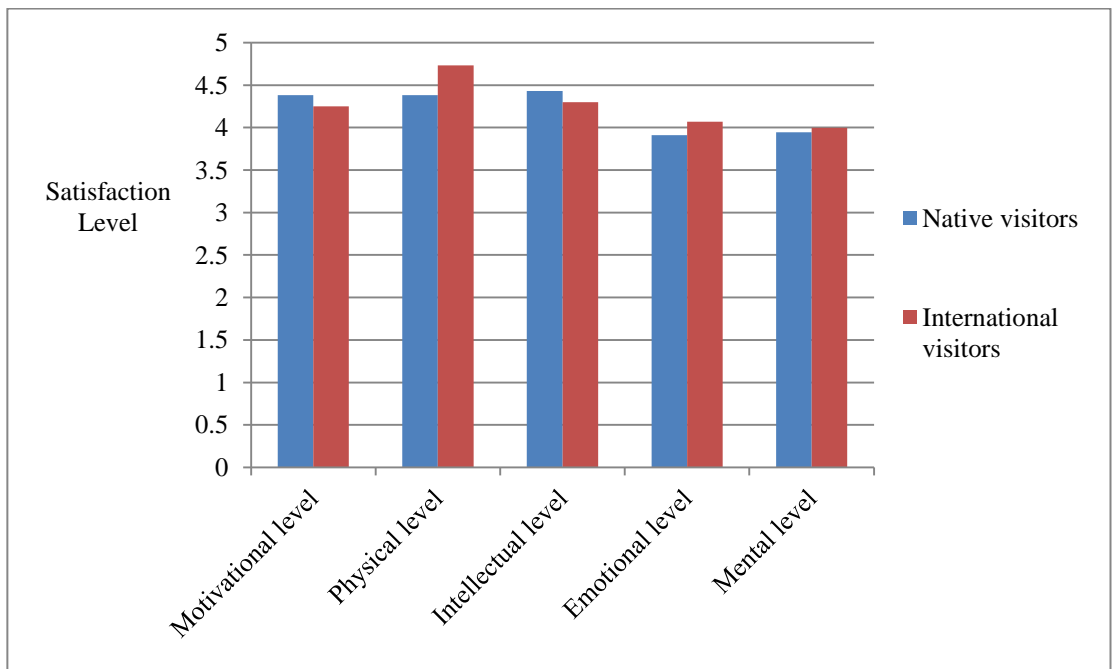


Figure 14. Satisfaction Level According to Nationality (n=77)

Likewise, figure 15 below discusses about the satisfaction level of the first time visitors and repeating visitors. There was a sharp difference on satisfaction level of visitors in motivational level. The first time visitors were satisfied at motivational level but repeated visitors were not satisfied. The intellectual and mental level for the first time visitor was satisfactory but it was not satisfactory for the repeated visitors. The physical and intellectual level for both types of visitors was good because their ratings were above 4. Beside other components, in intellectual level the satisfaction level of repeating visitors is higher than the first time visitors. In general, it was found that the first time as well as repeating visitors had higher level of satisfaction at physical level.

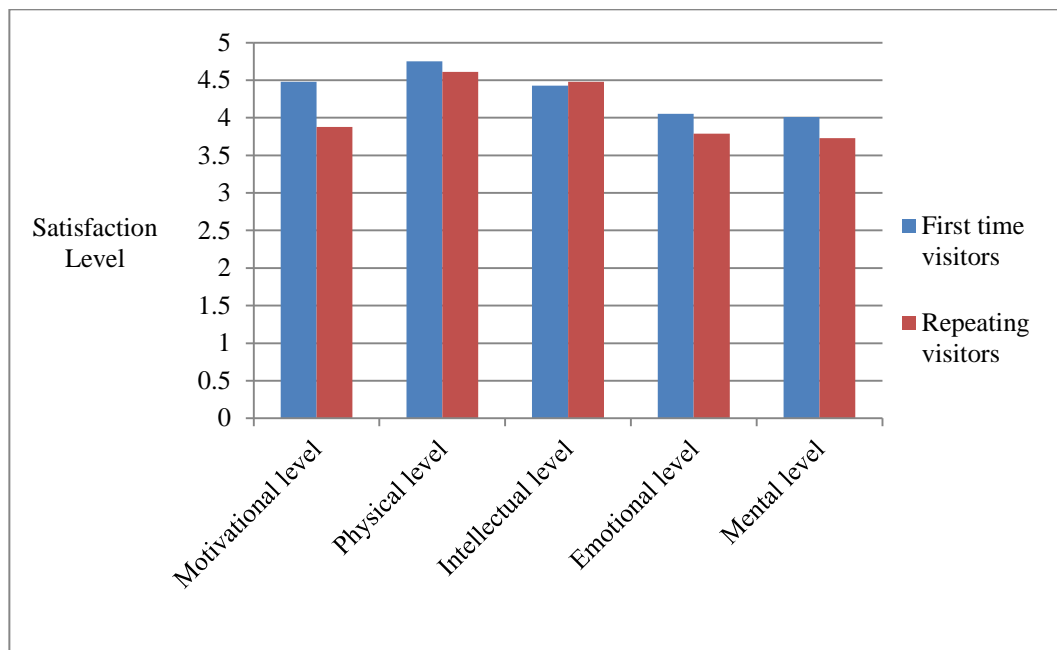


Figure 15. Satisfaction Level According to Frequency of Visit (n=77)

7.4 Feedback of Visitors

From the general questions it was seen that 38% of visitors are most likely going to visit Ghandruk again while 29% likely, 27% possible and 6% not very possible. Likewise, from the question asked in relation with the recommendation about Ghandruk to others, 97% said yes and 3% said may be while there were no visitors who didn't want to recommend. Similarly, from the question asked about their overall satisfaction of Ghandruk, 51% of the visitors were strongly satisfied, 47% were satisfied while 3% were neither

satisfied nor dissatisfied. None of the visitors commented as strongly dissatisfied or dissatisfied.

The open-ended questions were the last part of the questionnaires. It was at the end so that the respondents would be encouraged to express their opinion openly. The comments collected can be used to further enhance the service quality of Ghandruk.

The first open ended question was about the visitors' most memorable experience at Ghandruk. This was the most commented question and it received 54 comments. Some of the comments regarding the question are as:

"A tradition and cultural aspect of people in Ghandruk was awesome and also the trend of welcoming the guest is impressive", "I enjoyed the beautiful nature and its fantastic landscapes the most", "we stayed at Aama Hotel. The owner was an amazing host and very friendly, she also cooked the best dal bhat (local food). Everything she cooked was simple but delicious. When the clouds finally parted, we also experienced the most stunning view I have ever seen of the mountains", "Rivers, sightseeing, close view of Himalayan range, pollution free environment, natural beauty and its uniqueness", "Natural beauty and taking picture in a traditional dress", "Visiting museum and attending the local cultural show made my visit memorable" and "My visit to Ghandruk was many years ago. I was not on holiday but passing through en route for another village where somebody owed me money. I loved Ghandruk and was wishing I could spend a night or two there but our time was limited. So I had a good meal and some cold beer and chatted with people and continued on my way with a good impression of Ghandruk".

Those above mentioned comments strongly shows that visitors' level of experience is quite high in the region. It shows that a true asset for good experience in the region is beauty of nature and geographical landscapes. Cultural dance shows, hospitality and smiling faces of local people, local food, visiting an old museum, and dressing in a local Gurung dress were some memorable experience mentioned by the respondents.

The second open-ended question was asked about how the visitors experience could have been made more meaningful. This question received 30 comments. Some of the comments made by respondents are as:

“We will return again when it is less cloudy, we didn't get to see the views as often as we would have liked”, “ If I could stay there for more longer days it would have added to my knowledge more about the place and made it meaningful”, “More cultural activities and social interaction”, “If only I had extended my travelling days a little more I could have made my experience more meaningful and also should had made travelling plans to Poon hill”, “I prefer homestay at the house of Gurkha soldier's family to make my visit meaningful”, “I should say that I don't think my visit could have been improved on. The weather was perfect and the scenery was perfect. I think I should have stayed for one or two nights to meet and chat to more of the local people” and “ If had more information about the peoples' culture would understand things better”.

Most of the respondents commented that they need to stay more days in Ghandruk to make their visiting experience meaningful. Likewise, seeing more cultural activities, more interaction with local people, homestay etc. were other comments made by the respondents that could make their visit more meaningful.

The third open-ended question was asked about any additional comments they had about their Ghandruk visit. This question received 25 comments. Some of the comments made by the respondents are as:

“I love the way the locals treat visitors and their way of living in the nature. The thing that delight me the most is the glimpse of mountains seen in the morning which is so mesmerizing”, “During my visit, weather was cool, we had lots of fun and had memorable way out after a lot”, “I took the picture wearing the Gurung dress. It was my first time to be in such culturally rich place. The people were smiling and welcoming. Overall, good hospitality and the pleasant nature made my trip special”, “The hotel there was horrible and so damn expensive and even for Nepali it seems like the locals and hotels gave priority only to tourists and Nepalese are not treated with respect and more of ignorance. I felt really horrible with this attitude of the locals. I visited there a team of eighteen architect friends and everybody was so angry at these local business people's mentality. The real local villagers were very kind infact”, “ It was fun and refreshing”, “ I had loved the time I visited Ghandruk. I wished to enjoy the local culture more which I hadn't. So I would love to visit there again”, “ Expensive foods”, “It was very difficult for me to find an accommodation. They are focused only on international tourists but they should manage the accommodation facilities also for Nepalese tourists”, and “It was amazing, people friendly, very accommodating, food nice and the mountain views were amazing. One of the best places to visit in Nepal”.

Those above mentioned comments illustrates that most of the respondent enjoyed their visit to Ghandruk which meant that they had a higher satisfaction level. And some of the native visitor has commented that they were not satisfied with their visiting experience because they find the accommodation expensive and bad service of the hotel. One of the native visitor felt that the locals and hotels are giving priority only for the international tourists and native visitors are ignored.

8 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study has explored about the experience of visitors about Ghandruk as a destination and meaningful experiences at personal level. The purpose of the current study was to figure out the experience of visitors about Ghandruk. To achieve the target, two research questions were set as: a) what was the visitors' experience about Ghandruk as a destination product? and b) what was the visitors' personal experience about Ghandruk? This study has found that the visitors level of satisfaction was good in multi-sensory perception and not that good in story component. Likewise, it was also found that the visitors had good experience on all components of meaningful experiences at personal level.

This study has found that the average ratings for the overall visitors' satisfaction level on Ghandruk as a destination product was 4.09 and the average rating on overall visitors' personal experience was 4.24. The respondents highly rated Ghandruk as a unique place and found the culture and tradition genuine. Multi-sensory perception was rated as the highest level of experience. The results showed that senses are the vital part of the experience. The majority of the visitors were in Ghandruk to enjoy nature and outdoors. Beyond this, cultural tourism of Ghandruk could be potential component for the promotion in tourism as there are few numbers of visitors who visited Ghandruk to learn about the culture. Likewise, one of the most significant findings to emerge from this study is that the visitors experienced lower level of satisfaction on story component of Ghandruk and it made them feel that they didn't find enough historical linkages of the village.

Similarly, motivational, physical and intellectual level of the visitors experience was good and they experienced higher level of satisfaction on it. The respondents rated Ghandruk as a safe place. They were satisfied with the attraction and agreed that they had a good feeling. Likewise, on emotional and mental level their rating was also good.

There is no doubt that every destination needs to maintain the level of visitors' experience to establish a good image. Higher level of experience could contribute visitors' experience to memorable whereas lower level of experience could leave a bad impression towards the destination. Therefore,

the result of this study showed that the majority of respondents are willing to recommend Ghandruk to others. The higher recommendation rates prove that the majority of visitors are satisfied with their overall visiting experience.

Meaningful visiting experience and customers satisfaction is the key components of any destination or business. When the visitors feel they got meaningful experience then it is more likely that they will return looking for the same experience or recommend to others. It is also important for Ghandruk to pay attention to maintain the high quality of services in order to make the visitors experience meaningful and memorable forever. The majority of respondents are strongly satisfied with their overall experience. Despite the visitor's higher level of experiences, the lower level of experience in some specific component did not make that big difference on their satisfaction and therefore it can be said they had positive experience from Ghandruk visit.

Open-ended questions provided the information about the visitors' memorable experiences, expectations, and suggestions for improvement. It was revealed that nature of Ghandruk was the key factor that made the visitors experience memorable. Likewise, the visitors were willing to stay more days to make their visit more meaningful on another trip. Majority of the visitors did not see any need for improvement while some native visitors mentioned the problem with service, accommodation, and prices for foods. Moreover, some native visitors complained that entrepreneurs of Ghandruk gave priority on services to the international visitors only.

The finding of this study suggests that it is necessary for Ghandruk to strengthen and maintain its existing image. To strengthen the image, it is necessary to develop the elements that are in need of change like story component. It was seen that the visitors are less satisfied with the story component so it is necessary to highlight its existing themes. As experience pyramid reveals that story is one of the main reason that provides a good experience, it is important to highlight the history of Ghandruk through the museums of the village and the glorious history made by Gurkha soldiers.

As per the result it is necessary to take into consideration that services provided to the visitors travelling with friends have to be more interesting and

important because the ratio of visitors travelling with friends are higher as compared to others. Most of the visitors who participated in the survey could again be potential visitors for future in Ghandruk because of their age. For example the visitors between the age of 25 and 34 years old were large in numbers. If they had good impression then there is high possibility to return back and extend their length of stay. This age group has also a chance of circulating information about Ghandruk to their friends and relatives. However, the study also showed that there was very few number of visitors travelling alone.

Similarly, the entrepreneurs of Ghandruk should be able to focus on the needs of native visitors as well. Some native visitors found that they were not equally treated. This might be because the price range for international visitors is higher on most of the products and services comparing to native visitors. It is mandatory for them but also it is needed to make similarity on pricing so that the entrepreneurs can serve all types of visitors equally.

This research is important because it has provided the necessary information on meaningful experience components that needs to be maintained and developed. Likewise, no other similar research has been made before based on visitors experience in Ghandruk. So, this research has measured the visitors level of experience in different perspectives and suggested ways for making visit meaningful.

Therefore, the results of this study suggest that an effort to provide a meaningful experience in a particular destination can be done by exploring visitors' experience. By exploring the visitors' experience it is possible to find out the weak point of the destination and thus there will be a chance to develop them further according to the result of the survey.

This type of study was not performed before in Ghandruk. For this reason, it is recommended to carry out visitors experience survey in the future. It is recommended to conduct a new survey with a bigger sample of respondents to get more accurate survey results. As mentioned before, this study was done through a web based survey method. When performing a next survey it is recommended to perform a face to face survey in the destination so that visitors can express their fresh opinion. By performing the face to face survey

in the destination ,it is also possible to include other types of visitors beside internet users.

Finally it can be said that the goals of the survey were met. The research found the important feature about Ghandruk that needs further development on its services to create more meaningful visitor experiences. Therefore, it can be said that the results of this research are unique and important in order to further enhance the opportunity to attract more visitors to the region.

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APPENDICES

Survey Questionnaire

Appendix 1

Facebook Page of Ghandruk

Appendix 2

Theoretical Operationalization

Appendix 3

Cover Letter

Appendix 4

Visitor Experiences in Ghandruk, Nepal – Survey

Dear visitor,

The questionnaire is part of research project designed by Pramod Shrestha and supervised by Ari Kurtti, Senior Lecturer of Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Finland. This survey aims to obtain your views about your visiting experience of Ghandruk, Nepal. The result of this study will contribute to making the experience in Ghandruk better, more memorable and meaningful.

All responses to this survey will be kept confidential and will be used only in this research of my Bachelor's thesis. If you have any question concerning this research please contact pramod.shrestha@edu.lapinamk.fi.

Part A: Introduction and background questions

1. Gender
 - Male
 - Female

2. Age
 - 15-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65+

3. Nationality_____

4. Have you visited Ghandruk before?
 - Never
 - Once
 - A couple of times
 - Many times

5. Who are you travelling with?
 - Alone
 - Spouse
 - Friends
 - Family
 - Group
 - Other_____

6. What was your main purpose to visit Ghandruk? You can choose one or more options.
- To enjoy nature and outdoors
 - To learn about the culture
 - General interest
 - To spend a vacation
 - Visiting friends and relatives
 - Study/Research
 - Business
 - Just passing through on trekking
 - Other _____

Part B: Questionnaire for experience evaluation

7. Please evaluate and mark the following statements about your experience of Ghandruk in a rating scale: (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither agree nor disagree, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly agree.

	1	2	3	4	5
I found Ghandruk a unique place					
I felt dignified visiting Ghandruk					
I had never visited before a place like Ghandruk					
I found the culture and tradition of Ghandruk genuine					
The theme was relevant					
The experience was given a meaning through storytelling					
The environment was pleasurable					
The natural landscape of Ghandruk made my experience better					
I had once in a lifetime experience					
I experienced the new culture and local food					
I was able to make a good interaction between locals of Ghandruk					
I was able to make a good interaction between the guides and other tourism related staffs					
I had a 'wow' feeling when I stepped Ghandruk					
I felt safe and easy in the village during my visit					
I was satisfied with the attraction of Ghandruk					
I had an exciting experience					

My trip to Ghandruk was different from previous trips					
My knowledge was increased because of the amazing experience					
I was able to find a meaningful experience in Ghandruk					
I learned more than I expected					
The experience gave me a new interest					

Part C: General questions

8. How likely are you going to visit Ghandruk again?
- Most likely
 - Likely
 - Possible
 - Not very possible
 - Impossible
9. Will you recommend Ghandruk to your friends and relatives?
- Yes
 - May be
 - No
10. Overall, how satisfied were you with your Ghandruk visiting experience?
- Strongly satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
 - Dissatisfied
 - Strongly dissatisfied

11. (Optional) What did you enjoyed the most that made your visit memorable?

12. (Optional) How could your experience have been made more meaningful?

13. (Optional) Please share any additional comments you have about your experience with the Ghandruk visit.



Individuality	I found Ghandruk a unique place
	I felt dignified visiting Ghandruk
Authenticity	I had never visited before a place like Ghandruk
	I found the culture and tradition of Ghandruk genuine
Story	The theme was relevant
	The experience was given a meaning through storytelling
Multi-sensory perception	The environment was pleasurable
	The natural landscape of Ghandruk made my experience better
Contrast	I had once in a lifetime experience
	I experienced the new culture and local food
Interaction	I was able to make a good interaction between locals of Ghandruk
	I was able to make a good interaction between the guides and other tourism related staffs
Motivational level	I had a 'wow' feeling when I stepped Ghandruk
Physical level	I felt safe and easy in the village during my visit
Intellectual level	I was satisfied with the attraction of Ghandruk
Emotional level	I had an exciting experience
	My trip to Ghandruk was different from previous trips
	My knowledge was increased because of the amazing experience
Mental level	I was able to find a meaningful experience in Ghandruk
	I learned more than I expected
	The experience gave me a new interest

Cover Letter

Appendix 4

Namaste,

This survey aims to obtain your views about your visiting experience of Ghandruk, Nepal. The results of this study will contribute to making the experience in Ghandruk better, more memorable and meaningful.

The questionnaire is part of a research project designed by Pramod Shrestha and supervised by Ari Kurtti, a Senior Lecturer of Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Finland.

I am in need of your help by filling up the survey form which you can do by opening the link given below. I would be happy if you could forward the link to your friends who visited Ghandruk as well.

All responses to this survey will be kept confidential and will be used only in this research for my Bachelor's thesis. If you have any questions concerning this research please contact pramod.shrestha@edu.lapinamk.fi.

Your time and help is very much appreciated.

Thank you.

Best wishes from Finland,
Pramod Shrestha
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Rovaniemi, Finland
+358442061295

PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY FROM THE LINK BELOW:
<https://www.webpolsurveys.com/S/4057F93007122C08.par>