

Smart Handling of Covid-19 by a Cultural Destination, Pushkar

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to propose the understanding of shared responsibilities and social networking of a cultural destination in which different stakeholders, along with tourists, collectively can act responsibly towards any crisis. Through the example of a cultural destination, Pushkar, this study depicts various actions its stakeholders took to face the COVID-19 pandemic and attained zero covid-19 cases through effective crisis management. This study is a theoretical approach based on secondary data in analyzing the potentiality of a cultural destination to act smartly and responsibly during emergencies like the global COVID-19 pandemic. The study proposes the Shared Responsibilities Model (SRM) showcase, a roadmap for any destination to depict better crisis management through sharing responsibilities and social networking.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Tourism, Covid-19, Smartness, Social Network, Cultural Sustainability, Stakeholders.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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1. Introduction

Cultural tourism is a way of achieving socialization goals and moral development in society. Tourists and local stakeholders of a destination develop a sense of responsibility and respect towards each other (Phengsarakate & Chamaratana, 2021). The concept of cultural tourism could be applied to tourist destinations when stakeholders from different cultures come together and share a common agenda. The study examines how a cultural destination Pushkar, India, has proven itself as a responsible tourist destination during pandemic Covid-19. Pushkar has the brand image of a cultural tourism destination famously known for its folklore, handicrafts, lake, food, cattle fair, local festivals, religious rituals, and local culture. The destination is a promoter of global harmony and accepts many domestic and foreign tourists who visit here to experience its unique cultural events and traditions in its small arena. The stakeholders that involve local administration, travel agents, hoteliers, café owners, residents, and tourists make the place a symbol of universal togetherness. The pandemic Covid-19 alarmed the destinations' peaceful environment when foreign tourists who were staying for more cultural experiences after the Pushkar fair got stuck there. While the pandemic severely affected the other destinations, Pushkar remained unaffected by showing almost zero number of Covid-19 symptoms and Covid-19 positive cases. It safeguarded around 500 foreign tourists and safely arranged their accommodation, transport, and medical needs (Wadhwan, 2021). The active involvement and collaboration among major and minor stakeholders with the cooperation from tourists led to the proper handling of the situation without any chaos. People from different cultures altogether supported each other. They got helped by the administration, which properly channelized communication and information about Coronavirus risk. In this case study, the concept of a cultural tourism destination is explored where the destination brings a sense of responsibility for others' cultures and brings unity. The study explains how strategic collaboration among stakeholders by sharing responsibilities helps keep pandemics at its bay by dealing with various challenges surrounding this issue. The situation further leads towards attaining cultural sustainability among its stakeholders. Cultural sustainability establishes the trust between tourists and local destination stakeholders through social networks and proposes a theoretical Shared Responsibilities Model for stakeholders towards responsible cultural involvement. In the model, different stages of crisis management are included such that sharing responsibilities among different stakeholders in each of the stages would not only be the effective use of Social network but also make stakeholders to act smartly and responsibly towards their cultural destination.

2. Culture Tourism Destination and its Responsibilities

Cultural tourism is a tourism segment. Several determinants are analyzed and related in cultural tourism destinations like space, attractiveness, proper infrastructure, cultural resources, and many more (Khakzad, 2018). According to Crompton (1979), out of 9 tourist motivations, two motivations are related to cultural tourism while the rests are socio-economic factors. As per Richards (2001), cultural tourism is identified as a good form of tourism that builds relationships among hosts and visitors and elevates the destination's economy. Moreover, it also helps in conserving the local heritage and resources (Richards, 2018; Samaddar, 2021). It is said that the popularity of cultural tourism arose around post-World War 2 when travel and tourism across foreign destinations started opening up to share their cultural resources with the visitors (Richards, 2007). Travel helped countries to increase their cultural understandings and frame their relationship with one another. Cultural tourism in a tourist destination helps significantly in its economy by attracting tourists towards its unique community's culture, religiosity, artistic or traditional lifestyle-related attractions (Khakzad, 2018). Slowly, cultural tourism became famous and started spreading towards mass tourism, where tourists started visiting exotic destinations searching for uniqueness and foreign to them. This led to an exploration of the local culture of the area.

The acceptance of cultural tourism among mass tourists helped the local people enhance their income by providing home-stays, cooking classes, and performing their cultural folk dances, festivals, art, etc. While cultural tourism acts as a good tourism contributor, it carries immense responsibility among its stakeholders. It needs to save the local culture and authenticity from overcrowding, which is growing

in cultural destinations like Barcelona (Richards, 2019). UNWTO has recently launched UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guide- Sociocultural Impacts of Covid-19, Issue II: Culture Tourism. This initiative shows that cultural tourism will play a significant role in establishing and regaining trust among tourists while destinations recover from Covid-19 (UNWTO, 2021). In India, each of its states has its cultural presence and importance. India is rich in its natural and artificial cultural resources, from monuments, religious sites, forts, palaces, and mountains to beautiful beaches. Popular Indian destinations like Himachal Pradesh, Jaipur, and Delhi get many tourists all year round. These destinations also carry big responsibilities among their major and minor stakeholders to maintain their cultural tourism essence (Sharma & Sharma, 2017). The duties include preservation, conservation, and collaboration among stakeholders, including tourists, to safeguard the destination's cultural environment and sustainable surroundings. The concept of Cultural Sustainability first referred during World Commission on Culture and Development (1995). The term is defined for denoting the importance of preserving cultural resources among generations to come. The need for bringing sustainability in cultural destination is essential to maintain a destination's authenticity and integrity. Cultural Sustainability is termed for intangible cultural resources like cultural heritage and cultural identity. For tangible cultural resources, nature and man-made landscapes, sculptures and monuments require sustainability for being conserved (Axelsson et al., 2013). Loach and Rowley (2021) shows that for sustaining a cultural destination, three aspects need to be conserved and promoted- cultural identity, cultural diversity and cultural vitality. Together with social mindfulness, cultural values can be conserved by bringing cultural sustainability in tourist destinations. The sharing of responsibilities through social networking shows how beautifully a cultural destination proposes a sense of respect among its stakeholders. It presents a fair example of having sustainability in the destination's surroundings where a collective benefit is given importance to preserve a destination's resources, culture and environment.

2.1 Shared Responsibilities among Stakeholders

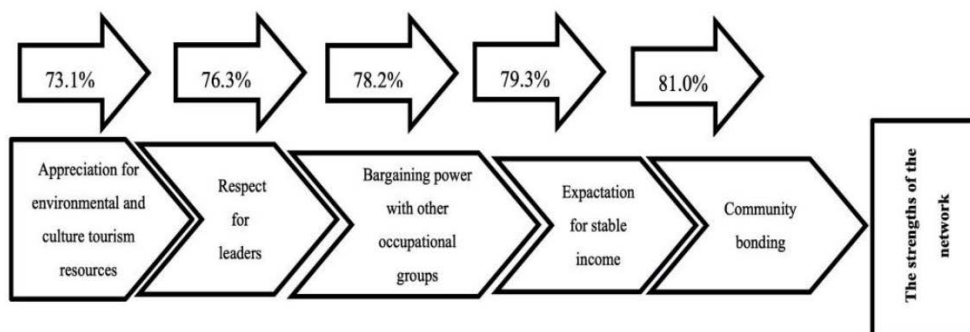
Stakeholders in a tourism location share obligations at three levels: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. The prominent stakeholders actively participate in the partnership process, which directly benefits them. In contrast, the lesser stakeholders merely function as spectators without regard for their wants and desires. One of the critical themes in discussions about sustainable tourism and empowerment is community involvement or participation. It is acknowledged that the quality and level of participation differ across regions, particularly in developing countries. This is related to the role of stakeholders in developing the tourism industry. The top-down approach is for planning or decision-making, which places most of the authority in the hands of the government or other stakeholders with "official" status (such as an NGO), limits community involvement (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). There are instances where planning is managed by "outsiders," such as government officials. These individuals may see the community as "an object" of development and create plans based on "what the external stakeholders can achieve" rather than "what the community needs" (Narayanan, 2003).

Furthermore, the community's ability to reap the benefits of tourism is frequently constrained by the unequal power between stakeholders and communities in decision-making, thus impeding community empowerment (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995; Narayanan, 2003). Minor stakeholders have had their influence reduced due to the top-down approach to tourism planning's acknowledged shortcomings. As a result, literature must adopt a bottom-up strategy that considers the needs and activities of significant stakeholders and the potential benefits of less active stakeholders (Narayanan, 2003; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). The strategy will improve control over stakeholder involvement on a major and minor scale through proper management of responsibility, information, and benefit distributions. By doing this, the planning process will be more controlled and efficient in the future (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). This is essential to improve everyone's quality of life, minimize unfavorable attitudes among major and minor stakeholders, and encourage collaboration with appropriate recognition and benefits (Sofield, 2003; Komppula, 2016). In order to build tourism communities and promote interaction among all stakeholders, it is necessary to define the various tasks and duties of major and minor stakeholders following their capacities (Valesca, 2021).

2.2 Social Network in Cultural Tourism

According to the social network concept, people, communities, and geographical locations are part of a relational structure with other players (Sorensen, 2007). Social network theories focused on the relationships between players, as opposed to earlier assessments that were more concerned with groups, community identities, and landscape destinations (Cenamor et al., 2017). According to “who was qualified to implement decisions and who was accepting responsibility for decisions” in tourism networks, Ladkin and Bertramini (2002) defined social networks. The first concept of social networks was created by Mitchell (1974) and was based on communities, task forces, project teams, groups, and social activities. Social networks are described as “a collection of nodes and the set of ties expressing some link, or absence of relationship, between the nodes” by Brass et al. in 2004. Social networks are “the type and extent of the impact of social relationship, social capital, partners, and encourage cooperation,” (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). This study looked at social networks from two angles: linkages within the network and bonding-bridging between players involved in and interested in local tourism. Tosun (2006) described social networks as encompassing spontaneous engagement (such as active, direct, authentic, and self-participation) in earlier studies on social networks in tourism. Some academics hypothesised that network closure, interactive communication, collaboration, and coercion contribute to “those who do better being better linked” (Burt, 2000). In Pushkar, the interaction between stakeholder networks and cultural tourism is the main topic of our study. It looks at how the importance of social networks affects the tourism system of a cultural destination and how stakeholders in communities are involved (Clarke et al., 2009), and whether network relationships depend on other major and minor stakeholders. Figure 1 shows the social network model for cultural tourism destinations and their relationship with each other, as proposed by Phengsrakate and Chamaratana (2021) in their study.

Figure 1. Social Network Model for Cultural Tourism Destination



Source: Phengsrakate & Chamaratana (2021). Social Networks and Cultural Tourism: A Mixed-Method Study of the Domestic Elephant Community Model in North-Eastern Thailand.

3. Smartly Overcoming of Covid-19

The emergence of tourism in Pushkar, a small city in Rajasthan near Ajmer situated around the Aravali Mountains on its western side, has been from earlier than the 18th century. The destination enjoys several local myths, tales, cultural folklores, and cultural resources like Pushkar Lake, religious sites, and Pushkar Cattle Fair, enhancing its attractiveness. According to Hindu mythology, the destination is known to be the only place to have Lord Brahma’s temple, creator of the world. The site is considered sacred among Hindus and Sikhs in India and experiences domestic tourist flow all around the year. Along with its religiosity, the destination attracts foreign tourists towards its cultural festivals, rituals, handicrafts, art, food, and universal togetherness spirit in its surroundings. In 2019, Pushkar received around 538 million visitors, about 3.5% from the previous year (Rajasthan Tourism Board, 2019). The place attracts tourists from different fields who stay in Pushkar for a longer time to experience its beauty. One can find artists, tradespeople, tourists, and researchers visiting Pushkar for various reasons and easily conversing with the locals (Monika & Kumar, 2021).

In March 2020, many tourist destinations worldwide were suffering from pandemic Covid-19 (UNWTO Report, 2020; Sigala, 2021). The situation was difficult, and a global lockdown was implemented making the tourists in destinations suffer hard due to restrictive movement. It came dawning on the destinations to fight with the disease and safeguard their residents and tourists. In 2019, the Indian tourists' destinations showed immense growth in tourists' statistics (foreign and domestic), including Pushkar. In Pushkar, many tourists extended their stay after celebrating the Pushkar Festival in November 2019. After covid-19 struck the destinations, many tourists in India got stranded due to emergency lockdown. Two thousand tourists hurriedly left Pushkar before the national lockdown, and about 500 visitors got stuck in Pushkar and have been restricted to travel due to an increase in the cases of Covid-19 (Wadhwan, 2021). Many flights were cancelled up to further notice, the responsibility of taking care of these tourists came on the shoulders of the state government. During the early stage of Covid-19, the destination, started screening its tourists from 04th March 2020, much before any other major tourist destination. Between 04th and 12th March 2020, Pushkar screened around 2300 tourists and was treated as per their outcomes (Wadhwan, 2021). Being a cultural destination, Pushkar has vigilante stakeholders who came forward to help these stuck tourists. The residents started offering their help in making the tourists do not feel helpless in Pushkar. They provided home-stays and food. The local administrative body made it mandatory for 28 days of quarantine of the foreign and domestic tourists. In this quarantine, locals came forward to provide them with daily necessities. In this situation, hotel owners also came forward. While they were suffering from cancelling and refunding of bookings, they extended their support to the tourists. According to Devika, a RAS officer in Pushkar, they ensured they could provide rooms with 50% or less rent (Sirur, 2020). According to Jay Narayan Jagdi (Wadhawan, 2021), the owner of Pushkar Inn, there is a famous Holi festival in March, and he was expecting full bookings. But, amidst such a crisis of almost no bookings, he was giving hotel rooms to the foreign and domestic guests at very cheap rates who were struggling in managing the cost of their stay in the quarantine period. The locals arranged doctors for these tourists who daily test them and coordinate his report with the local administrative body. The stuck tourists started using their quarantine time in painting, singing and knowing each other. They seem to be relaxed and grateful for the safety measures taken by local authorities and cooperation from the local community. As per Paul Jeylot, France (Wadhawan, 2021), "she is lucky to be in quarantine in Pushkar which is a spacious, close to nature and beautiful place and is very well taken care of by the local stakeholders". The local authorities kept exchanging information with foreign embassies for solutions and did not allow anyone to leave Pushkar without proper screening. Any bus sent by the local authority to send Covid-19 negative tourists to Delhi had to be quarantined with the bus driver for around 14 days. Apart from this, local collectors kept regular checks of the city's Covid-19 situation by round the clock monitoring the city. In the critical 30 days of lockdown, these procedures ensured that the remaining Pushkar tourists stayed healthy and were Covid-19 negative. After 30 days of quarantine, the foreign tourists were sent to Delhi to catch their flight towards their home country (Sirur, 2020; Gaur, 2020). Among these tourists, approx. five hundred were foreign tourists, and a majority of them were from Israel and Spain. The nearby tourism cities of Pushkar like Ajmer, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Delhi, and many more found numerous Covid-19 positive cases. They had come under the red zone whereas Pushkar remained Covid-19 free city and stayed out of the danger zone. All the roads that led to Pushkar were closed one month earlier when Covid-19 cases were more minor in number. Pushkar kept following its pro-active and preventive model, which proved to be successful in safeguarding its residents and tourists from getting affected by the disease. The model adopted by Pushkar for precaution and safety became successful by following five important Cs, which are:

- Community Aid
- Coordination
- Confidence building
- Cooperation
- Continued Screening

These five Cs depict the spirit of a cultural tourism destination that is aware of its fundamental responsibilities. The Indian government soon launched a website portal, "Stranded in India" where Covid-19 affected tourists could quickly get help from the government (Press Information Bureau, Delhi, 2020).

This initiative further helped Pushkar to send its guests without any harm. Moreover, after receiving their residents safely from India, Israel Embassy (Sirur, 2020) issued an appreciation letter in the name of the local authority head praising their quick responsiveness towards the pandemic.

3.1 Strategic Role of Stakeholders in Crisis Management

According to Samaddar et al. (2021), a cultural tourism destination promises to have more responsible behavior from its stakeholders by adopting smart strategies and steps. This is because the notion of cultural understanding among these stakeholders is high, and this makes dealing with crises like pandemic Covid-19 promptly by taking all the preventive measures. Table 1 shows different stages in which Pushkar as a cultural destination went through during the pandemic Covid-19 and how, at each stage, the stakeholders strategically took decisions and participated in nullifying the effect of the pandemic.

Table 1. Strategies and Action by Culture Tourism Destination Stakeholders in Pandemic

Stage	Strategies and Action took by Stakeholders
Stage 1: Precondition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing of network of the local administrative body and the local community • Profiling and data collection of tourists count • Proactively consultation with medical experts • Proper analysis of the crisis
Stage 2: Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration among stakeholders • Increase in the case of Covid-19 in surroundings • Lack of proper knowledge about the global pandemic • Address financial and health-related issues at the ground level • Setting up of rules and restrictions • Blockage of all types of transport access • Early quarantine of 28 days for every single tourist
Stage 3: Direction Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular Monitoring by medical experts • Ensuring proper availability of daily necessities to tourists • Sharing the common goal of the safety of everyone • Providing daily supervision and coordination with tourists
Stage 4: Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local residents, Hotel owners, and other local stakeholders helping in providing shelter and food • Assigning roles and responsibilities to stakeholders by the local authority • Mandatory quarantine of 14 days after coming from different places • Only after proper screening, Covid-19 negative tourists allowed to travel to the airport • Ensuring zero Covid-19 positive cases • Ensuring safety and good health of residents
Stage 5: Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submitting data of foreign tourists in Government website portal "Stranded in India" • Reevaluation of applied strategies • Following up on the tourists' health status • Evaluating the stakeholder's responsibilities
Stage 6: Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero Covid-19 positive cases in Pushkar • Tourists reaching their home country safely • Responsible behavior by tourists and local tourism stakeholders • Preparation for future crisis • Proper communication among stakeholders • Appreciation from foreign embassies including Israel Embassy • Collaborative response from stakeholders

Source: (Wadhwan, 2021; Sirur, 2020; Gaur 2020)

3.2 Challenges of Destinations faced During Pandemic

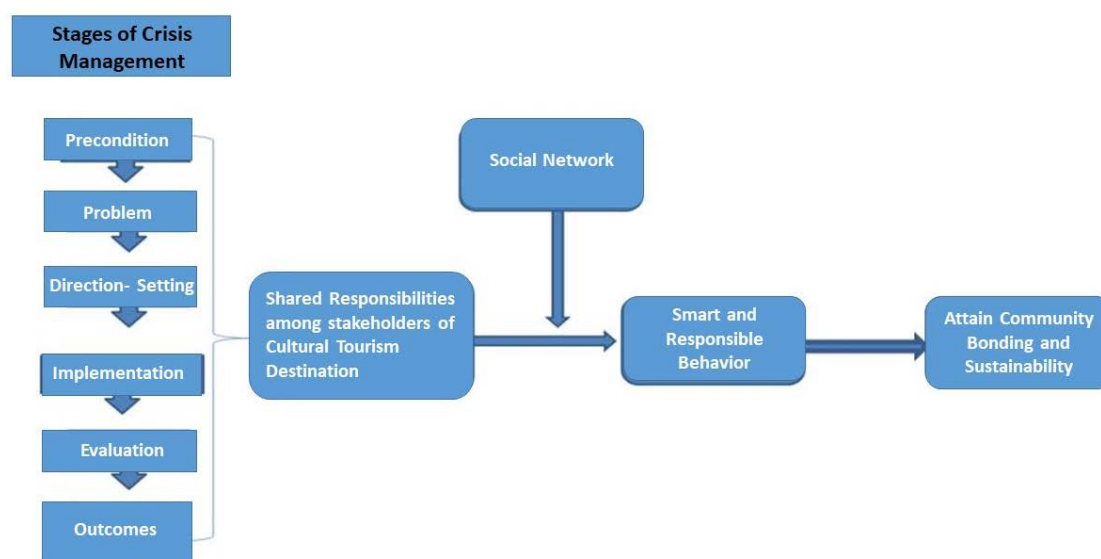
The global pandemic Covid-19 has hit the tourism destination hard, causing damages to the tourism business and its stakeholders (UNWTO Report, 2020). In this time of emergency, the existence of a tourist destination entirely depends on the actions of its stakeholders. The stakeholders faced various challenges on their part. Some of the critical challenges are:

- The popularity of cultural tourism destinations leads to over-tourism (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019), making it tough to manage the tourists and cultural resources during a crisis.
- There is a need for helpful information and data exchange to all levels of stakeholders. For this, effective technological advancement would be needed for effectiveness of social network.
- A cultural destination is needed to be prepared to preserve its authenticity and local culture from any crisis, which practically is more complicated.
- A cultural destination has to safeguard its residents, domestic tourists, and foreign tourists equally by continuously monitoring the place, which is time-consuming and lacks man-force.
- There is a lack of crisis task force among tourism stakeholders who are needed to take quick action during critical situations.
- A more proper understanding among stakeholders, including tourists, is needed to care for each other for their well-being.

4. Shared Responsibilities Model

The probability of sharing responsibilities and attaining sustainability among stakeholders of a cultural destination is relatively high (D'Angella et al., 2021). From Table 1, we have seen that with the collective and collaborative effort at different stages during a crisis, a positive outcome has been gained, and a critical situation is dealt with responsibly. Residents, tourists, tour operators, local authorities, and hotel owners worked together to make the crisis as bearable as possible. By deriving from the different stages towards responsible behavior of the stakeholders, below is the proposed theoretical Shared Responsibilities Model, which describes different stages of a situation. The cultural involvement of stakeholders shares responsibilities to display effective social network to act in collective and smart responsible behavior and ultimately helps in attaining community bonding. The Figure 2 below shows the proposed model through the extensive evaluation from Table 1 and Social Network Model shown in Figure 1.

Figure 2. Shared Responsibilities Model (SRM) among Stakeholders of a Smart Cultural Tourism Destination



In the Figure 2, the proposed SRM model shows that through integrating the strategies in each of the stages of Crisis Management derived from Table 1, a cultural tourism destination can share effective responsibilities to its various major and minor stakeholders. These responsibilities would be shared to the stakeholders as per their role in different stages. Through effective social network in collaboration with shared responsibilities, the cultural tourism destination will have smart and responsible stakeholders who shares same goal to reduce the impact of any kind of crisis happening on the destination. The collective behavior of stakeholders from different cultural background would not only make the destination responsible but smart as well. Effective crisis management cannot be achieve without the amalgamation of smart destination attributes which includes technology as most important factor (Gretzel et al., 2018). The stages of the crisis management utilizes technology for better communication and role allocation as well as providing services. To attain community bonding as well as sustainability, the shared responsibility and social network are important criteria among stakeholders which gives them an understanding and trust towards each other.

5. Results and Conclusion

The study has shown that tourists visiting a cultural tourism destination like Pushkar for local experiences show more responsibility and co-operation with local stakeholders. The collaboration among these stakeholders leads to a sense of relatedness towards each other to fight threats like pandemic Covid-19. Every stakeholder in a cultural tourism destination realizes the importance of each other's cultural values and needs to preserve them by working together through shared responsibilities. The proposed model would support the potential growth of cultural tourism destinations and their importance where the tourists would be more educated and empowered to have authentic cultural experiences by working with local stakeholders. The local stakeholders as well in a cultural tourism destination would be more supportive of cultural diversity and acceptance of tourists. On basis of this, the proposed model shows how following through different stages of crisis management, stakeholders can shared their roles and communicate at different level in order to handle any crisis with better result. In this process, the importance of social network to make the stakeholders act smartly and responsibly becomes the desired goal where each of the stakeholders are aware of their responsibility towards destination. Collaboration and sharing of responsibilities among stakeholders can only keep the trust of tourists intact and leads to the co-creation of responsible cultural tourism in the coming future.

Smartly Collaboration among stakeholders including tourists helps in resolving problems, helps in attaining a shared vision, and gives recognition to the advantages of working together. This creates a sense of shared responsibility and has a more positive effect on respecting each other's cultural values. The cultural tourism destination attracts tourists by offering their unique cultural experiences through fairs, festivals and give chance to have local cultural experiences. Apart from this, the destination also depicts its openness towards accepting and interacting with people coming from other cultures. In a time when covid-19 has proven to be a threat globally, cultural destinations like Pushkar emerged like an example of how human resources through social networking can overcome obstacles and preserve its cultural heritage and resources. These destinations offer tourists more openness towards each other's culture. To attain sustainability in current and future, one needs to be acting responsible towards nature, destination's surroundings and have respect towards the each other's culture and custom. In such way, spirit of travel would become more fruitful. The proposed SRM (Shared Responsibilities Model) model in the study gives the theoretical approach of how through different stages of crisis management, stakeholders can share their responsibilities and take tough decisions or facing critical situations. The model shows that sharing responsibility gives a positive responsible behavior collectively which helps in brings cultural sustainability to the destination. The study will certainly help destinations to recover from many unsustainable issues and will bring a positive image to the destination. Moreover, it will also help in keeping the trust and faith of tourists in the destination in the time of any crisis or disaster. The expected outcome of this study will prove to be beneficial for the sustainable development and advancement of the destination.

The study is limited of an individual destination and may or may not applied to other destinations which differ from its cultural identity and landscapes. The act of sharing responsibilities and social net-

work among stakeholders varies as per destinations as well as the strategies adopted in destination Pushkar may not work in other destination but it will surely help in taking decisions and act as a reference.

For future study, the importance of inculcation of stakeholders along with their roles and responsibilities at each of the stages of crisis management needs to be more defined and studied. In addition to this, the involvement of smart attributes to the cultural destinations is needed to be further studied to prepare the destination for future. Moreover, the effective usage of social network in handling crisis would be needed for more exploration.

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