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Understanding Distress Migration in the Garhwal Region of Uttarakhand though Tourism Engagement

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Abstract: ***Tourism is becoming a way to help rural areas grow and get better especially in places like Garhwal in Uttarakhand that are very sensitive to the environment and do not have a lot of money. This study explores that the tourism engagement though the homestay development to address the distress migration of Garhwal region of uttarakhand. It found tha Homestay tourism has an amazing hospitality concept is getting popularity due to its unique features and now a day's many leading brands of hospitality sectors like Amã Stays & Trails, Airbnb, Marriott International etc. with government are also initiating in this practice of Homestay to attract guest from worldwide to provide personalised services in exclusive location of homes. Garhwal region has the potential of homestay mainly due to geographic location and local community's socio economic benefits. The Government policies to enhance community participation, economic stability and addressing distress migration are investigated in this study. High probabilities of additional income, standard of living, reduction of migration, improvement of infrastructure, image building, and recognition is possible through the homestay. For the homestay development in Garhwal region many schemes like Deen Dayalupadhaya homestay scheme, Uttrakhand homestay schemes etc. many policies like skill development policy, start up policies etc. are working. The government is also providing the platform to NGO's and many private sector companies to create sustainable tourism with an enabling environment. For the study both primary and secondary data has been collected from the government reports, market research studies etc. as they provide reliable information. In spite of the bright outlook, questioning of hilly areas, difficulties, job opportunities, improper infrastructure hang on. Proper implementation by governments to promote the skill development of the local community, cultural preservation, natural beauty, and infrastructure improvement is a basic protection shield for the economic growth of the Garhwal region. The recommendation from the findings of study is that continued government support can prevent the distress migration in the Garhwal region and it will also ensure long term economic stability.***

Keywords: ***Tourism engagement, livelihood perception, distress migration, Government policies, Community participation, Tourism schemes***

I. INTRODUCTION

Uttrakhand is well known for its snowcapped peaks, towering Himalayas, fresh rivers, pilgrimage sites, cultural diversity, hills, AIMS hospital, Patanjali yoga etc. Tourist around the world of different interests like sports, peace, spiritual, health, medical, nature lover etc. attracted towards the Uttrakhand as it provide a complete package of all types of interests this is also a reason where tourist chooses to stay for sustained period of time that is why homestay tourism have immense opportunity in Uttrakhand. Homestay is getting popularity due to its unique feature among solo tourists, budgeted tourists and also among extended duration travelers. It is a unique hospitality where host offers their home to tourist for closer experience of culture, lifestyle of local community. In homestay necessary arrangement of accommodation, food and beverages are provided to tourist by the host family. In the atmosphere of home it is similar to hotel. The Garhwal region of Uttrakahand though a popular destination for all types of tourist, facing serious major challenges such as socio economic challenges, poor infrastructure, geographic location which makes isolates it, distress migration, and unemployment are facing by Uttrakahand, particularly hilly areas of Garhwal region in all these challenges homestay hold onto hope among the local community and Government as a budding solution. Homestay offer additional income, economic stability, infrastructure improvement, cultural, traditional activities preservation and through this have the potential to address distress migration of Garhwal region challenges. The major issues like poor infrastructure can be resolve by initiatives of Government and local community support.

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Giving backing to this State and central government has launched a variety of policies with aim to promote tourism, standard of living, local's economy and environment like "Uttrakhand Homestay Policy" launched in 2015 aimed to improve the infrastructure and promote the culture. The relationship between homestay and Garhwal region is mutually beneficial as homestay provides the job opportunities, additional income, cultural preservation and many more by supporting the solution of Grahwal region like distress migration, environment, traditional etc. The growth of homestay is attracting tourist interest towards the ecotourism, cultural tourism, and community based tourism and also to reshape the future of tourism industry, in this regards local community is playing equally responsible role to manage the tourism crowd besides the govt, hotels, tour operators, NGOs etc.

After the campaign "Incredible India" launched in 2003 number of tourist from other countries to India increased (Federici, E. 2019). The main agenda of this campaign was to promote and show the diversity in culture, unique tradition, natural beauty etc. and along with this by offering a chance to stay in local families, to build the personal relationship with the host and to know the authentic lifestyle of the community, homestay initiative supports this campaign. As per many tourist homestay is a better opportunity trough which in limited budget they can connect with the local culture, cuisine and can get the personalised services. The tourist satisfaction level as compare to the tourist expectation level is very high in the homstay business (Luvandwa el, at. 2020). This can be a reason when we can see that many leading hospitality brands are collaboration with Government to adopt the homestay concept like India Hotel Company Limited (IHCL) a part of TATA Group is initiating by Amã Stays & Trails initiative same is like initiatives- Airbnb, Homes & Villas by Marriott International, Six Sences Hotels Resorts Spas, Banyan Tree, Anantra Hotels, Resorts & Spa etc. Same the initiatives for homestay development is also taken by state government particularly in Garhwal region with the motive to get the solution of the challenges. The initiatives of government helps in continue growth of homestay tourism and offer various economic opportunities for both host and guest. Nevertheless the perception of local community towards the homestay is crucial. The lack of awareness about the benefits and the fear of business risk are the biggest challenges of government initiatives for community engagement and the provision of educational programmes (Singh, G., & Rawat, 2023). The aim of this study is to inspect how tourism engagement through government initiating in Homestay development to address well being of local community, cultural preservation, economic development of Garhwal region.

A. *Objectives*

1) To investigate various government initiatives aimed at promoting tourism engagement and homestay development in Garhwal region.
2) To examine the awareness and participation of local communities in government supported tourism initiatives.
3) To exmine the perception of local communities regarding the role of tourism engagement government policies to reduce distress migration.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Himalaya of Garhwal region offers significant tourism potential with a pure natural beauty who is demanding a proper research based tourism planning to sustain this natural beauty (Singh, T. V. 1977). For the promotion of rural tourism government of India has launched Swadesh Darshan Scheme as an important socio-economic phenomenon (Sengupta, C 2020). Prashad Scheme is launched by Ministry of Tourism to promote the tourism variations in rural areas (Tripathi, M. K., & Ali, M. 2021). According to (Maheshwari et al.,2018) the involvement of local communities is also important which is called community based tourism (CBT). Tourism is important for the economic development in society and digital strategies are very useful to promote regional tourism (Kurniawan & Samsithawrati, 2024). The participation of local communities in hosting activities not only foster social interaction but also empower them by providing a platform to showcase their culture, tradition and life style (Pankaj, P., & Pant, A. (2001). Limited accessibility to the hilly areas of Grahwal region will still have the probabilities to make them preferred destination where tourist will attract through stunning natural beauty, offbeat destination, peaceful locations and budget friendly sites will leads to economic stability, poverty reduction, development in infrastructure and wellbeing of local communities (Patwal et al., 2023). The general perception of local community towards the development of homestay is positive, for the stability of income community members including women are actively participating in this initiative (Pankaj, P., & Pant, A. 2001). Through the homestay development local community gains job opportunities, economic stability, an improved standard of living without needing seek options anywhere else which contributes to reduce distress migration, greater satisfaction of own residential area and stress free life (Nurfadilah et al., 2024).According to (K.C. et al., 2024) homestay is providing a source of income platform to local communities in their local areas which is contributing to poverty alleviations.

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Many factors such as insufficient job opportunities, non-satisfactory health facilities, unfit social conditions etc. are also responsible for the migration from Uttrakhand hilly areas which can be relieve through strengthening local community especially women, encouraging entrepreneurship, uplifting tourism, preserving culture (Bansal, N., & Diwakar, B. ,2024). According to (Woli. L. 2022) local communities perceive the homestay concept positively as due to homestay they are getting recognition, job opportunities, economic empowerment, infrastructure development and getting cultural identity and reducing migration issues. The development of homestay is positively perceived by local communities as homestay fosters social cooperation along with close relationship and trough these factors community based tourism enhanced (Gautam, S., & Thapa, A. 2023). The local communities are recognizing homestay as potential to enhance service quality and economic sustainability, for this continuous training, structured management practices are essential for improving skills and establishing new service standards in homestay management (Nurfadilah et al., 2024).

Garhwal region is waiting for creative and supportive policies which promote these practices and educate the youth to improve their skills, which in turn may stop the out-migration of males and also increase socio economic development as Uttrakhand faces limited sources of income, environmental challenges, poor infrastructure which lead to distress migration(Joshi, B., 2018). Many factors such as insufficient job opportunities, non-satisfactory health facilities, unfit social conditions etc. are also responsible for the migration from uttrakhand hilly areas which can be relieve through strengthening local community especially women, encouraging entrepreneurship, uplifting tourism, preserving culture (Bansal, N., & Diwakar, B. ,2024). After acknowledging the potential of tourism in Hilly areas of Garhwal region the Goverment is taking initiatives to support local communities especially women, by helping them to polish their skills this is why many policies and NGOs are implemented, introduced and established in Garhwal (Giri, S. G., & Kumar, S. 2024). After recognizing tourism sector potential by supportive policies the government is promoting homestay businesses and encouraging stakeholders to share the best practices with one another (Adhikari, A., & Joshi. 2024). According to (Dash, S. P. 2022) the adaptability of the private sector is comparatively higher than public and government sectors. With the supportive government policies and tourism engagement opportunities, homestay development can contribute in economic growth, profitable investment, and distress migration. Many policies and strategies are implemented with same agendas to promote community based tourism and particularly focusing on enhancing women's skill to support community, crafts and culture (Imran, M. M., & Nguyen, N. T. B. 2018). However many unregistered homestays are excluded from the benefits of the policies and financial aid of the govt (Joshi, K. D., & Bahuguna, P. 2023). Chourasia, B. does not satisfactorily evaluate the long time conditions of homestay business in terms of economic, social and environment.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on descriptive research design using mixed method approaches that integrates both primarily and secondary sources such as Ministry of tourism, Government of India, Uttrakahand Tourism Board (UTDB), Uttrakhand Swarojgar yojna and national policies aimed to promote the tourism in Garhwal region. Swadesh Darshan Scheme in Garhwal region with Eco Circuit project (Tehri-Chamba-Sarain) has significant role in promoting sustainable tourism by the improvement in infrastructure enhancing accessibilities, supporting the local businesses. Therefore the main aim is to boost the local economic growth through the tourist flow.

State	Year	Name of project	Amt. Sectioned	Amount released	Amt. utilised	Physical status	Agency
Uttarakhand	Eco Circuit 2015-16	Development of TehriChamba-Sarain around Tehri Lake.	69.17	69.17	69.20 C	Complete	(UTDB)

A. Ministry of Tourism

This Projects was sanctioned in 2015-16 and received the budget of 69.17 crore, the utilized amount exceed the sanctioned budget, which reflects that the full scale implementation. The project is completed and executed under the Uttrakhand Tourism Development Board. Due to Eco Circuit 2015-16 project Tehri Lake is the key tourist attraction in Garhwal region. This project demonstrates the commitment of government to strengthening tourism infrastructure in Garhwal and ensures the development support through the adequate investment.

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B. PRASAD scheme in Garhwal expected Outcome

Objective	Details	Data/Meaning
Increase in Tourist Visits	Improved infrastructure and events.	Higher footfall expected due to better accessibility and enriched visitor experiences.
Economic Growth & Employment	Job creation and increased incomes from tourism.	Tourism-driven businesses directly support local economies.
Promotion of Local Culture	Cultural events, craft bazaars, and festivals.	Enhances visibility of local arts, crafts, and traditions while enriching tourist offerings.

The PRADSAD scheme is important for the promotion of tourism in Garhwal by rejuvenating pilgrimage destinations, improving infrastructure and preserving the cultural heritage. Under this scheme the govt. is trying to improve the accessibilities, sanitation, accommodation and attraction sites. By the scheme community involvement is enhanced through the cultural and tourism activities which are important for the economic benefits. Overall the footfall of tourist will increase through the schemes which strengthen the link between government policies and tourism growth. Further the job creation, preservation of cultural helps in economic development and sustainable tourism. According to the National strategy, Digital platforms are playing an important role in promotion of homestay by providing them marketplace, by overcoming communities' issues and by giving best payment systems. The NIDHI portal (One India, One Registration) is giving the facilities of formalization of hometsay with the support of digital infrastructure, marketing development assistant and capacity building programs. This policy emphasis on cluster based development through the professional trainings, financial assistance, and digital literacy program. To oversee the implementations of policies national and state nodal agencies are framework.

Objective	Details	Data/Meaning
Financial Incentives	1. Subsidies (e.g., 30% fixed capital subsidy)	Reduces financial barriers, encouraging participation of locals in rural homestay projects.
Capacity Building	Training programs for hosts and local communities.	Enhances hospitality skills for better tourist experiences.
Digital Technologies	Platforms like NIDHI for registration and marketing.	Improves visibility and booking convenience for rural homestays.
Community Involvement	Encouraging women's self-help groups to manage homestays.	Promotes inclusivity and women's empowerment through tourism.
Sustainable Tourism	Focus on eco-tourism, cultural preservation, and low-density tourism.	Ensures responsible and sustainable tourism practices while directly benefiting communities.

C. National Strategy for Promotion of Rural Homestays (2022)

The above table outlines the key points of National Strategy for promotion of Rural Homestay (2022) and their impacts. Subsidies as financial incentives reduce the barriers to establish the homestay for locals. Capacity building program enhance the hospitality skills, service qualities. Community involvement promotes the economic empowerment and the sustainable tourism practices ensure the eco friendly development, preserving culture and giving benefits to local communities.

D. Mukhyamatri Swarojgar Yojana

District	Chamoli	Dehradun	Haridwar	Pauri	Rudraprayag	Tehri	Uttarkashi
Monthly	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Yearly	830	663	571	986	620	916	657
Total	3467	2529	2151	3603	2093	2603	2483

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This scheme by the Uttrakhand government is a self employment initiative aimed at the youth in both rural and urban areas with the objective of curbing migration from the hilly areas of state. The provided data indicates that this scheme is more effective in generating long term employment in Garhwal region by promoting local self employment and reducing migration.

Survey Aspect	Response (%)
Occasionally received capacity-building support	53%
Never received capacity-building support	11%
Regularly received capacity-building support	28%
Faced paperwork as major challenge	43.10%
Found UTDB Homestay Policy most impactful	59.20%
Found Uttarakhand Homestay Scheme (2016) helpful	66.80%
Found Mukhyamantri Swarozgar Yojana beneficial	7.60%
Found Swadesh Darshan and PRASAD schemes effective	82%
Noticed reduction in out-migration due to tourism	77%

To collect primary data, a structured questionnaire designed to gather the experiences and opinion from local communities and homestay owners. Through purposive sampling method 210 respondent's data collected who are directly and indirectly involved in tourism activities. The questionnaire covered areas such as:- Awareness of tourism schemes, Sources of schemes information, perceived benefits, challenges in assessing govt. supports, impacts of tourism on migration, helpful policies to increase guest footfalls. The questionnaire distributed to different parts of Garhwal region through digital platform like Google Forms. The analysis of collected primary data revealed that 60 % of respondents occasionally received capacity-building support under government tourism initiatives while 14% never received such support and 10 % reported that they are receiving it regularly. Additionally, 48.3% of respondents identified paper work (formalities) as major challenges in availing benefits of govt. homestay schemes. The most important 63.3% respondents think UTDB homestay policy is most impactful scheme for homestay in utrrakhand and same percentage acknowledged that Uttrakhand Homestay scheme (2016) has contributed to development of homestays. Moreover, 76.1% thinks mukhyamantri swarojgar yojna is beneficial. Additionally a significant 82% of respondents felt that Swadesh Darshan and PRASAD scheme is effective in increasing tourist footfalls. Furthermore 75% respondents noticed reduction in distress migration due to tourism related activities. This strategy of combining both secondary with primary helped to understand clearly that how government initiatives are working, impacting and promoting tourism in garhwal region.

IV. FINDINGS

1) The development of infrastructure, accessibilities and tourism facilities are possible significantly by Swadesh Darshan (Eco Circuit Project. 2015-16) and PRASAD scheme.
2) Eco Circuit Project (Tehri-Chamba-Sarain) project boost eco-tourism in the destination.
3) PRASAD scheme improves the visitors' facilities and strengthen the connection between tourism and local community.
4) Digital platform under the National Strategy for Promotion of Rural Homestays (2022) helps local host to connect world wider audience.
5) Govt. policies have strengthened community involvement by managing homestays and promoting culture.
6) Locals are benefited by Capacity building program that improves the hospitality skills, making more professional etc.
7) Schemes like the Swadesh Darshan and PRASAD helps in reducing the distress migration through tourism engagement from rural area.
8) Growth in local businesses resulted in higher income generation for residential.
9) Vocational trainings have improved the professionalism, skills and employment in tourism sector.
10) Public and private partnership has enhanced the employment opportunities in hills.
11) Local residential participation increased in tourism engagement activities like homestay etc.
12) Through the heritage walks and cultural tours tourist are able to know the local history and traditions.
13) Improvements in road conditions have reduced travel time and make it easier for tourist to reach remote areas which support the local businesses of hills.

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V. IMPACTS

The Swadesh Darshan Scheme particularly the project Eco Circuit Project has improved the tourist footfall in the destination by making the Tehri Lake a key attraction. Similarly, the PARASAD scheme improves the infrastructure and facilities for pilgrimage tourist. According to primary data 82% of respondents felt that both Swadesh Darshan and PARASAD schemes are effective to increase tourist footfall in Garhwal region. The subsidies under the National Strategy for promotion of Rural Homestays have encouraged local entrepreneur to register their respective homestays under NIDHI portal- further supported 28% of respondents received regular capacity building programs.

Swadesh Darshan scheme provides the better local road connectivity which save the time of travelers and making many villages accessible for tourist. An increased in tourist stay boosts income by creating job opportunities within local communities according to primary data 75% of respondents observed distress migration reduced due to tourism related opportunities within residential areas which helps in job opportunities and income genegration. Skill development courses have improved service quality, bring professionalism and strengthen the local economy. Digital platform is also playing crucial role by facilitating better marketing. Overall, through the growth in tourism infrastructure is improving, economic opportunities are increasing and the main thing is form hilly areas distress migration is reducing. These combined impacts highlight positive effectiveness of government policies and local communities' participations in Garhwal region.

A. Societal Impact

1) Homestays have created job opportunities, increased income and beneficiating local communities.
2) Sustainable tourism practices are important to stop the distress migration and to reduce the poverty.
3) A focus in long term environment conservation and economic stability.
4) Improvement in infrastructure driving the economic growth and accessibilities.
5) Promotion and preservation of local culture heritage.
6) Preservation of natural landscape through the growth in tourism sector.
7) Community led conservation programs protect biodiversity and local ecosystem.
8) Improvement in waste management and sanitation facilities.
9) Tourism policies also controlled over-tourism as per the carrying capacity of the destination and reduced ecological footprints from the hilly areas.
10) 75% of respondents observe the reduction in distress migration with the introduction of tourism related activities.
11) 82% of respondents observe effective in increasing tourist footfalls trough the govt. schemes to promote home stay and tourism.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

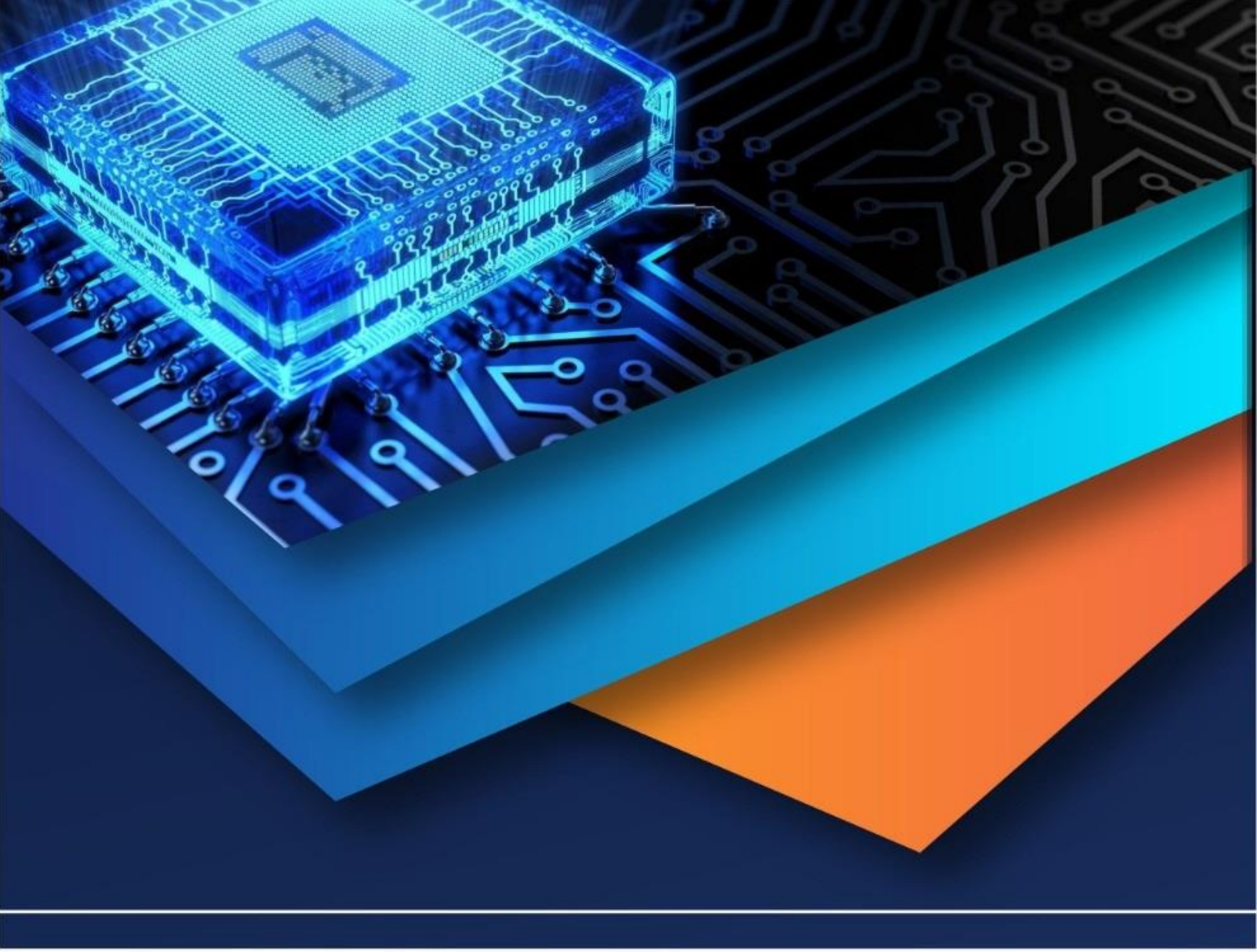
The studies best part is the positive impact of government resourcefulness like Swadesh Darshan, PARASAD schemes and National strategy for Rural Homestay in promoting sustainable tourism in Garhwal. Due to all these schemes and attempts infrastructure improved, tourist footfall increased, environment improved, accessibility enhanced and local communities empowered. Community based tourism encouraged cultural preservation and economic stability. Formalization of homestay and expedition of market is possible by NIDHI portal. As per the primary data collected from 211 respondents 75% of respondents observe the reduction in out-migration with the introduction of tourism related activities. 82% of respondents observe effective in increasing tourist footfalls trough the govt. schemes to promote home stay and tourism. Overall these findings indicate the positive impact of successful tourism growth with community development ensuring long term benefits for the region. Continues government support and community engagement is necessary to sustain the positive impacts.

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