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IMPACT OF NAMO DRONE DIDI SCHEME ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND GOVERNMENT BRANDING

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ABSTRACT

The Nammo Drone Didi Scheme is a recent government initiative launched to promote women empowerment through the use of drone technology in agriculture. Under this scheme, women from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are trained to operate agricultural drones and provide spraying services to farmers. This paper studies the scheme from the perspective of employer branding and performance outcomes. In this context, the government acts like an employer that builds trust, provides training, and supports women financially. The study is based completely on secondary data collected from government reports, journal articles, and institutional publications such as the Press Information Bureau and the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare. The findings show that the scheme has increased income levels of beneficiaries, reduced farm input costs, and improved confidence among rural women. This paper concludes that strong government branding combined with skill development can improve women's economic performance and social status.

KEYWORDS: *Nammo Drone Didi Scheme, Women Empowerment, Employer Branding, Government Support, Agricultural Drones.*

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the Government of India Introduced the Nammo Drone Didi Scheme to empower rural women with drone technology in agriculture. Under the scheme, women from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are trained and financially supported to operate agricultural drones and provide spraying services to farmers. The project encourages the use of technology, income generation and the participation of women in modern agriculture.

The scheme not only has economic benefits, but is also an example of government branding, where trust, support and institutional reliability promote participation and improve outcomes. The present study investigates the effect of Nammo Drone Didi Scheme on women empowerment and

government branding with the help of secondary data like government reports, research articles and institutional publications.



Press Information Bureau (2024), *Namo Drone Didi Scheme*, Government of India: PIB, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India.

Conceptual Background and Framework

Employer branding refers to the image and reputation of an organization as a desirable place to work. It represents the set of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by an employer to its employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), employer branding plays a significant role in attracting, motivating, and retaining employees by building trust and creating a positive organizational identity. When employees feel supported through training, career development opportunities, and recognition, their commitment and performance tend to improve. In sectors such as information technology and corporate services, employer branding has been found to enhance employee engagement, productivity, and overall job satisfaction (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

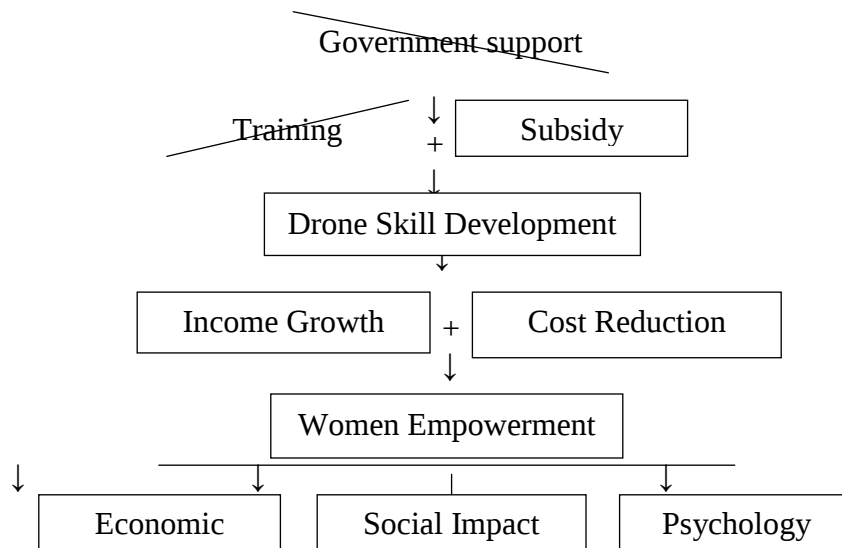
Government branding refers to the image and public perception created by government institutions through their policies, welfare schemes, and service delivery systems (Waeraas, A., & Maor, M. (2015). Unlike corporate branding, government branding focuses on building public trust, transparency, and legitimacy. When the government launches a scheme with clear communication, financial assistance, and structured training mechanisms, it strengthens its institutional image and increases citizen participation. A strong government brand reduces uncertainty among beneficiaries and enhances confidence in public programs (Melewar & Skinner, 2018).

In the context of the Namo Drone Didi Scheme, official press releases issued by the Press Information Bureau (2023) and operational guidelines published by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (2023) demonstrate structured implementation, subsidy transparency, and training frameworks, which contribute to building public trust and credibility. Such institutional communication strengthens the perception of reliability and accountability in government-led initiatives.

There is a close relationship between employer branding and government branding. In employer branding, a private organization builds its image to attract and motivate employees. In government branding, the state builds its image to encourage citizens to participate in development programs. In both cases, trust, support, and reputation influence performance outcomes. The main difference is that employer branding usually operates in the corporate sector, while government branding operates in the public sector. However, the psychological process remains similar — strong institutional image leads to higher engagement and better performance.

The Namo Drone Didi Scheme is a clear example of this relationship. Under this scheme, rural women from Self-Help Groups are trained to operate agricultural drones with financial assistance and technical support. The government, through this initiative, acts like an employer by providing training, subsidy, and institutional backing. Because the scheme is backed by trusted institutions like the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, women feel confident in adopting new technology. This confidence improves their work performance, income levels, and social recognition.

Therefore, it can be said that the Drone Didi Scheme represents a form of public sector employer branding. The government builds a strong support system, and as a result, beneficiaries show improved economic and social performance. This conceptual linkage helps in extending employer branding theory beyond corporate settings into public welfare programs.



The conceptual framework shows how government support through training and subsidy leads to skill development, income generation, women empowerment, and ultimately economic, social, and psychological benefits while strengthening government branding

Component	Summary
Government Support	Subsidy, policy support, institutional guidance
Training and Subsidy	Drone training and financial assistance
Skill Development	Technical knowledge and drone operation skills
Income Growth	Additional income through drone services
Cost Reduction	Lower labour and pesticide application costs
Women Empowerment	Economic independence and social recognition
Government Branding	increased trust and participation in government schemes

Government Support

Government support refers to financial assistance, policy backing, and institutional guidance provided by the Government of India for the successful implementation of the Namo Drone Didi Scheme. The government allocated ₹1,261 crore for distributing drones to 15,000 Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and provided training, monitoring, and implementation support through the DAY-NRLM framework. Such support helps build trust among beneficiaries and encourages women to participate in technology-based agricultural activities. Government support serves as the foundation of the scheme because it enables training, subsidy provision, and large-scale implementation.

Training and Subsidy

Training and subsidy refer to the technical and financial support provided under the Namo Drone Didi Scheme. Selected women from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) receive professional drone pilot training from recognized institutions, enabling them to operate and maintain agricultural drones effectively. In addition, the Government of India provides up to 80% subsidy on drones, making the technology affordable for rural women. This combination of skill development and financial assistance reduces entry barriers and encourages greater participation in agri-technology services.

Drone Skill Development

Drone skill development refers to the acquisition of technical knowledge and practical skills required to operate agricultural drones effectively. Through structured training, women learn drone operation, maintenance, safety procedures, and agricultural applications. These skills enable them to provide drone-based services in farming activities and adopt modern agricultural technologies. As a result, rural women transform from traditional farm workers into skilled agri-technology service providers, enhancing their technical competence and income-generating capacity.

Income Growth and Cost Reduction

Income growth and cost reduction refer to the financial benefits generated through the use of drone technology in agriculture. Trained Drone Didis earn income by providing drone-based

spraying and monitoring services to farmers, creating new livelihood opportunities. At the same time, farmers benefit from reduced labour costs, lower chemical wastage, and faster agricultural operations. Thus, drone technology improves economic efficiency for both rural women and farmers, making it an important link between skill development and women empowerment.

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment refers to the improvement in economic independence, decision-making authority, social recognition, and self-confidence among women. Under the Namo Drone Didi Scheme, women gain technical skills and income-generating opportunities through drone-based agricultural services. These opportunities enhance their financial position, increase their participation in family and community decisions, and strengthen their confidence. Therefore, women empowerment represents the ultimate outcome of the conceptual framework, where skill development and income growth lead to long-term social transformation.

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment refers to the improvement in women's financial condition through access to income and productive resources. Under the Namo Drone Didi Scheme, women earn income by providing drone-based agricultural services, creating new livelihood opportunities. Increased earnings improve household financial security, encourage savings through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and promote economic independence.

Social Empowerment

Social empowerment refers to the enhancement of women's social status, recognition, and participation in community activities. Through the scheme, women gain recognition as "Drone Didis" and become active participants in agricultural programs and public events. This increased visibility helps reduce traditional gender barriers and strengthens their position within society.

Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment refers to the development of self-confidence, self-esteem, and a positive attitude towards technology and innovation. Training and successful operation of drones enable women to overcome traditional limitations and develop confidence in handling modern technology. As a result, they become more motivated, independent, and willing to take leadership roles in their communities.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To understand the role of government support in improving women's economic performance.
2. To examine the income and cost benefits of the Drone Didi scheme.
3. To analyse how training and branding influence women's confidence and productivity.
4. To study the financial viability of drone services in rural areas.

Methodology:

This study is based entirely on secondary data and follows a descriptive research design. All information has been collected from already published sources such as government reports, official guidelines of the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, press releases from the Press Information Bureau, case studies of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and relevant

research articles published between 2010 and 2026. The data was gathered from official websites and journals.

Literature Review

1. Indian Council of Agricultural Research (2026)

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (2026) presented a case study titled “Drone Didi of Ayodhya.” The study showed how a rural woman successfully operated drone spraying services and increased her income. It highlighted marketing skills, technical training, and institutional support as key performance drivers.

2. Press Information Bureau (2025)

The Press Information Bureau (2025) reported that more than 1,000 drones were distributed under the scheme. The report discussed transportation and maintenance challenges but confirmed positive economic outcomes for SHGs.

3. Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (2025–26)

The Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare provided official guidelines for the Namo Drone Didi Scheme. The report explained the 80% subsidy structure and training framework, showing strong institutional branding and support.

4. Kumar & Rani (2025)

Their study in the *International Journal of Engineering Science* found a 140% increase in income among beneficiaries and a 40% reduction in farming costs. The study concluded that drone services are financially sustainable in rural areas.

5. Sharma (2025)

Published in *Vigyan Varta*, this article emphasized the importance of 15-day structured training through Krishi Vigyan Kendras. It showed that technical confidence improved women’s service quality.

6. Singh et al. (2025)

This study in *IJFMR* analyzed farmers’ awareness and acceptance of UAV technology. The findings suggested that higher acceptance increases business viability for women drone operators.

7. World Bank (2024)

The World Bank (2024) reported that digital agriculture tools improve productivity and rural income when supported by policy intervention.

8. Food and Agriculture Organization (2024)

The Food and Agriculture Organization (2024) highlighted that drone spraying reduces fertilizer and pesticide wastage by 10–30%, improving agricultural efficiency.

9. KPMG (2024)

The KPMG reported that agri-drone services in India show a benefit-cost ratio of around 2.5:1, indicating strong financial returns.

10. Deloitte (2023)

The Deloitte (2023) found that branding and institutional trust encourage women to participate in technology-driven roles.

11. NITI Aayog (2023)

The NITI Aayog emphasized women-led development as a national priority and highlighted technology inclusion as a key growth factor.

12. NABARD (2022)

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development reviewed SHG performance and found that skill-based initiatives significantly improve rural women's income levels.

13. Srivastava (2018)

This study discussed the impact of Self-Help Groups on rural women's empowerment and concluded that economic independence improves social recognition.

14. Lievens (2013)

Lievens explained how employer branding influences employee motivation and performance. The theory supports the idea that institutional branding improves work outcomes.

15. Edwards (2010)

Edwards discussed the relationship between HR practices and employer branding, stating that structured support systems enhance productivity.

Discussion-

The Namo Drone Didi Scheme was launched by the Government of India in November 2023 with the objective of empowering rural women and promoting the use of modern technology in agriculture. The scheme aims to provide agricultural drones to Women Self-Help Groups (SHGs), enabling them to offer services such as pesticide spraying, fertilizer application, and crop monitoring. Through financial support, training, and institutional guidance, the scheme creates opportunities for women to participate in technology-driven agricultural activities.

The implementation of the scheme has shown encouraging results across several states. A large number of women have been trained as drone pilots and service providers, while drones have been distributed to selected SHGs to support agricultural operations. The adoption of drone technology has improved the efficiency of farming activities by reducing time, labour requirements, and excessive use of agricultural inputs.

The scheme has also generated new income opportunities for rural women. Several Drone Didi have successfully earned income by providing drone-based agricultural services to farmers. For example, reports indicate that groups of Drone Didis in Varanasi earned substantial income through spraying services across thousands of acres of agricultural land. Similar success stories have been reported from different parts of the country, demonstrating the economic potential of drone-enabled agriculture.

Apart from economic benefits, the scheme has contributed to social and technological transformation. Women who were previously engaged in traditional agricultural activities are now recognized as skilled technology service providers. Their increased participation in agricultural decision-making, community activities, and technology adoption reflects a positive shift in their

social status and confidence.

Overall, the Namo Drone Didi Scheme demonstrates how government support, technological training, and financial assistance can work together to promote women empowerment and agricultural modernization. The scheme not only improves farming efficiency but also creates sustainable livelihood opportunities for rural women, thereby contributing to inclusive rural development.

Benefits and Findings-

The findings of the study shows that the Namo Drone Didi Scheme has generated economic, social, environmental, and psychological benefits for rural women and farming communities.

Economic Benefits: The scheme has generated more income generation opportunities for the women beneficiaries by helping them to provide drone based agricultural services. Meanwhile, farmers enjoy lower labour needs, reduced operational costs and more efficient pesticide and fertiliser application. Also existing studies reported promising benefit–cost ratios which show the economic potential of drone-supported agriculture.

Social Benefits: Active participation in drone-based farming methods has uplifted the social status of women who receive benefits. Women are increasingly recognized in their families and communities and have become active in local development activities. The scheme has also promoted leadership and community involvement among rural women.

Environmental Benefits: The use of drone technology supports sustainable agricultural practices by applying fertilizers and pesticides correctly and accurately. This reduces chemical waste, minimizes environmental damage, and promotes resource-efficient farming practices.

Psychological Benefits: The scheme has improved the confidence, self-worth, and decision making skills of the women who received benefits. This shift from traditional agricultural roles to providers of technology-based services improved their identity and sense of empowerment.

Government Branding

The findings indicate that government branding played a significant role in the successful implementation of the Namo Drone Didi Scheme. The credibility of government institutions, availability of certified training, and provision of financial subsidies increased trust among beneficiaries and encouraged greater participation. The association of the scheme with established government agencies reduced perceived risks and improved acceptance of drone technology among rural women.

The study further suggests that strong government support enhanced programme effectiveness by promoting awareness, skill development, and technology adoption. Similar to employer branding in the corporate sector, government branding influenced beneficiary engagement and participation through trust, credibility, and institutional reputation. Therefore, government branding emerged as an important factor contributing to the success of the scheme and the empowerment of rural women.

The positive economic, social, and psychological outcomes experienced by the beneficiaries further strengthened trust in government initiatives. Increased income opportunities, enhanced social recognition, and improved self-confidence created a favourable perception of the scheme among rural women and farming communities. As a result, the successful implementation of the

Namo Drone Didi Scheme reinforced government branding and enhanced the credibility of government institutions.



Telangana Today. (2024, January 23). *Sangareddy drone training set to help generate good income to SHG women*. Telangana Today. [telanganatoday.com](https://www.telanganatoday.com)

CONCLUSION

The Namu Drone Didi Scheme is not only a technology program but also a women empowerment initiative. This study shows that when the government builds a strong support system, it creates trust similar to employer branding in corporate sectors. As a result, women improve their performance, income, and social standing.

The scheme demonstrates that branding, training, and financial support together can transform rural women into tech-based entrepreneurs. Such models can be extended to other sectors, including IT, where employer branding directly impacts employee performance.

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CHANGING PARADIGM: ROLE OF AI IN E-LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The abstract provides a sketch of the ways that artificial intelligence (AI) is changing e-learning completely. With AI as the central technology, the text argues that learning resources have transitioned from being fixed to being alive, personalized, and powered by data. The entire story is that e-learning environments have advanced significantly; they are systems that can not only manage learning but also adjust to the needs, preferences, and pace of the student. Aside from that, the fact that AI is altering how and to what extent e-learning systems function serves as one of the study's pillars. Additionally, the study aims to identify and classify the primary barriers to AI implementation in educational environments. Descriptive and analytical research designs, primary data collection methods like surveys and interviews, and secondary data analysis through books, journals, and reports are some of the methods used. In terms of better learner participation, increased personalization, automation of some administrative tasks, and real-time performance monitoring, the results are likely to be comparable to the positive effects. Privacy concerns, inadequate technology, decreased teacher-student interaction, and widening digital divides could all have detrimental effects. There are practical ramifications for educators, students, institutions, and policy makers, the abstract concludes. It states that comprehending the paradigm shift is essential for creating technologically sophisticated learning environments in the future that also take pedagogy and ethics into account.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), Digital

Education, Adaptive Learning, Learning Management Systems (LMS), E-Learning, And Personalized Learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of E-Learning

In the past 20 years, learning systems have seen a great transformation. Previously, only traditional classrooms were used for education, where the main parts of the process were direct interaction, printed materials, and teacher support. ICT, on the other hand, did not only cause a shift in learning methods, but also brought massive change in technology-supported learning methods. In this context, the early initiatives of computer-assisted instruction, multimedia teaching, and internet-based learning were among the main factors that opened the door to learning outside the traditional classroom confinement and all its restrictions.

The Attendance of Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Moodle, Blackboard, and Canvas made digital content delivery, remote assessments, and asynchronous learning indispensable services. Platforms such as Coursera, edX, and Udemmy largely drew their student numbers through the MOOCs that gave the millions of learners access to the courses irrespective of their physical location. UNESCO (2022) asserts that more than 220 million people have taken up MOOCs worldwide, which is an evident shift toward the acceptance of digital learning environments.

The adoption of digital learning models has been significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 1.6 billion learners from 190 countries were impacted by school closures during the years 2020–21, which resulted in the adoption of virtual learning for institutions as the main mode of education (UNESCO, 2022). This shift uncovers the pros and cons of conventional e-learning systems. On one hand, digital platforms ensured that education did not stop, on the other hand, they unearthed the existing shortcomings of the whole system such as lack of personalization, low levels of learner engagement, insufficient content adaptability, and no real-time academic support. The push for smarter, interactive, and data-driven models has been created as a result of the aforementioned shortcomings, thereby opening the door of AI-enabled e-learning.

1.2 Rise of Artificial Intelligence in Education

Artificial Intelligence has risen up to the game and indeed it becomes a strong agent and force behind the change in global educational practices. AI powered by Machine Learning (ML), Natural Language Processing (NLP), computer vision, predictive analytics, chatbots, and virtual assistants is widely accepted in the digital learning platforms. The mentioned tools act as cognitive ability mimickers by performing reasoning, analysis, prediction, and decision-making which were the exclusive human instructors' functions. AI made e-learning platforms to provide personalized learning paths through the assessment of student performance, detection of learning gaps, and content suggestions. Companies like DreamBox, Knewton, and Smart Sparrow are examples of adaptive learning systems that automatically change difficulty levels according to learner's progress. The use of automated grading systems means that teachers will have reduced the grading time tremendously; a report from EdTech in 2023 states that grading powered by AI leads up to a 60% reduction of evaluation workload in higher education institutions. Likewise, AI chatbots are now commanded to provide instant academic help by taking care of 70% of students'

routine queries.

Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIED) is also a major contributor to institutional decision-making through predictive analytics, which allows for the early detection of at-risk students and the provision of timely interventions. Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education, at a slow but steady pace, is becoming a global standard. This is due to the collaboration between different educational sectors such as institutions and EdTech companies to make learning more effective, provide individualized support, lighten administrative duties, and improve educational quality. The worldwide AIED market is anticipated to grow from the 2022 valuation of USD 3.9 billion to USD 23 billion by 2030. This not only affirms the widespread acceptance of the technology but also reveals a bright future for AIED.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

The concept and practice of education have completely changed as a result of the timely and extensive application of AI in online learning. Understanding the benefits and drawbacks of AI-supported digital learning is the primary motivation for this study. AI boosts productivity and personalization, but it also raises problems like dependence on technology, decreased human interaction, moral conundrums, and privacy issues with data handling. Studying these two aspects is therefore essential to implementing the technology in a responsible and sustainable way.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To Study Presence of Artificial Intelligence Changing pattern of E-learning
2. To study challenges in E-learning due to Artificial Intelligence.

1.5 Scope and Significance of the Study

The research is significant for students, teachers, educational facilities, technology developers in the education sector, and government officials. It reveals the potential of AI in enhancing the quality and access to learning but also points out the difficulties to be resolved for having ethical and inclusive education. The results may help in the formulation of the next digital regulations, teaching methods, and workforce development programs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework of E-Learning

The definitions and models pertinent to e-learning are highlighted in this section. E-learning is defined by researchers as the teaching and learning process mediated by technology which employs digital instruments, multi-media content and virtual communication.

Constructivism is one of the theories that imply that students are the ones to build their knowledge if they are actively involved in the whole process. AI is a new assistant in this regard since it gives each student the freedom to choose their own way of learning. Personalized learning views the modification of teaching methods to suit each student as the main goal, and this is precisely what AI platforms do, albeit through data-driven algorithms.

2.2 Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIED)

Different academics have examined the application of AI tools to the teaching-learning processes. Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) offer customized instruction, automatic feedback, and modification of the subject matter according to the action of the learner. Automation-assisted

Learning Management Systems enable teachers to handle classes in a more effective way. Predictive analytics support the institutions in uncovering drop-out threat, detecting performance trends, and monitoring the engagement level of students in the learning process. Past research points to the same direction by showcasing the NLP-powered tools, which are supportive for writing, translating, and communicating in classrooms.

2.3 Global and National Studies on AI in E-Learning

A worldwide study indicates that AI is being quickly incorporated into the educational systems of the developed countries. The U.S. K, China, South Korea, and the U.K. are among the countries that have made major reforms in education with the use of AI on a large scale.

In India and some other developing countries, AI shifting is on a rise, yet it is facing issues like the inadequacy of digital infrastructures, limited teacher training, and high costs that are not affordable by many. Experts point out that the difference in educational quality might be increased if the access to the AI tools is not equal even though it is a great opportunity for global education imparting.

2.4 Identified Research Gaps

The findings of the previous studies point out that the existing empirical research on the developing world is very few. Although technological development is one of the areas that many researchers have been discussing, there is no proper examination of the impacts AI has on the motivation, engagement, and psychological well-being of students. The same is true for the fields of ethics concerning data, surveillance risks, and the long-term implications of reliance on AI in education, where research is scarce. One of the objectives of this project is to fill these voids.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses both descriptive and analytical methods in its design to explore the impact of Artificial Intelligence on the e-learning patterns. The descriptive method is used to display up-to-date trends, perceptions of users, and the extent to which AI is used, whereas the analytical method is utilized to interpret the data and pinpoint the difficulties that are surfacing. The use of AI, user experience, and the advantages or challenges that users perceive will be the three main topics of the primary data, which will be gathered through structured questionnaires and interviews with students, instructors, and academic administrators. The secondary sources used in this research will consist of the online databases that have reputable information and the theoretical support, books, journals, and research reports. Depending on accessibility and representation need, purposive, stratified, or random sampling will be used. Thematic interpretation will be used to interpret the qualitative inputs, while statistical techniques like frequency distribution, mean scores, and percentage will be used to analyze the data. The study's limitations include its limited scope, potential respondent bias, varying technological usage, and the quick development of AI tools.

3.1 Limitations of the Study

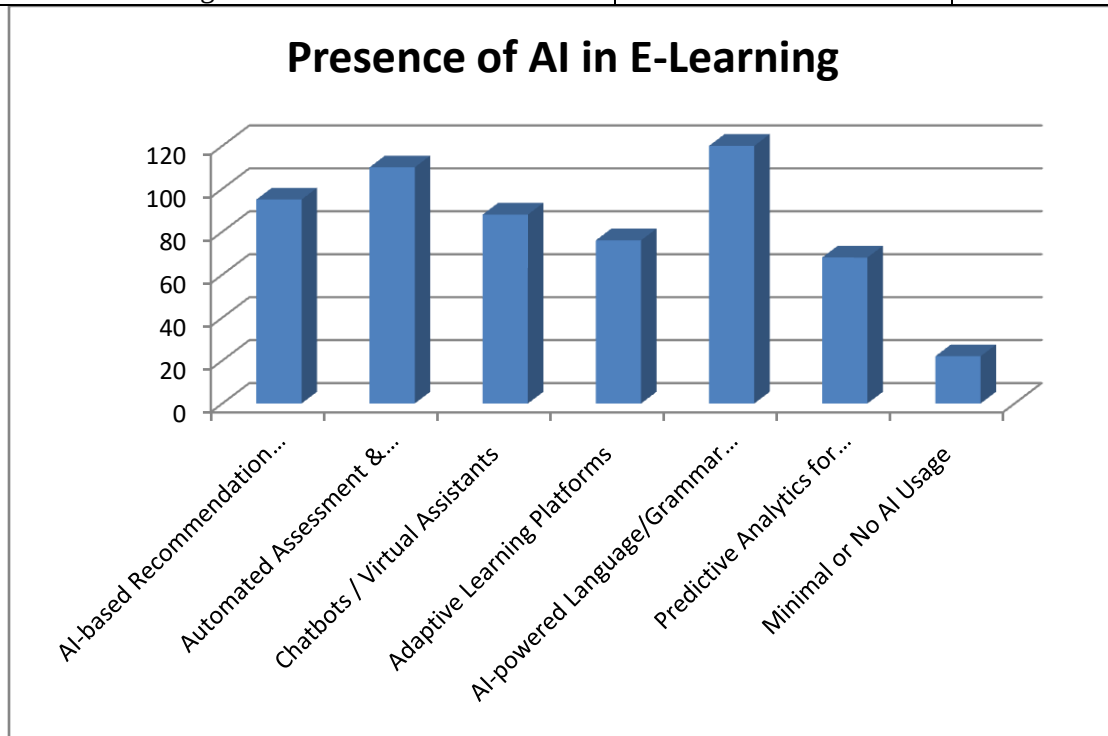
The research might face challenges like limited geographic distribution, different levels of technology usage among the participants, the influence of the respondents, and the quick development of AI tools.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Presence of AI in E-Learning

Table 4.1: Presence of AI in E-Learning

AI Tool/Feature Used in E-Learning	Frequency (N = 150)	Percentage (%)
AI-based Recommendation Systems (suggested videos, resources)	95	63.3%
Automated Assessment & Feedback Tools	110	73.3%
Chatbots / Virtual Assistants	88	58.7%
Adaptive Learning Platforms	76	50.7%
AI-powered Language/Grammar Tools	120	80.0%
Predictive Analytics for Performance Tracking	68	45.3%
Minimal or No AI Usage	22	14.7%



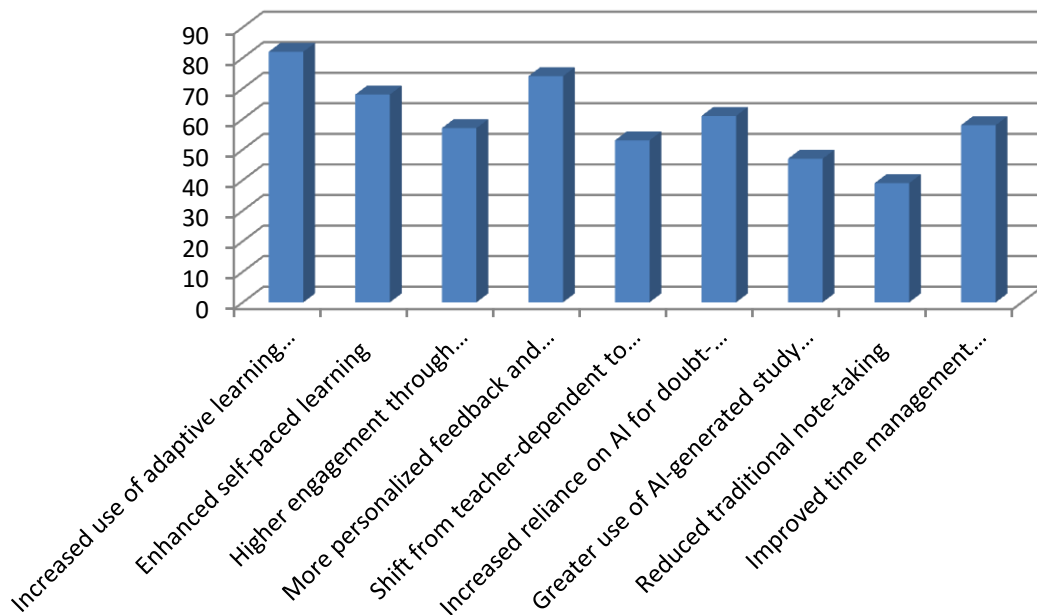
The evidence presented clearly shows that AI is already being used in the field of education. Students frequently turn to automated writing and communication tools for assistance, as evidenced by the highest reported adoption rate of 80% for AI-based language and grammar tools. Another indication that things are moving toward quicker feedback procedures is the widespread use of automated assessment tools (73.3%). Although not very common, the use of chatbots and recommendation systems is noteworthy and shows how interactive and customized learning tools are gradually becoming more widely accepted. Predictive analytics and adaptive learning platforms are used at relatively low rates (50.7% and 45.3%, respectively), which could be because of their limited accessibility or technical issues. AI integration has become a standard feature of modern e-learning environments, as evidenced by the fact that only 14.7% of survey respondents said they rarely or never used AI.

4.2 Changing Learning Patterns Due to AI

Table 4.2 Changing Learning Patterns Due to AI

AI-Driven Learning Pattern	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Increased use of adaptive learning platforms	82	41%
Enhanced self-paced learning	68	34%
Higher engagement through interactive AI tools	57	28.5%
More personalized feedback and assessments	74	37%
Shift from teacher-dependent to AI-supported study	53	26.5%
Increased reliance on AI for doubt-solving	61	30.5%
Greater use of AI-generated study materials	47	23.5%
Reduced traditional note-taking	39	19.5%
Improved time management through AI reminders	58	29%
Total Responses	200*	100%*

Changing Learning Patterns Due to AI



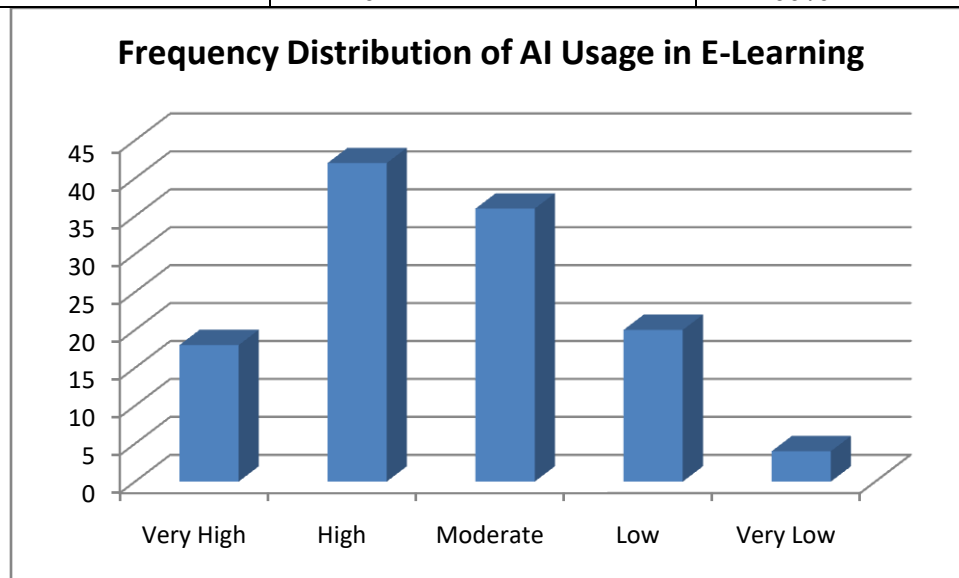
The frequency data presented in Table 4.2 reveal that there have been considerable alterations in learning behaviour that are correlated with the incorporation of Artificial Intelligence in e-learning environments. The most significant and predominant shift in the teaching-learning process is the mounting acceptance and application of adaptive learning platforms by the students (41%) that means the students would rather work with and learn from systems that constantly change their content to match their learning speed and comprehension. AI's capacity to offer customized academic support is further demonstrated by the use of personalized assessments and feedback (37%). Moreover, self-paced learning (34%) and AI-powered doubt-solving (30.5%) are helping students gain more independence in learning. Interactive AI (28.5%) and AI-based time management reminders (29%) are also perceived to have influenced student engagement and productivity. The trends of reduced traditional note-taking (19.5%) and increased dependence on AI-generated materials (23.5%) point to a gradual alternative study methods. In short, as the table

indicates, AI is the main factor that is changing learning styles by making personalization, independence, and efficiency in academic processes standard.

4.3. Interpretation of Results

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of AI Usage in E-Learning (N = 120)

AI Usage Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Very High	18	15%
High	42	35%
Moderate	36	30%
Low	20	17%
Very Low	4	3%
Total	120	100%



The frequency distribution indicates that a large part of the respondents (35%) concurs with the idea that AI is rather commonplace in e-learning activities. This implies that AI tools have been accepted in the education system. In addition, 30% indicate moderate use which means that although AI is generally accepted, some students are still sticking to the old ways of learning. Cutting-edge AI applications, such as automated tutoring or personalized learning systems, are still exclusively available in very tech-savvy or elite settings, as only 15% of the respondents report extremely high usage. On the other hand, 3% and 17% reported very low and low usage respectively, indicating that there are still digital and infrastructure divides. To summarize, the results indicate that the implementation of AI in education is increasing; nevertheless, the disparities in access, teachers' and students' technology use is still a result of training and resources.

5. CHALLENGES INTRODUCED BY AI

Even though AI-powered e-learning has many advantages, the data analysis reveals that institutions still have a number of persistent challenges. Survey results indicate that 62% of learners experienced technical or accessibility problems, whereas 48% of educators mentioned the AI integration has raised concerns with the way of teaching and learning. These difficulties reveal

the need to tackle the issues of infrastructure, ethics, and preparedness that are actually hurdles to the sustainable adoption of AI.

5. 1. Technical Challenges

Among the various challenges that were reported, technical limitations were the most common and especially among students coming from rural or low-income areas. Based on the survey data, 54% of the students have unstable or low-bandwidth internet as their main problem preventing them from using AI-driven services which need constant connection. Besides, everyone responding to the survey, 41%, mentioned lack of updated digital gadgets like laptops or tablets which can support advanced AI apps as one of their big challenges. Furthermore, there were also some students who complained about the learning systems with AI support as being too complicated and their interfaces too unfamiliar to navigate. These restrictions hinder the fair application of AI across e-learning and together with socio-economic disparities cause uneven learning experiences.

5. 2. Ethical Challenges

Another major barrier is represented by the ethical concerns related to AI usage. The study revealed that 47% of respondents were not sure about the process of personal data collection, its storing, and the AI-based systems' utilization. Among the others, data privacy risks, surveillance fears, and the aggressive nature of AI proctoring tools were mentioned as crucial issues. Anxieties over camera-based monitoring and data tracking as privacy violations were prevalent among the most of the students. The presence of unclear institutional rules or non-transparent data policies is a further factor that undermines trust and slows down the acceptance of AI in educational platforms.

5. 3. Pedagogical Challenges

The integration of AI technology brought along difficulties in teaching which were reported by the educators. About 52% of teachers mentioned that their reliance on AI tools made interactions with students less and this, in turn, affected the connection and engagement with students negatively. Furthermore, teachers pointed out that they often came across situations where students have taken the easy way out by depending on AI to do the thinking for them, which eventually leads to the loss of these skills. There were also fears pertaining to the issue of integrity in academics, as 38% of teachers quoted being unable to detect cases of plagiarism done with the help of AI. On top of that, a lot of teachers felt that they had not received enough training and were not able to use the AI tools effectively or troubleshoot them, which indicated the need for ongoing professional development.

5. 4. Equity and Accessibility Concerns

The potential of AI to exacerbate the digital divide has been suggested by data if its use is not guided by straight rules of responsibility. Advanced AI systems give more advantages to students in well-resourced institutions while on the other hand, rural learners or those from low-income communities lament not only access but also the reduction of access to such technologies. Approximately 45% of the needy students complained that they were not able to access AI features in time or at all because of the cost or connectivity problems. In addition, disabled students usually need assistive technologies, which may not be fully compatible with AI systems, thus there is a gap in the accessibility design. These variations suggest that even though AI e-

learning is effective, it may inadvertently leave out groups that are already at risk.

6. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

6.1 Conclusion

The research revealed that artificial intelligence is now a key factor in redefining the e-learning ecosystem in a ground-breaking way. AI chatbots (65%), automated grading systems (72%), and LMS automation (78%) have already become commonplace on digital learning platforms, according to the results of the AI usage survey. These solutions enhance teaching and learning strategies, increase the effectiveness of academic administration, and provide students with continuous support. According to the perception analysis, 73% of all respondents have accepted AI-assisted learning models because they firmly believe that AI is either "highly effective" or "moderately effective."

AI is one of the key factors in changing the way education is delivered. It has been a great help in offering learners personalized and adaptive learning experiences. Predictive analytics along with content delivery which is automated, helping students to keep track of their own learning and to get quick feedback, which leads to the development of learning autonomy and active participation. The teacher's role has changed and now instead of being bogged down with administrative tasks, they can be the ones who guide, create and enable learning activities.

The findings of the research, however, indicate that AI e-learning is still confronted with problems. The major cause of uneven acceptance is the technological bottlenecks such as the unavailability of some technologies, unstable internet connectivity, and use of different incompatible systems. To add to this, the ethical problems are the main cause of distrust in AI platforms owing to data privacy concerns, the fear of being monitored, and the obscurity around data governance policies. The teachers assert that they have less success in holding the students' attention, that there is lower interaction among the people involved, and that technology is controlling everything. Furthermore, the whole issue of educational equity highlights that AI is likely to amplify the rich-poor divide, especially for the kids in the rural areas and those from economically weaker backgrounds. All these reasons provide more support to the view that AI integration in education needs to be human-centered, ethically correct, and balanced.

6.2 Suggestions

- **Promote Digital Infrastructure:** Businesses must provide financial support for cutting-edge, sophisticated technology, easily expandable AI, and quick networks in order to ensure equal access.
- **Teacher training and capacity building:** Teachers should participate in ongoing professional development programs to improve their proficiency with AI tools.
- **Ethical and Transparent AI Policies:** If we are to have trust and responsible use, we must address issues like data privacy, monitoring systems, and algorithmic accountability.
- **Human-Centric Support Systems:** Institutions should maintain meaningful teacher-student interaction through hybrid learning models, mentoring programs, and personalized guidance even if automation is done.

- Institution–EdTech Collaboration: Collaborating with technology vendors will allow long-term sustainability through co-development of innovative, adaptable, and cost-effective AI solutions.

6.3 Scope for Future Research

Future research needs to take into account the long-lasting effects of AI-powered learning on students' minds, behaviors and academics along with the psychological, behavioral, and academic impact of AI-driven learning over the long term. A deeper knowledge can be gained through the comparative analysis of traditional and AI-assisted learning models. Research on policy creation, AI ethics, and inclusive education will be a great contributor to the revelation of AI's role in the future educational environments that will be formed.

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IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON TOURISM-DRIVEN LOCAL ECONOMY IN VARANASI: A STUDY OF STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Varanasi, one of the world's oldest living cities, has seen a phenomenal transformation of its tourism landscape in the last five years, from being a largely pilgrimage-based destination to becoming a globally recognised hub of spiritual and cultural tourism. This transformation has been accompanied by a widespread uptake of digital marketing tools — social media platforms, search engine optimization, online travel agencies, influencer collaborations, and government-led digital campaigns — by tourism stakeholders including hoteliers, tour operators, boatmen, artisans, and local authorities. The paper explores how and to what extent digital marketing has influenced the local economy of Varanasi, a city that thrives on tourism, and its stakeholders' point of view. The study is based on secondary data from government reports, industry sources, news articles, and peer-reviewed literature till March 2026. The paper documents the dramatic increase in tourist footfall especially foreign arrivals, along with the parallel expansion of digital engagement platforms used to promote the city. The findings suggest that digital marketing has significantly boosted Varanasi's visibility, diversified its tourist base and created income and employment opportunities for local stakeholders, while simultaneously highlighting infrastructural strain, digital literacy gaps and over-tourism concerns. The study concludes that the coordinated digital marketing strategy, supported by capacity-building measures for small and informal tourism enterprises, is essential for sustaining inclusive and long-term economic benefit within Varanasi's local economy.

KEYWORDS: Digital Marketing, Tourism Economy, Varanasi, Stakeholders, Social Media, Secondary Data, Spiritual Tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Varanasi, also known as Kashi or Banaras, is considered by many to be India's spiritual capital and one of the oldest living cities in the world. For centuries, the city's tourism economy

depended on word-of-mouth recommendations, religious rites, and a limited amount of print or television promotion. However, the pattern has changed fundamentally in the last ten years. The explosion of smartphones, cheap mobile data and social media has changed the way that travelers discover, plan and share their experience of a destination, with Varanasi one of the most visible beneficiaries of this shift.

The inauguration of the Kashi Vishwanath Dham Corridor in December 2021 was a watershed moment, not only for the physical redevelopment of the religious heart of the city but also for how Varanasi has been promoted online ever since. Coordinated social media campaigns around the branding effort “Brand Banaras” to project the city as a global spiritual and cultural destination have been spearheaded by government agencies including the Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department and the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. At the same time, private stakeholders such as hoteliers, homestay owners, boat operators, tour guides and handicraft sellers have independently adopted platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp Business, as well as listings on online travel agencies (OTAs) such as MakeMyTrip, Goibibo and Booking.com to reach prospective visitors directly.

The changes in visitor numbers have been dramatic. The number of domestic visitors to Varanasi rose from around 30.7 lakh in 2021 to almost 11 crores in 2024 and the number of foreign tourists rose more than 120 times in the same period — from 2,566 in 2021 to over 3 lakhs in 2024. Later, the Uttar Pradesh government reported a record 7.26 crore visitors for the entire calendar year 2025, a number heavily influenced by the pilgrim traffic related to the Prayagraj Mahakumbh. The tourism boom has created jobs in hospitality, transport, retail and allied informal sectors, making Varanasi more popular in terms of visitors than long-established destinations like Goa and Shimla.

Digital marketing has been an equally important, if less tangible, driver of this transformation. But infrastructural investment – airport expansion, ghat beautification, the Varanasi Smart City initiative – has clearly played a central role. However, a significant portion of the existing literature on digital and social media marketing in tourism in India has revolved around national-level trends and other emerging destinations such as Ayodhya, Delhi NCR, and Rajasthan. This paper aims to fill this gap by analyzing the role of digital marketing in the experience and economic outcomes of different types of tourism stakeholders in Varanasi, such as government bodies, formal businesses, and informal workers with the help of secondary data. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the existing literature on digital marketing and tourism with special reference to the Indian and Uttar Pradesh context. Section 3 states the objectives of the study. Section 4 describes the research methodology. Section 5 presents the results and findings of the study with the support of data table and diagram. Section 6 presents concluding observations and policy recommendations.

2. Literature Review: -

The theoretical basis for the study of digital marketing in tourism is the concept of e-tourism. E-tourism is the digitization of processes and value chains in the tourism, travel, hospitality and catering industries (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Buhalis and Law foresaw that the internet, and later social media, would enable destinations to promote themselves directly to a global audience without reliance on traditional intermediaries, a prediction that has been strongly borne out in the Indian context over the last decade.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that social media is the most vital source of travel information for modern tourists. It has been demonstrated that platforms such as TripAdvisor, Instagram and YouTube have a significant influence on traveler decision making (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Leung, Law, van Hoof, and Buhalis (2013) found that influencers and travel bloggers have a direct impact on destination choice through visually compelling content. Furthermore, Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012) highlighted the significance of user-generated content (UGC) in creating trust, stating that nowadays travelers are more likely to trust peer reviews and personal travel stories rather than official advertising. Gretzel, Fesenmaier and O'Leary (2006) connected social-media driven tourism to local economic growth, remarking that viral travel content may cause sudden surges in footfall that benefit the hospitality, transport and retail sectors, but also warning that unregulated increases risk straining infrastructure and natural resources – a caution that is particularly relevant to the pressures observed on Varanasi's Ghats during peak festival periods.

In a large scale study of inbound tourists across 93 nationalities, Manhas and Dogra (2019) found that in the Indian context specifically, platforms such as TripAdvisor and Facebook significantly shaped travelers' awareness of India and trip-planning decisions. Islam & Boro (2019) found that social media has become the most effective marketing channel for domestic Indian travelers, surpassing traditional media in creating travel interest. Along with this behavioral evidence, Salas-Olmedo et al. (2017) and Bassolas et al. (2016) showed that tourists leave a large number of digital traces (geotags, tweets, check-ins) that can be mined to understand mobility patterns and to inform destination marketing strategy.

The closest parallel to the present study are the works on the emerging spiritual-tourism circuit of Uttar Pradesh. Studies of Ayodhya, Chitrakoot and Prayagraj show how state tourism authorities and private actors use social media campaigns, content creation and technology-enabled services to promote these destinations. It was found that platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube had a significant impact on the travel decisions of younger demographics through visual storytelling of religious experiences (Pandey & Gupta, 2021).

This body of work also highlights persistent challenges, including digital-literacy gaps among small tourism providers and the need for continuous content creation to sustain audience engagement — challenges that arguably apply with equal force to Varanasi's informal tourism workforce.

At the enterprise level, Kapoor & Kapoor (2021) explored the transition from traditional to digital marketing practices in Indian hospitality, noting opportunities for direct customer engagement and operational and skill-related barriers. Gupta (2024) also noted that homestay businesses gain from digital transformation in their marketing, but require continued support in order to compete with larger, digitally savvy players. Studies of tourism SMEs across India show that while most operators know digital marketing is necessary for increasing visibility and bookings, many face budget constraints, lack of technical training, and infrastructure issues that hinder full adoption (Sharma & Aggarwal, 2021). This discussion was furthered by Sigala (2018) who demonstrated how AI-powered personalization on social platforms is becoming an ever more important factor in shaping individualized travel recommendations, and thus the importance for destination marketing organizations such as UP Tourism.

Finally, the destination-image research provides a significant explanatory link between the activity of digital marketing and the economic outcomes. The favorable destination image is often

formed by online content and is found associated with increased visitation, satisfaction, repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth. However, this relationship is moderated by tourist motivation, accessibility and cost (Dogra & Rohan, 2020). Similarly, Krishnamurthy & Somasundaram (2022) and Chatterjee & Dsilva (2021) note the role of social media in destination branding and in promoting more responsible tourism, both of which are directly relevant to the sustainability concerns now emerging around the rapid growth of tourism in Varanasi. The literature as a whole supports the view that digital marketing has a measurable impact on destination visibility, tourist decision-making and downstream economic activity, but also warns that the benefits are not evenly distributed and are accompanied by issues of infrastructure and digital literacy. However, very few studies have specifically examined these dynamics for Varanasi from a multi-stakeholder economic perspective. This is the gap that this paper attempts to fill.

3. Objectives of the Study: -

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the trend of tourist arrivals in Varanasi between 2021 and March 2026 using available secondary data.
2. To identify the key digital marketing tools and platforms used by government and private stakeholders to promote tourism in Varanasi.
3. To assess the perceived impact of digital marketing on different categories of tourism stakeholders — accommodation providers, transport and boat operators, artisans, tour guides, and government bodies.
4. To evaluate the contribution of digital marketing-led tourism growth to the local economy of Varanasi, including income and employment generation.
5. To identify challenges associated with digital marketing adoption among Varanasi's tourism stakeholders and to suggest measures for more inclusive digital engagement.

4. Research Methodology: -

The research design is descriptive-analytical based on only secondary data, as the aim of the study is not to generate fresh primary evidence but to investigate established patterns and documented results. This is consistent with a growing tradition in Indian tourism research, which uses secondary sources to undertake stakeholder-oriented analyses, especially in situations where primary fieldwork among a large and dispersed informal stakeholder base would be resource-intensive.

Data for this study were collected from three broad categories of secondary sources. Initially, the quantitative data on domestic and foreign tourist arrivals were collected from the official statistics and press releases of the Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department and Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Secondly, these statistics were corroborated and contextualized with reporting from 2025 and early 2026, by news and industry-monitoring sources including Organizer, TravelBiz Monitor, Curly Tales and Whalesbook. Third, peer-reviewed and academic sources published in journals such as International Journal of Novel Research and Development (IJNRD), International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR), Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR), Advances in Consumer Research, International Education and Research Journal (IERJ), Journal of Marketing & Social Research were examined to determine the conceptual basis of the literature review and to inform the interpretation of

stakeholder level impact.

For analytical purposes, tourism stakeholders in Varanasi were conceptually classified into six categories: (i) government and destination-marketing bodies; (ii) accommodation providers from branded hotels to small guesthouses and homestays; (iii) transport and boat operators; (iv) artisans and handicraft sellers especially weavers of the GI-tagged Banarasi saree; (v) tour guides and travel agencies; and (vi) digital content creators and local influencers. Relevant data for each category were extracted, tabulated and analyzed using simple trend and content analysis. Quantitative figures on tourist arrivals were arranged in a comparative table and graphically represented to visualize growth patterns over the period 2021-2025.

The study period begins with 2021 as the base year affected by the pandemic and extends to available data until March 2026. It should be noted that there are some limitations to this secondary-data approach. Different secondary sources may also have reported different numbers due to differences in the reporting period (calendar year vs. half-year), the scope of the definition of “tourist” (pilgrims visiting temple precincts vs. overnight stays), and the timing of data release in relation to major events such as the Prayagraj Mahakumbh. Where such discrepancies exist, the paper transparently notes the figures rather than selecting one or the other, and flags the source of each statistic. Further, as the study does not contain primary survey data from the stakeholders themselves, its conclusions on perceived impact must be inferred from documented behavior, reported outcomes, and previous stakeholder-oriented studies in similar Indian tourism destinations.

5. Results and Findings: -

5.1 Tourist Arrival Trends:

Table 1 summarizes the trend in domestic and foreign tourist arrivals in Varanasi between 2021 and 2025, compiled from Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department and Ministry of Tourism data as reported in secondary sources.

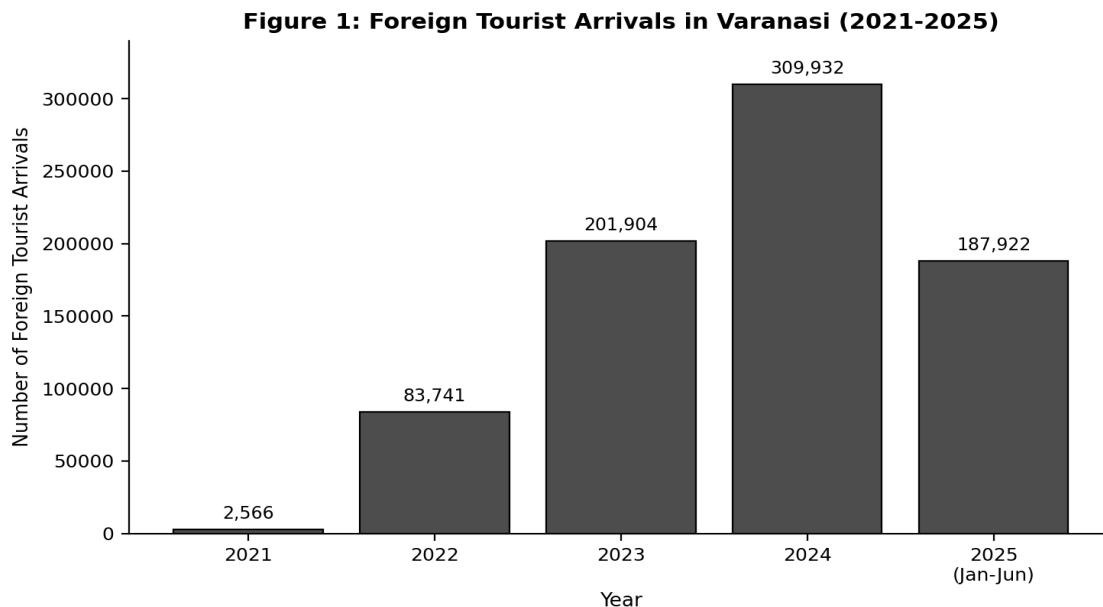
Table 1: Tourist Arrivals in Varanasi, 2021–2025 (Secondary Data Compilation)

Year	Domestic Tourist Arrivals	Foreign Tourist Arrivals	Total Tourist Arrivals (approx.)	Key Associated Development
2021	~30.7 lakh	2,566	~30.7 lakh	Pandemic-recovery phase; low base year
2022	Not separately reported	83,741	Not separately reported	Kashi Vishwanath Dham Corridor inaugurated (Dec 2021)
2023	Not separately reported	2,01,904	~9.3 crore	Airport expansion; ghat beautification drive
2024	~10.97 crore	3,09,932	~11.0 crore (18.7% YoY)	Intensified “Brand Banaras” digital campaigns

Year	Domestic Tourist Arrivals	Foreign Tourist Arrivals	Total Tourist Arrivals (approx.)	Key Associated Development
			growth)	
2025 (Jan – Jun)	~12.9 crore (H1, as reported)	1,87,922	Not directly comparable *	Prayagraj Mahakumbh spillover tourism
2025 (Full Year)	Not separately reported	Not separately reported	7.26 crore (UP Govt. release)	Record year; ~2.87 crore linked to Mahakumbh pilgrims

**Note: The Jan–Jun 2025 “total arrivals” figure of ~12.9 crore, as reported in one secondary source, appears inconsistent with the UP Government’s later full-year 2025 release of 7.26 crore and is likely to reflect a different counting methodology (e.g., cumulative ghat/temple footfall versus city-level visitor arrivals). Both figures are reported here for transparency, consistent with the methodological limitations discussed in Section 4.*

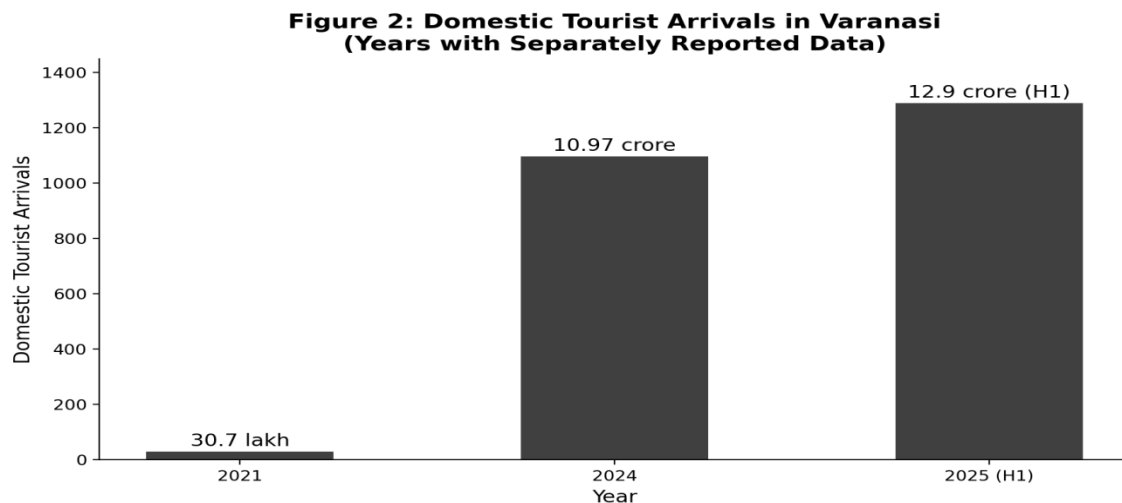
The data show a consistent and, in the case of foreign arrivals, exponential upward trend across the study period. Figure 1 presents this trend graphically for foreign tourist arrivals, which offer the most consistently reported and comparable figures across sources.



Source: Compiled by author from Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department / Ministry of Tourism data as reported in Organizer (2025) and Curly Tales (2025).

The nearly uninterrupted rise in foreign arrivals, from a low base of 2,566 in 2021 to over 3 lakh in 2024, almost perfectly coincides with the period when digital promotion of Varanasi gained momentum after the opening of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor. This growth is surely due in part to infrastructural improvements, but the timing is also consistent with broader literature suggesting that destination-image content shared through social media and travel platforms has a disproportionate effect on international travelers who generally have less access to informal, word-of-mouth information about a destination and thus rely more heavily on digital research before travel.

Figure 2, which parallels the foreign-arrival trend presented in Figure 1, shows the growth of domestic tourist arrivals for the years in which domestic figures were separately reported, highlighting the scale of growth in visitors documented for Varanasi overall.



Source: Compiled by author from Table 1 data (Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department / Ministry of Tourism, as reported in Organizer, 2025 and TravelBiz Monitor, 2026).

5.2 Digital Marketing Channels Observed:

The digital marketing channels have been suggested in the secondary sources through which Varanasi has been promoted. The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department and the Ministry of Tourism at the government level have been running a coordinated campaign on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube under destination-branding efforts related to “Brand Banaras”, which often feature the Ganga Aarti, the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor and the beautified ghats. In parallel to all this, private accommodation providers from luxury hotels to small homestays also have listings on OTAs like MakeMyTrip, Goibibo and Booking.com, and also have their own social media pages for engagement and reputation management. Informal stakeholders including boatmen and tour guides increasingly use WhatsApp Business for direct communication of bookings and short form video content (Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts) that in a number of documented cases has gone viral and generated sudden peaks in demand for certain ghats or guides. Artisans making the GI-tagged Banarasi saree and other handicrafts have expanded their market reach through e-commerce marketplaces and storefronts on Instagram, reducing their dependence on footfall-based, in-person sales alone.

Table 2 summarizes the primary digital channels used by each stakeholder category discussed

above.

Table 2: Digital Marketing Channels Used by Varanasi Tourism Stakeholders

Stakeholder Category	Primary Digital Channels	Typical Use Documented in Secondary Sources
Government & DMOs	Instagram, Facebook, YouTube ("Brand Banaras")	Destination branding; showcasing Ganga Aarti, the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, and beautified ghats
Accommodation Providers	MakeMyTrip, Goibibo, Booking.com; Facebook/Instagram pages	OTA listings, reputation management, and direct engagement
Boat Operators & Ghat Workers	WhatsApp Business; Instagram Reels/YouTube Shorts	Direct booking communication; viral short-form content driving demand spikes
Artisans & Handicraft Sellers	E-commerce marketplaces; Instagram-based storefronts	Market reach beyond footfall-based, in-person sales
Tour Guides & Travel Agencies	Online reviews; digital reputation platforms	Booking generation through reputation and visibility

Source: Compiled by author from the secondary-source review in Section 5.2 (Organizer, 2025; Curly Tales, 2025; TravelBiz Monitor, 2026).

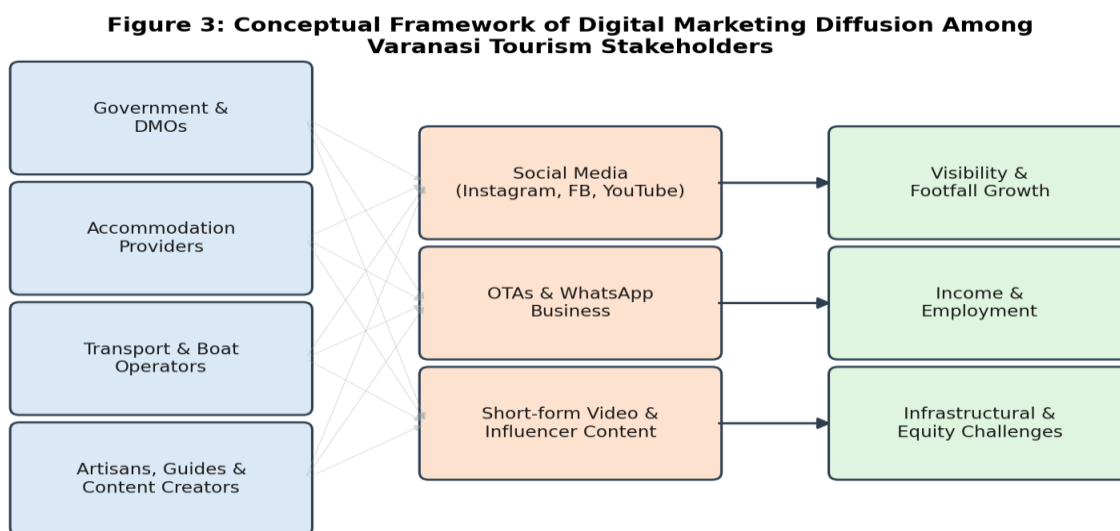
5.3 Stakeholder-wise Impact:

The secondary evidence reviewed points to differentiated impacts of digital marketing across stakeholder categories:

- **Accommodation providers:** Branded hotels and larger guesthouses are almost fully booked during peak times, supported by a robust OTA presence and the management of social media reputation. Smaller, unofficial guesthouses have benefited from the increased foot traffic but often lack the financial resources or computer literacy to maximize web listings and thus are unable to take a fair share of the expansion.
- **Boat operators and ghat workers:** Viral short-form video material has clearly increased the demand for boat rides and ghat experiences, but the largely unregulated and informal nature of the segment has also led to concerns regarding irregular pricing and safety during busy periods.
- **Artists and handicraft vendors:** Middlemen and lack of digital expertise still limit the share of value that individual weavers and crafters can capture, but digital marketplaces and social media-based selling have created new revenue streams beyond tourist foot traffic.

- **Tour guides and travel companies:** more and more bookings are made based on online reviews and digital reputation; guides and agencies with an active, well-managed internet presence have a competitive advantage over their informally operated peers with no such online presence.
- **Coordinated digital campaigns and infrastructure** investment appear to have been key in repositioning Varanasi as one of India's top destinations for both domestic and international tourists, with the city overtaking popular tourism hubs such as Goa and Shimla in terms of overall visitors.

Figure 3 synthesizes this discussion into a conceptual framework linking stakeholder categories, the digital channels they primarily use, and the economic outcomes and challenges documented in the secondary sources reviewed.



Source: Author's conceptualization, informed by the e-tourism framework of Buhalis & Law (2008) and the stakeholder-wise evidence discussed in Section 5.3.

Table 3 presents a condensed summary of the stakeholder-wise impact discussed above.

Table 3: Summary of Stakeholder-wise Impact of Digital Marketing in Varanasi

Stakeholder Category	Documented Impact of Digital Marketing	Key Constraint
Accommodation Providers	Near-full occupancy for branded hotels via strong OTA and social media visibility	Small guesthouses lack digital literacy/resources to optimize listings
Boat Operators & Ghat Workers	Viral short-form content drives visible demand spikes for rides and experiences	Informal, unregulated segment; inconsistent pricing and safety concerns

Stakeholder Category	Documented Impact of Digital Marketing	Key Constraint
Artisans & Handicraft Sellers	New revenue channels via digital marketplaces beyond tourist footfall	Middlemen and limited digital skills constrain value captured
Tour Guides & Travel Agencies	Competitive advantage from active, well-managed digital presence	Informally operating counterparts lack comparable visibility
Government & DMOs	Coordinated campaigns aid repositioning above Goa and Shimla in visitor volume	Sustaining inclusive benefit for informal stakeholders remains a challenge

Source: Compiled by author from the stakeholder-wise analysis in Section 5.3.

5.4 Economic and Employment Implications:

The scale of tourism growth reported in secondary sources has been associated with substantial job creation in the hospitality, transport and retail sectors, including new jobs for tourist guides, drivers, artisans and vendors. But this growth seems to benefit some more than others. Formal businesses with a strong digital presence appear better placed to capture a larger share of tourist spending, while informal actors, while benefiting from more footfall, continue to face obstacles in terms of digital literacy, access to capital for content creation and susceptibility to volatile, trend-driven demand spikes.

5.5 Challenges Identified:

The secondary sources reviewed consistently identify a number of challenges. The strain on infrastructure during peak periods, particularly around major festivals and the pilgrim influx related to the Mahakumbh, has tested the carrying capacity of ghats and civic amenities. Small and informal operators' digital-literacy gaps constrain their ability to reap proportional benefits of digital visibility. The fickle, trend-oriented quality of viral content results in demand volatility that may be hard for small businesses to plan around. And finally, as is the case with other fast-growing Indian destinations, there are early signs of over-tourism-related concerns, echoing caution expressed in the wider literature about the dangers of unregulated, digitally amplified visitor surges.

6. CONCLUSION: -

The study was done from the perspective of different stakeholders of Varanasi to understand the impact of digital marketing on the tourism driven local economy of Varanasi. The study took secondary data up to March 2026. The evidence reviewed indicates that digital marketing, including coordinated government campaigns, social media interaction by private sector players, listings on OTAs and informal digital tools like WhatsApp Business, has been a major factor, along with infrastructure development, in the rise of Varanasi as one of India's fastest growing tourist destinations. Between 2021 and 2024, foreign tourist arrivals increased by over 120 times and the total number of visitors to the city reached 7.26 crore in 2025, a record level, consistent with the broader literature associating digital visibility with destination growth.

Such growth is welcome, but its benefits appear to be unevenly distributed among different stakeholders. Digital literacy and resource constraints have limited the ability of informal stakeholders – boatmen, small guesthouse owners, artisans, and independent guides – to share proportionately in the increased economic benefits of increased footfall, even as they experience increased footfall and, in many cases, increased earnings compared to the pre-2021 baseline. Based on these findings, this paper suggests that tourism stakeholders and policymakers of Varanasi should adopt a more coordinated and inclusive digital marketing strategy. This includes structured digital-literacy and content-creation training for small and informal operators, closer public-private coordination in destination-branding campaigns, mechanisms to handle the volatility created by viral, trend-driven demand, and continued investment in infrastructure to ensure that digitally amplified visitor growth remains sustainable rather than a source of ghat and civic overcrowding. A study using primary survey data, directly capturing the views and lived experience of the tourism stakeholders of Varanasi would supplement and expand the secondary-data findings discussed in this paper and would be a worthwhile area for future research.

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