



NEPAL
ECONOMIC
FORUM

BOWER
GROUP ASIA

NETFLIX



on Tourism in the Digital Era

Proceedings Report

Nepal Economic Forum
P.O. Box 7025, Krishna Galli,
Lalitpur 3, Nepal

www.nepaleconomicforum.org

Nepal Economic Forum (NEF) is a not-for-profit organization aiming to be Nepal's premier private sector-led economic policy and research institution. We are an impact-driven economic and development think tank that seeks to redefine Nepal's development discourse by analyzing, facilitating and disseminating contemporary issues on society and the economy.

Please write to info@nepaleconomicforum.org, if you have questions or comments with respect to the content.

Event details

This panel discussion was organized by Nepal Economic Form to deconstruct the onset of digital innovation in Nepal, understand the role that the internet, cinema and online social media and streaming platforms play in marketing Nepal as an attractive travel destination, and identify digital platforms as a key driver in promoting tourism.

The event was supported by Netflix, the Bower Group Asia and Sustainable Summits.

The Neftalk was held on June 13, 2022 at the Kathmandu Marriott Hotel.

Event curated by	Nasala Maharjan and Sakshee Singh
Proceedings Report compiled by	Aarya Rijal, Ashish Gupta, Migena Satyal, Pragati Karki, Sayas Dhoj Joshi and Sneha Shrestha
Event Collaterals designed by	Sakshee Singh

Table of Contents –

1. Introduction	Page 1
2. Speakers Profiles	Page 2
3. Speaker notes	Page 3 – 13
4. Key Highlights	Page 14
5. Event Gallery	Page 15
6. Event Recording Link	Page 16

Introduction to the event

Tourism sector, one of the most fundamental economic sectors, has been dramatically altered by digitization. With greater digitization in virtually every aspect of life, the travel experience has undergone a complete and drastic transformation from what it was a few decades ago. Travel has become more economical, accessible, and easy as a result of technological advancements. People of all ages, with varying likes and preferences, are more satisfied than ever before with the digital era.

Digital platforms have revolutionized and helped the Nepali tourist businesses as well. The COVID-19 pandemic has also demonstrated the power of the internet. With people confined to their homes, they turned to the internet and television for entertainment as well as information about foreign cultures and tourism sites. From virtual cookery courses to vlogs, reels, and internet entertainment, the digital world has played a crucial role in helping visitors to experience Nepal's beauty, art, and culture.

With this background, Nepal Economic Forum (NEF) conducted a neftalk titled 'Tourism in Digital Era' to shed light on the context of digitization in Nepal and to deconstruct the onset of digital innovation in the country. The session began with an **introductory video** by Netflix followed by a panel discussion and ended with closing remarks.



The neftalk sought to provide a better understanding of the internet's role in marketing Nepal as a desirable tourist destination, as well as identifying digital platforms as a vital driver of tourism and sustainable tourism in the country. The session brought together prominent national and international speakers, dignitaries, regulators, professionals, sector-specific experts, media, and other individuals from the tourism and hospitality sector of the country.



Tourism in the Digital Era

Speakers:



Ambika Khurana

Director,
Public Policy Netflix



Lisa Choegyal

Tourism Specialists and Convenor,
Sustainable Summits



Jason Shah

Co-Founder,
Hostel Nextdoor and राैथाने ।
Raithaane



Ramyata Limbu

Director,
Kathmandu International Mountain
Film Festival (kimff)



Closing remarks:

Nandini Lahe Thapa

Sr. Director,
PR and Publicity Nepal Tourism
Board



Moderated by:

Sujeev Shakya

Chair,
Nepal Economic Forum

Tourism in the Digital Era



Ambika Khurana

Director, Public Policy Netflix

Ms. Ambika Khurana elaborated on what Netflix is: a curated online digital entertainment service available only through subscription. 70 to 75 percent of Netflix content has subtitles or dubs. Over 220 million users around the world use Netflix as a source of entertainment and leisure. To get those content published and made available for the users, the teams involved check every piece of content before it is made publicly available on the service. If something is deemed inappropriate, a flag is raised; an age rating is assigned; a description is provided, and tags are added to inform users of graphic violence or sexual content.

Having laid a background on Netflix and the procedure for publishing content on the platform, she proceeded to emphasize the role that regulators play in facilitating such digital content production in various parts of the world. According to her, there are a long list of permits that the digital content production team have to obtain in many countries, which is arduous and cumbersome for consumers. Hence, to deliver the material that consumers want on their screens, either clear carriage laws must exist or subscribers must be able to pay digitally.

Finally, Ms. Khurana asserted that digital platforms play a significant role in tourism. Nepal,

Tourism in the Digital Era

particularly, is experiencing a golden age, and this moment in time has the potential to be shared with the rest of the globe so that its citizens and visitors alike might reap its benefits and be drawn to Nepal. The N-world¹ is the future globe, and Nepal has so much to offer the rest of the world in terms of its tangible and intangible cultural artifacts, such as its music, cuisine, festivals, mountains, and natural wonders. In addition to international climbing that has captivated foreign tourists since the release of '14 Peaks', domestic mountaineering has also seen a surge in interest in recent months. Undoubtedly, there's no need to limit Nepal's stories; simply let one's imagination go wild.

[1] In this context, the speaker refers to "N-world" as "Nepal World." It stands for aspects of and from Nepal that can enhance its tourism and spread it around the rest of the world for everyone to see, admire, and draw visitors to Nepal to experience. She is making references to terms like *K-Pop*, *K-Food*, and *K-Culture* - all of which have gained international recognition owing to *Squid Games* and other digital content.

Tourism in the Digital Era



Jason Shah

Co-Founder, Hostel Nextdoor and राथाने । राइथाणे

Mr. Jason Shah elaborated on the growth of content creation, digital tourism, and sustainability around the tourism sector in Nepal. He mentioned that increasing numbers of young people, between the ages of 15 and 29 years, are now traveling and many of them are linking their travel with experimental education, volunteering, au-pairing, and studying abroad. Due to this, he also came to terms with the possibility that this generation of young Nepalis is the first to interact with digitally created content on social media and other platforms in order to develop their narratives about where to travel and work, which has led them to identify as self-proclaimed travelers who have a story to tell.

Adding on, he elaborated on content creation around tourism sector. He mentioned that as an increasing amount of content is being created, it has become equally difficult to distinguish between authentic and unauthentic content. As a result, it is challenging to conserve and define the parameters of authenticity. When uploading and consuming travel content, he argued that debating between what is authentic and what is not leads to a bottomless pit however, there needs to be more awareness regarding the extent of the authenticity of what content is being released.



Tourism in the Digital Era

Lastly, Mr. Shah elaborated on the roles and responsibilities of different travelers. Traveling is deeply inequitable and not an equalizing factor which is why he opines that traveling comes with privileges and responsibilities. It is important to understand who is benefitting and who is at a disadvantage from traveling and take action accordingly. Only if this is carefully carried out and more discourse on the sustainability of the tourism sector is conducted, concrete positive results for the improvement of the sector can be realized.

Tourism in the Digital Era



Lisa Choegyal

Tourism Specialists and Convenor, Sustainable Summits

Ms. Lisa Choegyal discussed how she transitioned from the private sector to sustainable tourism consulting in the Asia-Pacific region, along with writing and film production supporting Nepal. As she is more acquainted with sustainable tourism currently, she expressed her excitement about the opportunities and impact the rise of digital media and social media have brought to the travel industry.

While she acknowledged the COVID-19 pandemic's devastating global impact, it also presented an opportunity to address various problems in Nepal's tourism industry, including the country's high dependency on foreign visitors. In this regard, she opined that domestic tourism in Nepal is vital for keeping the industry afloat through challenging periods like the Maoist insurgency, the Earthquake of 2015 and the pandemic. To tap this market and other opportunities, Nepal can deliver a more immersive regenerative experiential tourism due to its natural and cultural advantages. However, she mentioned that enhancing the quality of these new experiential tourism products must be done.

Furthermore, Ms. Choegyal also highlighted the significant impact of visual imagery as a promotional tool in the digital age. However, current regulation such as those connected to

Tourism in the Digital Era

the usage of modern technology, like the drone, requires vast paperwork and lacks a single-window system² which prevents its use as a marketing strategy. She argued that if such restrictions were eased, capitalizing on the tools through Bollywood³ might be beneficial for the sector.

Lastly, she highlighted the importance of sustainable tourism in Nepal as climate change has caused catastrophe like snow-capped mountains melting and turning black, and water sources drying. Thus, she emphasised using a model like the Sagarmatha and Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP)⁴ which involves locals in conserving a resource vital to the local economy. Overall, Nepal should capitalize on responsible and sustainable tourism, that are already in existence in the country, to attract more domestic and international tourists.

[2] Single Window System is a government-mandated platform that allows for the submission of information to fulfil regulatory requirements for the required party. The platform must be introduced by the government in the entertainment sector in order to make filming simpler and easier as all the paperwork needed for regulatory purposes can be submitted through a single portal and permission for filming by using modern technology can be accessed swiftly.

[3] Bollywood is a name, coined during the 1970s, to refer to the Indian-language film industry based in Mumbai (formerly Bombay). It is India's and world's largest film industry in terms of film produced and released each year.

[4] Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) was launched in 1986 by the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC). It is the first conservation area and the largest protected area in Nepal covering 7,629 sq. km. area.

Tourism in the Digital Era



Ramyata Limbu

Director, Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (kimff)

Representing the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF), Ms. Ramyata Limbu began by emphasizing the importance of films and their ability to entice people to travel. With the proliferation of digital media platforms, filmmakers now have more opportunities to reach audiences and connect with them than ever before. Many people have been encouraged to travel as a result of media depictions of exciting and interesting destinations, resulting in increased tourism. Therefore, digital media can undoubtedly be efficiently used to market and promote tourism in Nepal.

Given this context, she highlighted three key advantages of digital media for the tourism industry. To begin, the decline in the price of watching content has prompted a large number of young people to travel and has led to an uptick in domestic tourism. Second, the abundance of data available now allows content creators to identify and ascertain the kind of content in demand, as well as enables them to build more relevant content. Third, local knowledge-based content (which means content based on local knowledge) is becoming more prevalent as western-style filmmaking becomes less popular. This has allowed creators to promote local culture on a global scale.

Ms. Limbu, then, continued her discussion by drawing parallels between tourism and film



Tourism in the Digital Era

production. The pursuit of new experiences is, in her view, fundamental to both tourism and filmmaking. Promoters of tourism in Nepal pitch the country as a once-in-a-lifetime adventure and entice visitors from all over the world.

Towards the end, she stressed that digital media is a double-edged sword: both a potent tool and an effective weapon. When utilized constructively, it can be beneficial, but when used adversely, it can be harmful. She, thus, asserted the need for a fresh approach and a new strategy for promoting tourism using digital media.

Tourism in the Digital Era



Moderator – Sujeev Shakya

Chair, Nepal Economic Forum

Mr. Sujeev Shakya, the moderator of the session, revolved the discussion on various aspects of tourism and the digital era. He centered the discussion on the link between tourism and digital platforms, as well as self-regulation in determining what material a consumer should opt for. During the discussion, he referred to contemporary developments, such as how vloggers and individuals are able to build new destinations through a video or a selfie, which results in domestic visitor growth on the corresponding new areas, to illustrate how tourism has experienced significant changes.

Towards the end, he closed the discussion on an optimistic note, noting that the next five to ten years will see a similar rapid transformation as the preceding three to four decades; that new digital platforms would emerge; and that there would, undoubtedly, be more travel for a wide range of reasons.



Closing Remarks – Nandini Lahe Thapa

Sr. Director, PR and Publicity Nepal Tourism Board

Ms. Nandini Lahe Thapa – responsible for Tourism Marketing and Promotion at the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) – elaborated on her long and rich experience in the Nepali tourism sector by highlighting tourism as a well-established and mature sector of the economy with forward and backward linkages. She emphasized the role of NTB in reviving Nepal's tourism sector by bringing Nepal at the international stage. As the tourism sector was progressing towards propensity, it was struck by the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent lockdowns. It was at that time that the world's tourism industry began to embrace the potential of digital technology since digital platforms had become the lifeline to keep the world connected.

Continuing her discussion, she emphasized the growing reliance of tourism on digital technology to retain connection and ensure survival of businesses. Digital platform has become the most preferred way of choosing destination, booking tickets and sharing experiences, thereby highlighting the significance of digital technology in rebooting Nepal's tourism. Further, she also underlined how crucial digital technology is to understanding changing traveller preferences. For instance, tourists choose nature-based tourism with an emphasis on sustainability and responsibility, which has been discovered as a result of the increased information accessibility through digital media platforms.



Tourism in the Digital Era

Likewise, she also framed her remarks around some of the advantages and disadvantages of the growing reliance on digital technology. Firstly, she acknowledged the potential of digital technology as a potent instrument for promoting tourism. However, she also recognized the drawbacks of digital technology, and advocated for strict regulation to reduce the risk of misinformation.

Concluding her remarks, she endorsed the notion that there is more to Nepal than just the mountains and Mount Everest when it comes to tourism. She stressed that there is a critical need for rebranding Nepal's tourism to attract a larger audience to the country, and vouched for digital marketing to be the most effective way to do so.



Tourism in the Digital Era

Key Highlights

- Nepal is in the midst of a golden period and has the opportunity to share its tangible and intangible cultural artifacts, including music, cuisine, festivals, mountains, and natural wonders, with the rest of the world through digital platforms to benefit its citizens and visitors.
- The rise of digital content has made it difficult to distinguish between authentic and unauthentic content and to define and conserve parameters of authenticity.
- Digital media can promote tourism in Nepal. Since data is more readily available now, content creators can generate relevant material based on local expertise and promote local culture abroad. As digital media is cheaper, this can also attract domestic travellers.
- Tourists are increasingly choosing sustainable, responsible nature-based tourism due to concerns about climate change and their carbon footprint due to travel.

Tourism in the Digital Era



Neftalk on Tourism in the Digital Era



The Neftalk Panel (Left to Right) – Ambika Khurana, Jason Shah, Lisa Choegyal, Ramyata Limbu and Sujeev Shakya



Closing Remarks by Nandini Lahe Thapa



Neftalk Venue – The Kathmandu Marriott Hotel



Ambika Khurana, Director Public Policy at Netflix

Watch the event recording –



To read other publications by NEF, visit – [thuprai](#) [issuu](#)

Connect with us on –



or write to us at
info@nepaleconomicforum.org



Learn more on the NEF website.

NEPAL
ECONOMIC
FORUM
