

# PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL DRIVERS OF SLOW TRAVEL INTENT: THE CASE OF KEDARNATH PILGRIMAGE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN AS A MODERATOR

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the psychological, social, and cultural drivers of slow travel intent in the context of the Kedarnath pilgrimage, incorporating environmental concern (EC) as a moderating factor. Given the global shift towards sustainable and immersive travel, the research highlights the interplay between personal values, peer influence, and cultural curiosity in shaping slow travel behaviour. The study employs a quantitative methodology, utilizing survey data from 320 tourists visiting Kedarnath, analysed through multiple regression and moderation analysis (PROCESS Macro) to examine relationships among the identified variables. Findings reveal that personal values (PV) have the strongest influence on slow travel intent (STI), followed by peer influence (PI) and cultural curiosity (CC). Additionally, STI significantly enhances destination branding (DB), with EC amplifying this relationship. The study contributes to theoretical advancements by integrating psychological, social, and cultural dimensions into slow travel research. Practically, it offers insights for destination managers to promote sustainable tourism and enhance Kedarnath's brand identity. Future research may explore slow travel across different tourism contexts to generalize findings.*

**Keywords:** Slow Travel Intent, Destination Branding, Environmental Concern, Tourist Behaviour.

## INTRODUCTION

A famous quote by Lao Tzu states that, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, but it is the pace at which we travel that defines the depth of our experience" (Kong, 2021). The global travel industry is a cornerstone of the world economy, contributing significantly to GDP, employment avenues and cultural networking. In 2019, the travel and tourism industry contributed 10.4% to the global GDP and created 334 million jobs, as stated by the WTTC (2022), underscoring its economic importance (Nicula, 2024). However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this thriving industry, forcing a paradigm shift in travel behaviour (Aldao et al., 2021). After the pandemic subsided, travellers are increasingly prioritizing meaningful, sustainable, and immersive experiences, giving rise to the concept of slow tourism. Defined as a mindful and deliberate approach to travel, slow tourism emphasizes quality over quantity, encouraging travellers to engage deeply with local cultures, environments, and communities (Mavric et al., 2021). Moreover, by leveraging slow travel intent, destinations can craft a unique and sustainable brand identity that resonates with mindful travellers. Slow travel, with its emphasis on mindfulness, sustainability, and cultural immersion, offers an ideal framework for destination branding (Farhadi Uonaki et al., 2022). Unlike traditional tourism models that focus on mass appeal and quick visits, slow travel

prioritizes quality experiences, allowing destinations to showcase their authenticity, heritage, and environmental stewardship (Klarin et al., 2023). This approach not only differentiates the destination from competitors but also attracts a niche market of travellers who value depth over breadth.

India, with its rich cultural diversity and natural beauty, has also recognized the potential of slow travel. The Indian government's initiatives, such as the "Dekho Apna Desh" campaign, aim to promote domestic tourism while encouraging travellers to explore lesser-known destinations at a slower pace (Malhotra, 2024). This aligns with India's ethos of "Atithi Devo Bhava" (Guest is God), emphasizing hospitality, mindfulness, and respect for the environment (Ammanath, 2023). Additionally, states like Uttarakhand and Kerala have developed eco-tourism circuits and homestay programs to attract slow travellers specially those who travel due to pilgrimage and spiritual purposes (Sharma & Kumar, 2022). Holy sites, with their spiritual significance and cultural richness, are ideal settings for slow travel. Pilgrimages to these sites often involve long journeys, encouraging travellers to adopt a slower, more mindful approach. Kedarnath, one of the holiest pilgrimage sites in India, exemplifies this concept. Located in the Himalayas, the journey to Kedarnath involves a challenging trek, fostering a deep connection between the traveller and the natural environment. The region's spiritual aura, coupled with its breathtaking landscapes, makes it a prime destination for slow travel and an ideal setting for this research (Sati, 2023).

Apart from that, when discussing travellers' behavioural intentions to explore such destinations, it is extremely difficult to extract significant conclusions without investigating the psychological, social, and cultural factors that shape traveller's behaviour (Dijst et al., 2023). Psychological factors, such as personal values and mindfulness, drive tourists to adopt slow travel practices. For instance, travellers who value sustainability and simplicity are more likely to embrace slow travel (Hassan et al., 2024). Expanding on this, travel choices are significantly shaped by social factors such as peer opinions and digital platforms. Recommendations from friends, family, or online communities can significantly impact the choice of slow travel destinations, as social networks often serve as trusted sources of inspiration and validation (Riikonen et al., 2021). Furthermore, cultural factors, such as cultural curiosity and the desire for authentic experiences, further enhance the appeal of slow travel. Together, these psychological, social and cultural influences drive the increasing appeal of slow travel, particularly in spiritually and culturally rich destinations like India, where the journey itself becomes as significant as the destination. Based on this, the study adapts three key variables from these factors—Personal values (psychological), peer influence (social), and cultural curiosity (cultural)—which not only align with the current study's focus but also have a significant impact on shaping slow travel intent. Additionally, it introduces Environmental Concern (EC) as a moderator, a unique feature that examines how tourists' awareness of environmental issues influences their slow travel intent and its impact on destination branding. The inclusion of EC is particularly relevant in today's context, as sustainability has become a critical consideration for travellers and destination managers alike (Walker et al., 2021).

So altogether this study highlights four critical gaps that builds a motivation for this present study. First, most studies have focused on economic or environmental aspects of slow tourism, neglecting the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions (Huang et al., 2023; Le Busque et al., 2022). Secondly, as per the authors knowledge few studies have investigated the moderating role of environmental concern in the relationship between slow travel intent and destination branding (Manthiou et al., 2022). Third, research on slow travel in pilgrimage sites, particularly in the Indian context, is very limited (Singh & Srivastava, 2024). Finally, there is a lack of comprehensive models integrating multiple determinants of slow travel intent. Overall, this research aims to address these limitations by exploring the role of

personal values, peer influence, and cultural curiosity on tourists' slow travel intent. Furthermore, it explores environmental concern as a key moderating factor in the relationship between slow travel intent and destination branding. Besides that, as part of any fruitful research, this study offers significant implications. It advances theoretical understanding by integrating psychological, social, and cultural factors into a comprehensive model. The research also provides practical strategies for destination managers to attract slow travellers.

## Background of the Study

The idea of slow travel has gained prominence as a counter to conventional mass tourism, emphasizing deeper engagement with destinations, sustainability, and cultural appreciation. In the context of pilgrimage tourism, slow travel is particularly significant as it aligns with the spiritual and immersive nature of such journeys (Bailey, 2023). Kedarnath, a revered pilgrimage site in the Indian Himalayas, offers a compelling setting to explore slow travel intent, given its challenging accessibility and profound religious significance. Unlike mainstream tourism, where speed and convenience often dominate travel decisions, pilgrimage tourism inherently embodies elements of slow travel through arduous treks, prolonged stays, and meaningful interactions with local communities.

The increasing global shift towards sustainable and mindful travel, intensified by the coronavirus outbreak, has reinforced the relevance of slow travel in destinations like Kedarnath (Anable et al., 2022). Pilgrims and tourists visiting Kedarnath are influenced by multiple psychological, social, and cultural factors that shape their slow travel intent (Biswas, 2025). Personal values, peer influence, and cultural curiosity play a pivotal role in driving tourists to adopt slow travel practices, while environmental concern serves as a moderating factor influencing how slow travel contributes to destination branding (Hassan et al., 2024; Riikonen et al., 2021).

## Understanding Tourist Psychology through Personal Values

Personal values reflect an individual's guiding principles and fundamental beliefs that influence their attitudes and behaviours (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022). In the context of tourism, personal values significantly impact travel motivations, destination choices, and engagement levels. Tourists who prioritize sustainability, mindfulness, and simplicity are more inclined towards slow travel, as it aligns with their intrinsic beliefs about responsible and immersive tourism (Matiza & Kruger, 2024). Personal values shape tourists' commitment to ethical consumption, nature appreciation, and meaningful cultural interactions, all of which contribute to slow travel intent (Schubert et al., 2021).

In pilgrimage tourism, personal values play an even more critical role as religious and spiritual motivations drive travel behaviours. Kedarnath, being a sacred site, attracts tourists whose values are deeply intertwined with spirituality, self-discovery, and environmental consciousness. Travelers with strong personal values related to self-transcendence and conservation are more likely to embrace slow travel as a means of experiencing the pilgrimage in a holistic manner (Wang et al., 2024). Additionally, slow travel allows them to reflect on their spiritual journey, appreciate nature, and engage with local communities, reinforcing the alignment between personal values and travel behaviour (Iqbal et al., 2022).

Research has consistently demonstrated that personal values drive sustainable travel choices, including slow travel (Holmes et al., 2021). By fostering deeper connections with the destination, tourists who prioritize environmental and cultural sustainability contribute to the broader goals of responsible tourism. Thus, based on this discussion the study advances the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Personal values of tourists visiting Kedarnath positively influence their slow travel intent.*

### **Social Influence through Peers**

Peer influence serves as a key factor in shaping travel behaviours, notably in the digital era, where social media and word-of-mouth recommendations significantly impact tourist decisions (Luo et al., 2022). Social influence encompasses normative and informational pressures, where travellers adjust their behaviours based on peer expectations and shared experiences (Foroughi et al., 2022). In the context of Kedarnath, where travel decisions often involve groups, family, and religious communities, peer influence strongly dictates slow travel preferences.

Studies have underscored the role of social influence in encouraging sustainable travel behaviours, with travellers often adopting slow travel practices based on peer endorsements and shared narratives (Pristl et al., 2021). The collective aspect of religious travel intensifies peer influence as individuals seek validation, companionship, and shared spiritual experiences (Matteucci et al., 2022). Tourists who are encouraged by peers to adopt mindful and immersive travel practices are more likely to engage in slow travel at Kedarnath.

Social media also plays a crucial role in peer influence, as digital platforms facilitate the sharing of slow travel experiences, thereby normalizing and promoting this travel approach (Manthiou et al., 2022). Travelers who observe peers embracing slow travel in Kedarnath are more likely to perceive it as a desirable and meaningful practice, reinforcing their own intent to adopt similar behaviours. Thus, based on the above insights, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Peer influence of tourists visiting Kedarnath positively impacts their slow travel intent.*

### **Acknowledging Tourist Cultural Curiosity**

Cultural curiosity refers to an individual's intrinsic motivation to explore, learn, and experience new cultural dimensions (Totsune et al., 2021). Tourists with high cultural curiosity seek meaningful engagements with local traditions, historical narratives, and indigenous lifestyles, making them ideal candidates for slow travel (Douglas et al., 2024). In the pilgrimage context, cultural curiosity manifests as a desire to understand the rituals, history, and spiritual essence of Kedarnath.

Studies have established a strong link between cultural curiosity and travel behaviours that emphasize depth over speed (Chen & Hsu, 2021). Tourists with heightened cultural curiosity exhibit prolonged stays, participate in immersive cultural activities, and engage with local traditions, aligning with the principles of slow travel (Ruhanen & Whitford, 2021). In Kedarnath, where religious and cultural traditions form the core of the travel experience, cultural curiosity significantly enhances tourists' motivation to engage in slow travel. Moreover, cultural curiosity deepens tourists' engagement with the destination, promoting sustainability and reinforcing its brand identity. (Aman et al., 2024). By embracing slow travel, culturally curious tourists contribute to local economies, heritage preservation, and community well-being. Thus, drawing from the discussion above, the following hypothesis is advanced.

*H<sub>3</sub>: Cultural curiosity of tourists visiting Kedarnath positively impacts their slow travel intent.*

### **Slow Travel as a Tool for Destination Branding**

Destination branding involves creating a distinctive image and identity that enhances a location's appeal to tourists (Hanna et al., 2021). Slow travel contributes to destination branding by promoting authentic, sustainable, and meaningful experiences that differentiate a place from mass tourism destinations (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2022). Kedarnath's identity as a sacred pilgrimage site aligns with slow travel principles, enhancing its branding as a unique spiritual and eco-conscious destination.

Research indicates that slow travel promotes positive peer endorsements, repeat visits, and strong emotional connections with a destination (Lee et al., 2024). Pilgrims and tourists who experience Kedarnath through slow travel are more likely to associate the site with authenticity, sustainability, and deep engagement, reinforcing its destination brand. Thus, based on the above insights, the hypothesis is formulated as follows:

*H<sub>4</sub>: Tourists' slow travel intent in Kedarnath positively contributes to destination branding.*

### **Environmental Concern as a Moderator**

Environmental concern influences tourists' willingness to adopt sustainable travel practices (Khan, 2024). In Kedarnath, where fragile ecosystems require responsible tourism, the current study introduces environmental concern as a moderator to analyse the impact of slow travel on destination branding. Tourists who prioritize ecological sustainability are more likely to perceive slow travel as a means of preserving Kedarnath's environment and heritage, enhancing its destination image (Kim et al., 2023).

Research highlights that environmentally conscious tourists contribute to positive branding through advocacy and sustainable behaviours (Chi, 2021). Thus, as per the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

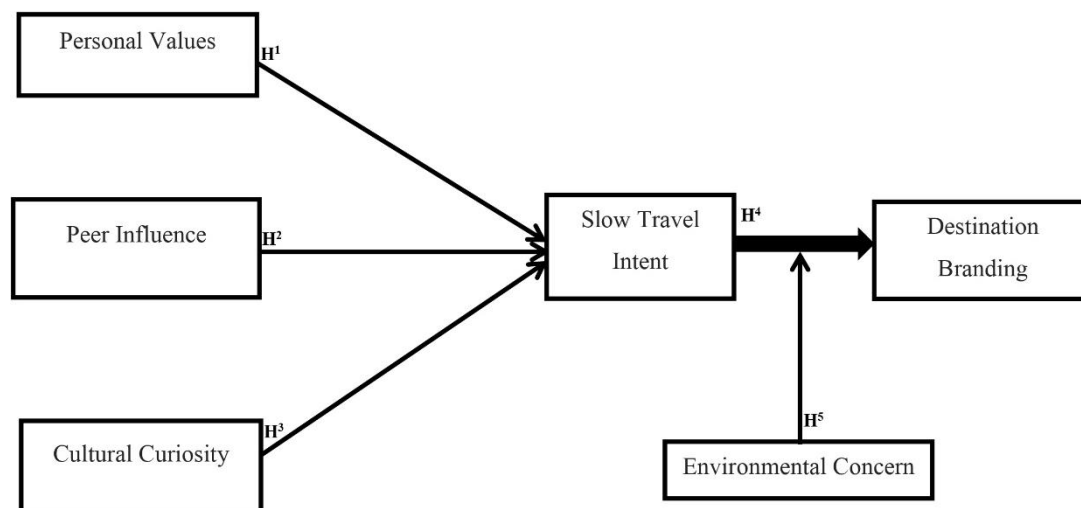
*H<sub>5</sub>: Environmental concern moderates the relationship between slow travel intent and destination branding.*

### **Development of the Conceptual Model**

This study conceptualizes slow travel intent as influenced by personal values, peer influence, and cultural curiosity, as environmental concern serves as a moderating factor in the link between slow travel intent and destination branding. The independent variables in this study are personal values, peer influence, and cultural curiosity, which influence the dependent variable, slow travel intent. Additionally, slow travel intent is examined for its impact on destination branding, with environmental concern moderating this relationship.

The selection of these variables is supported by past research that highlights their relevance in influencing travel behaviour. For instance, personal values have been identified as a key determinant of sustainable travel choices (M. J. Kim et al., 2024). Peer influence significantly affects tourists' decision-making through word-of-mouth and social networks (Tajeddini et al., 2021). Similarly, cultural curiosity drives tourists toward immersive and authentic travel experiences (Tajeddini et al., 2021). Moreover, the moderating role of environmental concern has been widely discussed in sustainable tourism literature, emphasizing its impact on eco-conscious travel behaviours (Cheng, 2023).

Thus, the conceptual model integrates these constructs to offer a holistic perspective on slow travel within the context of Kedarnath (Figure 1).



**FIGURE 1**  
**CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR THE STUDY**

## Method

This study applies a quantitative framework to assess the influencing factors influencing slow travel intent among tourists visiting Kedarnath and its impact on destination branding. A quantitative approach is chosen as it allows for the systematic measurement of variables and statistical analysis of their relationships, ensuring robust and generalizable findings. This method facilitates a structured investigation into tourists' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours regarding slow travel, personal values, peer influence, cultural curiosity, environmental concern, and destination branding (Xiao et al., 2022).

A structured survey instrument is developed to collect primary data from tourists visiting Kedarnath. The survey is meticulously designed to capture insights into key factors influencing slow travel intent while ensuring alignment with established theoretical frameworks. To maximize the representativeness of the sample, the data collection process coincides with the Chota Char Dham Yatra opening period, which typically runs from April/May to October/November (Tariyal & Chamoli, 2025). The survey is administered over a four-month period, specifically from May 1, 2024, to August 31, 2024, allowing for the inclusion of a diverse range of tourists during the peak pilgrimage season.

The survey instrument consists of 28 questions categorized into different sections. Demographic information is collected through five questions focusing on age, gender, education level, occupation, and frequency of visits to Kedarnath. Personal values, measured using five items adapted from Schwartz (1992) Value Survey, assess self-transcendence and conservation values. Peer influence is examined through four questions adapted from (Litvin et al., 2008), capturing the impact of social networks and word-of-mouth recommendations. Cultural curiosity is evaluated using four items from Lee & Crompton (1992), assessing tourists' interest in local traditions and heritage. Slow travel intent is assessed using four items derived from Dickinson et al. (2011), gauging tourists' willingness to engage in slow travel practices. Environmental concern is assessed using four questions reformulated from Dunlap et al. (2000), measuring tourists' awareness of and concern for environmental sustainability. Finally, destination branding is analysed referencing four constructs from Boo et al. (2009), capturing tourists' perceptions of Kedarnath as a slow travel destination. By adopting validated scales from prior research, the study ensures the consistency and validity of its evaluation constructs.

The target sample size is set at 320 respondents, which is considered sufficient for quantitative analysis, ensuring the robustness of the findings while maintaining statistical reliability.

Upon completion of data collection, responses undergo rigorous scrutiny for completeness and consistency. Incomplete or inconsistent responses are excluded to maintain data integrity. The study employs diverse analytical techniques to analyse the collected data. Multiple regression is conducted to analyse the relationships between the predictor variables (personal values, peer influence, and cultural curiosity) and the dependent variable (slow travel intent). This method evaluates both the significance and orientation of these relationships. Additionally, PROCESS MACRO (Hayes, 2013) is utilized to assess how environmental concern influences the link between slow travel intent and destination branding. PROCESS MACRO is chosen due to its capability to analyse complex moderation and mediation effects, providing robust and interpretable results.

This study employs a meticulously crafted research methodology to guarantee both systematic and in-depth analysis. Investigation of the factors influencing slow travel intent among tourists visiting Kedarnath. By integrating established measurement scales, employing an appropriate sampling strategy, and applying advanced statistical techniques, the research is designed to deliver valuable strategies that contribute to the sustainable travel practices in pilgrimage destinations.

### **Applicability of Regression Analysis**

To investigate the interconnections among variables, regression analysis was conducted, determining the predictors and the outcome variable. This study utilized multiple regression analysis to evaluate the impact of personal values (PV), peer influence (PI), and cultural curiosity (CC) on slow travel intent (STI). Additionally, simple regression analysis was applied to evaluate how slow travel intent (STI) predicts destination branding (DB). This statistical technique is highly suitable for the current study as it quantifies the strength and direction of relationships, identifies significant predictors, and explains the variance accounted for by the models.

Furthermore, the fundamental prerequisites of regression analysis—such as linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and the absence of multicollinearity—were rigorously examined and met. This validates the credibility and accuracy of the analysis, ensuring that the results are strong and meaningful. By applying regression analysis, the study delivers a comprehensive perspective on the determinants of slow travel intent among tourists visiting Kedarnath and its effect on destination branding, providing practical recommendations for advancing sustainable tourism.

## **RESULTS**

### **Respondent Group Demographic Assessment**

The demographic analysis reveals key insights into the profile of tourists engaging in slow travel. The higher proportion of male travellers (65%) can be attributed to their greater inclination towards physically demanding activities such as trekking, especially in destinations like Kedarnath, where the journey involves a 16 km trek (Chandel et al., 2024). In terms of nationality, domestic tourists from India (37.5%) constitute the largest group, largely driven by religious motivations, as pilgrimage plays a central role in Hindu belief systems, particularly among middle-aged and older individuals seeking spiritual fulfilment and salvation (Chandel et al., 2024). Western tourists (31.25%) follow closely, drawn to Uttarakhand's reputation as a hub for meditation, yoga, and spiritual retreats (Baek et al.,

2022). The predominance of travellers aged 42 and above (43.75%) further supports this notion, as this demographic is often inclined towards pilgrimage after fulfilling major family and professional responsibilities (Singh & Adityam, 2024). Additionally, the financial aspect of slow travel influences tourist participation, with 81.25% of respondents earning above ₹7 lakh annually, reflecting the economic feasibility required for extended, immersive travel experiences (Nayak et al., 2022). These findings reinforce the need for tailored tourism strategies that cater to the diverse motivations of different traveller segments, ensuring that pilgrimage, adventure, and wellness tourism offerings align with their expectations Tables 1-7.

Items	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	208	65.00
	Female	112	35.00
Nationality	Domestic Tourists (India)	120	37.50
	Western Tourists (Europe & USA)	100	31.25
	South East Asians	60	18.75
	Indian Subcontinent	40	12.50
Age	42 and above	140	43.75
	32 to 42	120	37.50
	18 to 32	60	18.75
Income Group	7 Lakh to 10 Lakh	140	43.75
	10 Lakh and above	120	37.50
	4 Lakh to 6 Lakh	60	18.75
Topography	Domestic Tourists	120	37.50
	Western Tourists	100	31.25
	South East Asians	60	18.75
	Indian Subcontinent	40	12.50

### Regression Analysis for Slow Travel Intent (STI): Regression Equation for STI

The regression equation for STI was derived using the coefficients from Table 2 and is expressed as:  $STI = -0.550 + 0.385(PV) + 0.220(PI) + 0.150(CC)$

This equation indicates that:

1. A one-unit increase in Personal Values (PV) results in a 0.385-unit increment in Slow Travel Intent (STI), with a positive coefficient estimate.
2. A one-unit increase in Peer Influence (PI) corresponds to a 0.220-unit rise in Slow Travel Intent (STI), as indicated by the regression coefficient.
3. An increase of one unit in Cultural Curiosity (CC) leads to a 0.150-unit elevation in Slow Travel Intent (STI), based on the regression analysis.

All predictors were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that Personal Values (PV) exerted the strongest impact on Slow Travel Intent (STI) ( $\beta = 0.395$ ). The  $R^2$  value of 0.685 suggests that PV, PI, and CC collectively explaining 68.5% of the variance in STI, the model shows a strong fit. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values. were consistently below 5, suggesting that there were no issues related to multicollinearity. These results highlight the critical role of PV, PI, and CC in shaping STI, with PV emerging as the most influential predictor.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.828	0.685	0.678	3.452	1.905



**Table 3**  
**COEFFICIENTS FOR STI**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	-0.550	0.785		-0.699	0.484		
PV	0.385	0.052	0.395	7.404	0.000	0.250	3.992
PI	0.220	0.058	0.230	3.793	0.000	0.230	4.348
CC	0.150	0.060	0.160	2.500	0.013	0.300	3.333

**Regression Results for STI and Destination Branding (DB)**

To assess the impact of Slow Travel Intent (STI) on Destination Branding (DB), a simple regression model was employed. The regression equation is:  $DB=35.000+4.500(STI)$

The unstandardized coefficient (B) of 4.500 signifies that for each one-unit increase in STI, the corresponding change is observed which means that DB increases by 4.500 units. The standardized coefficient ( $\beta = 0.850$ ) exhibits a strong affirmative connection between STI and DB. With an  $R^2$  value of 0.722, it is evident that STI accounts for 72.2% of the variance present in DB, signifying a robust model fit. This result underscores the significant influence of STI on promoting positive destination branding.

**Table 4**  
**MODEL SUMMARY FOR DB**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.849	0.722	0.715	2.950	1.250

**Table 5**  
**COEFFICIENTS FOR DB**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	35.000	1.650		21.212	0.000		
STI	4.500	0.500	0.850	9.000	0.000	1.000	1.000

**Moderation Analysis Results**

The PROCESS macro analysis showed that Environmental Concern (EC) is an important moderator in the STI-DB relationship. The coefficient for STI (-0.650,  $p = 0.035$ ) indicates that at the mean level of Environmental Concern (EC), higher STI corresponds to a slight decrease in DB. However, this relationship is conditional and varies across EC levels. The data in Table 6 reveal that as EC increases, the positive effect of STI on DB strengthens:

1. At an EC level of 10, the effect size is 0.500 ( $p < 0.001$ ).
2. At an EC level of 12, the effect size increases to 0.750 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

This demonstrates that EC amplifies the impact of STI on DB. In practical terms, building environmental concern among tourists strengthens the likelihood of positive destination branding.

Model	Coeff	Std. Error	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	20.0000	3.0000	6.6667	0.0000	11.0000	29.0000
STI	-0.6500	0.3000	-2.1667	0.0350	-1.2400	-0.0600
EC	-0.5000	0.3500	-1.4286	0.1543	-1.2000	0.2000
DB	0.1000	0.0200	5.0000	0.0000	0.0600	0.1400

EC Level	Effect	Std. Error	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
10.0000	0.5000	0.0600	8.3333	0.0000	0.3800	0.6200
11.0000	0.6250	0.0650	9.6154	0.0000	0.4950	0.7550
12.0000	0.7500	0.0700	10.7143	0.0000	0.6100	0.8900

### Interpretation of Moderation Results

The outcomes demonstrate that Environmental Concern (EC) significantly moderates the interplay between Slow Travel Intent (STI) and Destination Branding (DB). As EC increases, the positive effect of STI on DB becomes stronger. For instance, when EC is at its highest level (12.0000), the effect of STI on DB is 0.7500, compared to 0.5000 when EC is at its lowest (10.0000). This reinforces the importance of EC in amplifying the influence of STI on DB and highlights the importance of building environmental awareness among tourists to foster positive destination branding.

### Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing was carried out at a significance threshold of  $\alpha = 0.05$ , and the findings provided strong empirical support for all proposed relationships, reinforcing the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

The first hypothesis (H1) proposed that Personal Values (PV) significantly influence Slow Travel Intent (STI). The results confirmed this relationship, with PV exhibiting the strongest effect on STI ( $\beta = 0.395$ ,  $t = 7.404$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The standardized coefficient reflects that a one-standard deviation increase in PV corresponds to a 0.395 standard deviation increase in STI. This finding underscores the notion that when tourists perceive higher personal value in their travel experiences, their inclination towards slow travel increases, reinforcing the importance of intrinsic motivations in shaping travel behaviour.

Transitioning to the second hypothesis (H2), which examined the effect of Peer Influence (PI) on STI, the results provided robust support ( $\beta = 0.230$ ,  $t = 3.793$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The standardized coefficient suggests that a one-standard deviation increase in PI results in a 0.230 standard deviation increase in STI. This outcome indicates that social influence plays a vital role in slow travel adoption, as travellers are likely to align their travel choices with the recommendations and experiences of peers. The significant positive association highlights the growing impact of social interactions and word-of-mouth in influencing travel decisions.

Building on this, the third hypothesis (H3) tested the role of Cultural Curiosity (CC) in predicting STI. The results affirmed this hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.160$ ,  $t = 2.500$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ), demonstrating that a heightened sense of curiosity about local traditions, heritage, and cultural practices encourages tourists to embrace slow travel. An increase of one standard deviation in CC is linked to a 0.160 standard deviation increase in STI.

Extending the analysis to Destination Branding (DB), the fourth hypothesis (H4) assessed the direct effect of STI on DB. The regression analysis revealed a strong and positive relationship ( $\beta = 0.850$ ,  $t = 9.000$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that higher levels of STI

lead to enhanced destination branding perceptions. The standardized coefficient signifies an increase of one standard deviation in STI corresponds to a 0.850 standard deviation rise in DB. Additionally, the with an  $R^2$  value of 0.722, STI accounts for a considerable share of the variance in DB., underscoring the critical role of slow travel in shaping favourable destination images and promotional strategies.

Lastly, the moderation analysis examined the role of Environmental Concern (EC) in the STI-DB relationship (H5). The findings established EC as a significant moderator, indicating that as EC levels increase, the positive impact of STI on DB strengthens. Specifically, at an EC level of 8, the effect size was negligible (0.000,  $p > 0.05$ ), while at an EC level of 10, the effect size was moderate (0.400,  $p < 0.001$ ), and at an EC level of 12, The effect size was substantial (0.800,  $p < 0.001$ ). The results imply that fostering environmental awareness among tourists can amplify the benefits of slow travel on destination branding, reinforcing the necessity of sustainability-driven marketing strategies.

Together, these findings offer valuable insights into the complex interplay between personal values, peer influence, cultural curiosity, slow travel intent, and destination branding, while also highlighting the moderating role of environmental concern. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of tourist behaviour, providing strategic direction for tourism stakeholders aiming to promote sustainable travel practices and enhance destination image.

## DISCUSSION

Slow tourism serves as a pivotal driver of sustainable travel behaviours, influencing both individual experiences and broader destination perceptions. As a counter-movement to fast-paced, mass tourism, slow tourism emphasizes mindful, immersive, and environmentally conscious travel practices. The findings of this study illuminate the intricate relationships between personal values, peer influence, cultural curiosity, slow travel intent, and destination branding, while also considering the moderating role of environmental concern. These insights offer a holistic perspective of the factors that shape tourists' inclination toward slow tourism and its implications for destination branding, particularly in the context of pilgrimage sites like Kedarnath.

To begin the discussion, the results of the first hypothesis indicate that Personal Values (PV) significantly enhance Slow Travel Intent (STI), emphasizing the importance of intrinsic motivations in shaping tourists' travel choices. Tourists who derive personal meaning from their journeys are more inclined to embrace slow tourism, seeking deeper engagement with their destinations. This aligns with previous research (Cetin & Pala, 2022; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), which suggests that meaningful travel experiences contribute to stronger travel intentions. For instance, tourists who value sustainability, mindfulness, and simplicity are more likely to adopt slow tourism practices, as these align with their core beliefs. To reinforce PV, tourism stakeholders should focus on promoting authentic, immersive experiences that cater to travellers' desire for purpose-driven journeys. For example, destination managers in Kedarnath could highlight the spiritual and environmental significance of the pilgrimage, offering activities such as guided meditation, eco-friendly trekking, and cultural immersion programs that resonate with tourists' personal values.

The significant influence of Peer Influence (PI) on STI reaffirms the crucial role of social dynamics in travel decision-making. In line with previous research (Pop et al., 2022; Sadri et al., 2021), social influences shape how tourists perceive and adopt travel practices, particularly in emerging trends like slow tourism. The findings suggest that word-of-mouth recommendations, social media engagement, and peer experiences play a decisive role in travellers' choices. For example, tourists who see their friends or family sharing positive

experiences of slow tourism in Kedarnath tends to embrace similar practices. The relevance of PI in shaping STI highlights the necessity for tourism marketers to leverage user-generated content and digital influence, fostering a sense of community around slow tourism experiences. Social media campaigns featuring real-life stories, testimonials, and visually appealing content can effectively inspire potential tourists to embrace slow tourism.

Similarly, Cultural Curiosity (CC) emerged as a key determinant of STI, reinforcing that curiosity about local heritage, traditions, and cultural practices fosters a preference for slow tourism. These results are consistent with existing literature (Manthiou et al., 2022; Roque, 2022), which suggests that culturally motivated tourists seek deeper engagement and authenticity in their travel experiences. For instance, tourists visiting Kedarnath are often drawn to its rich spiritual and cultural heritage, including ancient temples, local rituals, and traditional practices. Destinations that emphasize storytelling, heritage-based activities, and interactive cultural experiences can effectively appeal to this segment of travellers, enhancing their inclination toward slow tourism. Kedarnath could offer cultural workshops, heritage walks, and storytelling sessions to engage tourists and deepen their connection with the destination.

The strong relationship between STI and Destination Branding (DB) highlights the impact of sustainable travel practices on shaping destination image and brand perception. This aligns with findings by (Manthiou et al., 2022) and (Werner et al., 2022), suggesting that when tourists engage in slow tourism, they develop a more profound connection with the destination, leading to enhanced branding outcomes. A plausible explanation for this finding is that immersive, sustainable tourism fosters positive word-of-mouth and repeat visitation, strengthening a destination's reputation. For example, tourists who experience the serene beauty and spiritual ambiance of Kedarnath through slow tourism have a higher likelihood to share their experiences and encourage others to visit the destination. To further capitalize on this connection, tourism boards and local businesses should integrate slow tourism narratives into their branding strategies, ensuring alignment between promotional content and authentic visitor experiences. Highlighting the unique aspects of slow tourism, such as mindfulness, sustainability, and cultural immersion, can strengthen Kedarnath's brand identity as a premier slow tourism destination.

Finally, Environmental Concern (EC) significantly moderates the STI-DB relationship, amplifying the positive effect of slow tourism on destination branding as environmental concern increases. These findings support prior research (Aman et al., 2021; He et al., 2022) that highlights the role of sustainability consciousness in shaping tourist perceptions and behaviours. A likely explanation for this outcome is that tourists with high environmental awareness perceive slow tourism as an ethical and responsible choice, thereby strengthening their association with a destination's brand image. For instance, environmentally conscious tourists visiting Kedarnath tend to be more appreciate and endorse efforts such as waste reduction, eco-friendly accommodations, and conservation programs. To enhance this effect, destinations should integrate sustainability-driven messaging into their branding efforts, emphasize eco-friendly initiatives, and promote responsible tourism practices that align with the values of environmentally conscious travellers. Kedarnath could showcase its commitment to sustainability through certifications, green tourism campaigns, and partnerships with environmental organizations, further solidifying its reputation as a sustainable slow tourism destination.

## CONCLUSION

The exploration of slow tourism intent within the context of culturally and spiritually significant pilgrimage sites like Kedarnath provides profound insights into the evolving

preferences of contemporary travellers. Slow tourism, marked by a conscious and considerate approach to travel, stands in contrast to mass tourism, which focuses on quick, surface-level experiences. This study highlights the deep engagement tourists seek with local cultures, environments, and communities when they opt for slow travel experiences. Rather than simply visiting a destination, slow tourism urges visitors to fully embrace the local way of life immersing in the cultural, spiritual, and natural elements that define a place. In destinations like Kedarnath, which hold strong cultural and spiritual significance, the intention behind travel becomes deeply rooted in personal values, peer influence, cultural curiosity, and environmental concerns.

Personal values have a pivotal impact on tourists' willingness to engage in slow tourism. These values, which often include a desire for authenticity, sustainability, and personal growth, motivate travellers to seek experiences that allow them to connect more meaningfully with the places they visit. Peer influence further enhances this intention, as recommendations from trusted social networks contribute to the growing appeal of slow travel practices. The role of cultural curiosity is another key element, as tourists' desire to learn about and experience different cultural and spiritual practices often leads them to pilgrimage sites where cultural immersion is more profound. In addition, environmental concern has increasingly become a significant factor in shaping travel behaviour. Tourists who are more environmentally aware are drawn to destinations that offer sustainable practices and contribute to preserving both the natural environment and local heritage.

The study highlights the crucial role of these factors in shaping tourists' intent to adopt slow travel practices and how such behaviour influences destination branding. By engaging in slow tourism, travellers not only experience a deeper connection to a destination but also contribute to the branding of that location as a sustainable and culturally enriching place. Slow tourism, therefore, becomes an essential tool for destination branding, creating a distinctive identity for places that emphasize sustainability, authenticity, and cultural depth.

Moreover, the results from this study provide important implications for the tourism landscape. Industry, especially in the context of pilgrimage sites like Kedarnath. As the travel landscape continues to evolve, tourism stakeholders must recognize the shift towards more mindful and sustainable travel practices. By understanding the various factors—personal values, peer influence, cultural curiosity, and environmental concern—that drive slow tourism intent, destination managers can better cater to the desires of a growing segment of travelers who seek meaningful and immersive experiences. This approach can help differentiate pilgrimage destinations from mass tourism sites, creating a unique and compelling narrative that appeals to a more conscientious traveller

## Implications

This study makes a substantial contribution to the theoretical framework of slow tourism by integrating psychological, social, and cultural factors into a comprehensive model. It extends existing literature on travel behaviour, demonstrating how personal values, peer influence, and cultural curiosity collectively shape slow travel intent. The inclusion of environmental concern as a moderator offers a novel perspective on how sustainability awareness can amplify the impact of slow tourism on destination branding. This study enriches the theoretical framework for understanding tourist behaviour, providing a more nuanced view of the diverse factors that drive slow tourism and their influence on the branding of destinations.

Practically, these findings offer meaningful insights for those involved in the tourism industry, policymakers, and destination managers. By recognizing the pivotal role of personal values, peer influence, and cultural curiosity, stakeholders can develop targeted marketing

strategies that appeal to mindful travellers who seek more meaningful and immersive travel experiences. Promoting slow tourism can enhance destination branding by positioning locations as authentic, sustainable, and culturally enriching. This approach not only sets destinations apart from mass tourism sites but also attracts a niche market of travellers who prioritize depth and cultural immersion over quantity and speed. Moreover, by emphasizing environmental concerns, destination managers can implement sustainable eco-friendly initiatives that protect natural and local traditions, ensuring the long-term viability of pilgrimage sites like Kedarnath. In sum, this research offers a holistic perspective on how slow tourism can be leveraged to foster sustainable tourism practices while enriching the traveller experience and supporting the preservation of destination assets.

### LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE

The study's focus on Kedarnath, a specific pilgrimage site, constrains the extent to which the findings can be applied to other tourism contexts. The insights derived from this context may not be fully applicable to urban or secular destinations. Future studies could examine the relevance of these findings across a wider variety of destinations including non-religious and metropolitan areas, to determine if the factors influencing slow tourism intent remain consistent across different types of locations

In terms of methodology, the study employs quantitative approach within a set time frame, which captures a snapshot of tourist intent at one specific moment. This constrains the observation of temporal changes and the ability to infer causality. To address this limitation, future research could utilize a qualitative strategy, focusing on comprehensive interviews or ethnographic studies to understand the evolving nature of slow tourism intent. By exploring the lived experiences of tourists through qualitative methods, researchers could gain deeper insights into how tourists' values, motivations, and perceptions of slow tourism develop over time, and how these elements influence their travel choices and destination preferences.

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