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Knowledge of villagers regarding rural tourism as an emerging sector for livelihood security

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism has emerged as a promising avenue for livelihood security and sustainable rural development, particularly in regions like Assam, which possess rich cultural and natural heritage. This study explores knowledge of the respondents regarding rural tourism in four districts of Assam: Goalpara, Golaghat, Sonitpur and Biswanath which represents a diverse geographic zone. The research follows an exploratory cum descriptive design, employing multistage purposive sampling. A total of 240 villagers were surveyed using structured interview schedule and Knowledge Test. Data were analysed through ANOVA to determine significant relationships between socio economic factors with knowledge level. The findings highlight the immense potential of rural tourism, with the respondents demonstrating a generally moderate knowledge about its benefits. While there are opportunities for growth, enhancing awareness, improving infrastructure, and strengthening policies can further accelerate development. Thus, the study concludes that policy interventions, capacity-building programmes, and active community participation are crucial for harnessing rural tourism as a sustainable livelihood strategy in Assam.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Livelihood Security, Rural Community, Knowledge, Assam

Introduction

In the current era, tourism is being recognized as a leading industry which might drastically change the economic scenario of a particular region or a country. It is a multifaceted sector encompassing various industries, such as hospitality, transport, entertainment, and cultural services. Globally, tourism has evolved into a significant driver of economic development, cultural exchange, and social integration. As highlighted by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism leads to GDP growth, employment generation, and community development, making it an indispensable tool for fostering socio-economic stability. According to the UNWTO report (2015), approximately 1 in every 11 people are employed by tourism sector globally while global GDP contribution of this sector stands at 10 percent in the year 2014 (Department of Tourism, 2022) [1]. Tourism is an industry that is not driven directly by commercial concerns but in most cases by natural and cultural resources. Thus, tourism can contribute significantly towards growth of a country. In case of India, the GDP share from tourism was 9.3 per cent and generated 5.9 per cent of total investments in 2019 (Hindustan Times, 2020) [2]. India aspires for tourism to contribute 10 per cent of its GDP by 2030 [3], utilizing its cultural assets and enhanced infrastructure. (The Economic Times, n.d.)

A study on “Local Tourism Awareness and Knowledge: Community Views in Wanayasa” by Sihombing *et al.* (2017) [4] stated that almost all the respondents possessed extensive knowledge on the principles of sustainable tourism. Additionally, they were also aware about their important role in development of tourism. This study also highlighted that the perceived understanding of the respondents regarding the idea of sustainable tourism was impacted by their perceived awareness about the role the local communities undertake in tourism. Similarly, Phukan *et al.* (2024) [5] stated that respondents possessed significant knowledge about tourism along with its benefits and impacts. Similar kind of study was conducted in Lesotho southern Africa by Lekaota (2014) [6] in three villages namely, Ha ‘Mali, Ha Lejone and Phelandaba, adjacent to distinguished nature reserves. The findings revealed that among the surveyed villages, the respondents from Ha Lejone were identified as the most knowledgeable about potential benefits of tourism. They had relatively good awareness regarding tourism. When it comes to sustainability, energy saving is one of the important factors. Sun and Wu in 2023 [7] conducted a study on “Energy Literacy of Residence in Rural Communities: Comparison of Tourism and Non-Tourism Villages” in Jizhou District, China. Researchers found that rural communities exhibited higher levels of energy literacy, which fosters better knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards energy conservation, contributing to more sustainable tourism practices and development. Conversely, Fong *et al.* (2015) [8] stated that the local communities’ engagement in decision-making, community knowledge and empowerment all have an impact on the sustainable rural tourism. Surprisingly, the research revealed that knowledge sharing had no significant influence on sustainable rural tourism development. Poor relationships among tourism stakeholders were thought to have an impact on the efficacy of knowledge sharing.

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Assam and its diverse geography with forest-clad hills, roaring rivers, scenic landscape, rich diversity in flora and fauna, protected forests etc. attracts eco-tourists and those who seek adventure. The state offers a great potential of agro-tourism as well as tea tourism as the state has large number of tea gardens. Moreover, organic and traditional farming practices are still prevalent in the state. Its rich traditional crafts like bamboo and cane work, bell metal works, mask art, handloom and textiles, folk dances, fairs and festivals etc. are integral to Assam's identity which provides authentic rural experience. In spite of having myriads of opportunities in Assam, in rural tourism, it is observed that its true potentiality hitherto has not been discovered fully. In rural places tourism has the ability to boost the expansion of the economy along with cultural preservation, which is shown by the nations that have successfully developed it on a global scale. The interest in unique cultural experiences, natural attractions and engagement in rural life has the potential to uplift the condition of many economically backward rural communities. Similarly, it can also contribute in preservation of many traditional crafts and traditions, providing the local residents with alternate source of income while preserving their cultural heritage. Such significant benefits might establish prospective outcomes in case of Assam too with strategic planning and implementation.

Having been affected by covid-19 pandemic the tourism industry worldwide, people have ventured into alternative forms of tourism, of which rural tourism has been one of the alternative tourism options where people find their roots. Rural tourism may be one of the pillars of "Vocal for local" campaign which is a rallying cry given by the union government urging people to support local products, which is a part of the "Atmanirbhar Bharat", a vision for a self-reliant India. The Government of India has included rural tourism as one of the components of "Atmanirbhar Bharat". This has a great bearing with rural tourism as it is based on local resources. Nevertheless, the rural tourism as a concept is still in nascent phase. Even though there has been growth of alternative tourism projects, they are very few in numbers.

Assam with more than around 80 per cent people living in rural areas, and 29 notified tribes certainly offers excellent potential for blooming rural tourism. However, apparently the potential offered by rural tourism in Assam has not been adequately explored. In spite of being rich in numerous resources such as – natural resources, cultural resources, agricultural resources etc., the state is still lagging behind in exploring the potential areas for rural tourism. Many factors such as, inadequate public and private investment to build and support the tourism infrastructure, lack of community participation coupled with their apprehension regarding the opportunities and scope of rural tourism in their area might hinder the expansion of the state's rural tourism. Knowledge and attitude on rural tourism is one of the key factors which can attract people to involve meaningfully in this sector. Considering this, the current study attempts to ascertain the knowledge and attitude of rural people towards rural tourism as livelihood opportunity.

Materials and methods

The current study had been carried out in Assam. A list of districts with existing agro-tourism, eco-tourism or rural tourism projects had been prepared on the basis of information collected from various sources such as government website, electronic and social media and officials from different departments and non-governmental organizations. From the list, four districts viz., Goalpara, Golaghat,

Bishwanath and Sonitpur were selected purposively which represent diverse geographical zones and cultural identities within the state. Among the districts, two villages i.e., Kasumari and Nisangram from Goalpara, Bochagaon and Durgapur from Golaghat, Biswanathghat Purni Gaon and Karbi Block from Biswanath Ghat and Baligaon Miri Green Village and Chegelimari Garo Gaon from Sonitpur were selected for the present study. For selection of respondents, thirty villagers, who were involved directly or indirectly in the project had been included from each selected village as respondent purposively. Total number of villagers as respondents was 240. To gather the information from the respondents, one structured interview schedule and a knowledge test was developed to assess knowledge of the respondents.

For assessing knowledge on rural tourism different aspects such as knowledge related to tourism, rural tourism, principles of rural tourism and benefits from rural tourism were included in knowledge test after reviewing various journals, publications related to agro-eco-rural tourism. It comprises 57 statements including both positive and negative dimensions. Respondents were categorized as low, medium and high level of knowledge considering their mean score and standard deviation. Further ranking of knowledge was done based on the responses of the respondents.

Results and discussion

Knowledge enhances the reasoning and critical thinking and helps to think productively. It broadens the horizon of thoughts and thereby simplifies the decision-making process. In the present study knowledge is regarded as the body of information acquired by the respondents related to different aspects of rural tourism. Perusal of the Table 1 indicates that majority (79.60%) of the respondents had medium level of knowledge regarding rural tourism whereas 12.90 per cent had high and 7.50 per cent had low level of knowledge respectively.

Results portrayed that majority of the respondents had medium level of knowledge regarding rural tourism. This could be attributed to their general awareness of tourism concepts through local exposure and informal discussions. However, their knowledge might be limited to surface-level understanding rather than in-depth technical aspects such as key government programmes, policy framework, tourism initiatives etc. The availability of basic tourism related information through community interactions and occasional tourism activities may have contributed to this medium level of knowledge. Whereas the respondents with high level of knowledge were significantly less. They may have had direct engagement in tourism initiatives or access to structured training programmes covering various aspects of eco/rural tourism. Conversely, those with a low level of knowledge might not have had significant exposure to tourism-related discussions, structured learning opportunities, or authentic sources of information on the expansion and governance of rural tourism.

The statements on knowledge were formulated in four dimensions, which includes knowledge on tourism, knowledge on rural tourism, principles of rural tourism, and knowledge related to benefits of rural tourism. According to the mean score, the subcategories were ranked. It is seen from the Table 2 that 'Knowledge related to benefits from rural tourism' occupied as rank I with mean score 1.97, followed by 'Principles of rural tourism' with mean score 1.92 ranked II. 'Knowledge related to tourism' and 'Knowledge related to rural tourism' received lowest ranks i.e. III and IV with mean score 1.48 and 1.42 respectively.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents (villagers) according to the level of knowledge

Knowledge Score		Knowledge Category	Frequency	Percent
N	240	Low level	18	7.50
Minimum	72	Medium level	191	79.60
Maximum	114	High level	31	12.90

(continued on next page)

Knowledge Score		Knowledge Category	Frequency	Percent
Mean	99.87	Total	240	100
SD	7.374			

For the ranking of the knowledge statements, each statement's mean score was calculated and accordingly the statements were hierarchical. The knowledge test was presented to the respondents in four dif-

ferent dimensions and results are presented separately for each section.

Table 2. Ranking of different dimension of knowledge of the respondents regarding rural tourism

Sl. No.	Knowledge on different area	Mean	Rank
1	Knowledge related to benefits from rural tourism	1.97	I
2	Knowledge related to principles of rural tourism	1.92	II
3	Knowledge related to tourism	1.48	III
4	Knowledge related to rural tourism	1.42	IV

Table 3 shows that two statements i.e. 'Tourism is defined as the actions of people travelling to and staying in places outside of their typical surroundings' and 'Tourism is one of the largest industries worldwide' both ranked I with mean score 1.97, which suggest that respondents recognize the fundamental concept of tourism. Additionally, the statement 'The tourism sector has the power to profoundly change the economic state of a nation' ranked II with mean score 1.78 further re-

flects their understanding of role of tourism in national development. However, knowledge about alternative tourism appears to be relatively lower. The statement 'Three 'A' Approach of Tourism are: Attraction, Accessibility, and Accommodation' ranked VII with mean score 1.16 reflects lack of familiarity with tourism development frameworks, which are essential for planning and policy-making.

Table 3. Ranking of knowledge statements on tourism

Sl. No.	Statements	Mean Score	Rank
1	Tourism is defined as the actions of people travelling to and staying in places outside of their typical surroundings	1.97	I
2	Tourism is one of the largest industries worldwide	1.97	I
3	The tourism sector has the power to profoundly change the economic state of a nation	1.78	II
4	Tourism can contribute to a country's growth even when other commercial activities are constrained	1.68	III
5	Alternative tourism is a type of tourism which is related to environmental, cultural, and traditional values.	1.28	IV
6	Alternative tourism includes rural tourism, eco tourism, natural tourism, cultural tourism, agro tourism, tea tourism, etc.	1.20	V
7	Mass tourism is a type of tourism in which a huge number of tourists converge in one place at once	1.17	VI
8	Two major categories of tourism are Mass tourism and Alternative tourism	1.16	VII
9	Three "A" Approach of Tourism are: Attraction, Accessibility and Accommodation	1.16	VII

Table 4 indicates that the ranking of knowledge statements on rural tourism reflects the villagers' understanding of the concept. The highest ranked statement with mean score 1.97 emphasizes 'association of rural tourism with nature, agriculture, culture, and sightseeing', indicating that villagers recognize these elements as integral to tourism in rural areas. However, knowledge about specific initiatives such as

'Biswanath Ghat being recognized as the best tourism village', 'national policies for sustainable livelihood development', 'government initiatives for rural tourism development' and 'introduction of rural tourism through 10th five-year plan' were significantly lower which were ranked VII, VII, IX and X with mean score 0.78, 0.30, 0.26 and 0.23 respectively.

Table 4. Ranking of knowledge statements on rural tourism

Sl. No.	Statements	Mean Score	Rank
1	Rural tourism is associated with nature-based activities, rural lifestyle, agriculture, culture and sightseeing.	1.97	I
2	Rural tourism may enhance production of local commodities	1.95	II
3	Rural tourism provides opportunities to the national or international tourists to experience rural life	1.95	II
4	Rural tourism may accelerate the sale of locally produced commodities	1.93	III
5	Maintaining hygiene at village and household level attracts tourists to visit the local community	1.93	III
6	Due to diverse physiographical nature, Assam offers much potential for rural tourism	1.92	IV

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Sl. No.	Statements	Mean Score	Rank
7	Rural tourism uses rich resources of flora and fauna	1.90	V
8	Rural tourism can create different jobs such as tourist guide, videographer, photographer, driver etc.	1.89	VI
9	In Assam, Biswanath Ghat has been selected as the best tourism village of India 2023 by the Ministry of Tourism	0.78	VII
10	Rural tourism was included in the 2002 National Tourism Policy as a focal area for creating jobs and sustainable livelihood.	0.30	VIII
11	Under United Nations Development Programme Government of India, Ministry of Tourism, had taken up Rural Tourism scheme	0.26	IX
12	Rural tourism in India was officially started under 10 th five-year plan (2002-2007)	0.23	X

Table 5 reflects the ranking of knowledge statements related to the principle “Something to See” in rural tourism indicates the respondents’ understanding of what aspects of their locality can be showcased to tourists. The highest-ranked statements, with a mean score of 1.97, were ‘Local traditions, culture, dress, art and crafts, festivals, games, etc.’ and ‘Traditional technologies such as *dheki, ural (rice pounding machine)* etc.’ This suggests that respondents are well aware of the significance of cultural heritage and traditional practices as key attractions for rural tourism. On the other hand, the lowest-ranked statement, ‘Providing scope for seeing something unique is a principle of rural tourism’, with a mean score of 1.68, indicates that respondents may not perceive uniqueness in an abstract sense but rather associate it with specific cultural and economic activities. It also reveals that respondents have substantial knowledge about providing opportunities for tourists to engage in various rural activities. The highest-ranked activities, such as ‘cooking traditional cuisines’, ‘playing indigenous games with local people’ and ‘animal feeding’ (mean score 1.98), suggest that respondents recognize the value of hands-on participation in enhancing the rural tourism experience. On the other hand, the statement ‘Giving opportunity to participate in something is a principle of rural tourism’ received a comparatively

lower mean score (1.66). This does not indicate a lack of knowledge but rather suggests that respondents focus more on specific, tangible experiences rather than the broader concept of participation.

It is also evident from the Table 5 that respondents have a strong understanding of the role food plays in enhancing rural tourism experiences. The highest-ranked statement, ‘Traditional snack items of the area (mostly rice-based),’ with a mean score of 1.99, exhibits that respondents recognize the appeal of regionally distinct, easily accessible, and culturally significant food items. The statement ‘Providing scope for eating something traditional and unique is a principle of rural tourism’ received a comparatively lower mean score (mean score 1.67).

The Table 5 highlights that respondents recognize the importance of local products in enhancing rural tourism. The highest-ranked statement, ‘Local traditional dress’ (mean score 1.98), indicates that respondents understand the appeal of indigenous clothing as a unique cultural symbol that tourists may find valuable. The statement ‘Providing scope for buying something local from the community is a principle of rural tourism’ received a comparatively lower mean score (1.66).

Table 5. Ranking of knowledge statements on principles of rural tourism

Principles	Sl. No.	Statements	Mean Score	Rank
Something to see	1	Providing scope for seeing something unique is a principle of rural tourism	1.68	VI
	2	In the rural tourism sites, provision for showcasing the following items may be done		
	a	Local farms	1.95	II
	b	Cottage industries	1.94	III
	c	Agricultural activities	1.92	V
	d	Local traditions, culture, dress, art and crafts, festivals, games etc.	1.97	I
	e	Traditional weaving activities	1.93	IV
	f	Traditional technologies such as <i>dheki, ural</i> etc.	1.97	I
Something to do	1	Giving opportunity to participate in something is a principle of rural tourism	1.66	VI
	2	Host families may arrange the following facilities when the guest can participate		
	a	Fishing in pond or nearby river or lake	1.93	V
	b	Boating in pond or nearby river or lake	1.97	II
	c	Hiking or trekking	1.95	IV
	d	Swimming in pond	1.96	III
	e	Traditional art and culture (art and craft, dancing, singing)	1.96	III
	f	Agricultural activities	1.95	IV
	g	Weaving activities	1.97	II
	h	Cooking traditional cuisines	1.98	I
	i	Playing indigenous games with local people	1.98	I
	j	Community feast	1.96	III
	k	Local traditional festivals	1.97	II
	l	Harvest festivals	1.96	III
	m	Animal feeding	1.98	I

(continued on next page)

Principles	Sl. No.	Statements	Mean Score	Rank
Something to eat	1	Providing scope for eating something traditional and unique is a principle of rural tourism	1.67	IV
	2	Host families may arrange the following items for the tourists		
	a	Various local cuisines	1.96	III
	b	Local ethnic drinks (rice based fermented beer)	1.98	II
	c	Traditional snacks items of the area (mostly rice based)	1.99	I
Something to buy	1	Providing scope for buying something local from the community is a principle of rural tourism	1.66	IV
	2	In the rural tourism sites, following items may be arranged for the tourists		
	a	Local art and craft products	1.96	III
	b	Local traditional dress	1.98	I
	c	Traditional foods	1.97	II

Table 6 shows that among all the statements related to benefits from rural tourism three statements obtained ranked I with mean score 1.98. From the data it is evident that respondents had knowledge on 'preservation and promotion of cultures and traditions', 'entrepreneurial scope' and 'platform provider for showcasing talents.' These aspects likely received the highest score because they directly contribute to cultural sustainability and livelihood opportunities, which are crucial for rural communities.

The variations presented in ranking of the knowledge statement may be due to the firsthand experience on the positive impacts such as income generation, cultural promotions etc. In contrast, their lower scores in overall concept of tourism might stem from limited formal education on these topics. The highest-ranked statements indicate a strong information about tourism as an industry and its economic significance, which suggest that respondents recognize the fundamental concept of tourism along with the role of rural tourism to enhance local production which provides tourists with an authentic rural experience. However, knowledge about alternative tourism appears to be relatively lower. The moderate level of knowledge of the respondents indicates that they might recognize the natural potential of their region but may not fully understand its utilization. The variation may be due to limited exposure to policy level discussions and a lack of direct involvement in government initiatives. Furthermore, the lowest-

ranked statements signify considerable gap in understanding tourism classifications and structured planning models. Several factors could explain these knowledge gaps. Limited exposure to alternative tourism, or insufficient awareness programmes might contribute to the lower understanding of specialized tourism concepts. Additionally, the absence of structured tourism education or training for local communities, lack of theoretical foundation may hinder deeper knowledge on tourism development. However, the ranking of statements related to principles of tourism reiterate that respondents' knowledge was based on practical involvement in rural tourism without having sufficient theoretical foundation. The findings are in line with Sihombing *et al.* (2017) [4], who found that all the respondents had high level of knowledge regarding the principles of sustainable tourism. In terms of the benefits from rural tourism the findings align with Phukan *et al.* (2024) [5] and Lekaota (2014) [6], where they stated that respondents possessed significant knowledge about benefits of tourism. This could indicate that villagers acknowledge its role but may feel that rural tourism alone is insufficient for sustaining traditional crafts, requiring additional support such as better market linkages and financial assistance. Overall, the rankings reflect that villagers prioritize direct economic and cultural benefits, which are essential for their livelihood security and community development.

Table 6. Ranking of knowledge statements on benefits from rural tourism

Sl. No.	Statements	Mean Score	Rank
1	Rural tourism helps in preserving and promoting cultures and traditions	1.98	I
2	Rural tourism provides entrepreneurial scope to the community	1.98	I
3	It provides a platform to the local people to showcase their talents	1.98	I
4	Rural tourism showcases the unique lifestyle, art, craft, culture, heritage, etc. to the national and international travelers	1.97	II
5	It helps in providing alternative way of earning	1.97	II
6	It helps in preserving heritage	1.96	III
7	Rural tourism helps in promoting local arts and crafts	1.95	IV

Attitude of the respondents towards rural tourism

Table 7. Distribution of respondents (villagers) according to the level of attitude

Knowledge Score	Knowledge Category	Frequency	Percent
N	Least favourable	47	19.6
Minimum	Favourable	183	76.3
Maximum	Most favourable	10	4.2
Mean	Total	240	100
SD			

(continued on next page)

From the Table 7 it is evident that 76.30 per cent had a favourable attitude toward rural tourism, 19.60 per cent had least favourable attitude whereas only 4.20 per cent of respondents had most favourable attitude towards rural tourism.

Findings are in line with Sai *et al.* (2022) [9], where they found that respondents from Meghalaya had favourable attitude towards rural tourism. The respondents' favourable attitude towards rural tourism may be explained from the encouraging experience gained over the years as results of their association with rural tourism. Their knowledge level, mass media exposure and extension contact might also contribute in shaping their favourable attitude toward rural tourism. The prospect of earning additional revenue through activities related to tourism including homestays, handicrafts and cultural performances, might also have encouraged their positive perception. Moreover, the presence of natural and cultural attractions in their villages, coupled with a growing interest in rural tourism, could have further reinforced their belief in its potential benefits.

Correlation between knowledge with attitude of the villagers regarding the rural tourism as an avenue for livelihood security

Spearman's rho correlation co-efficient test was conducted to study the correlation between knowledge and attitude of the respondents regarding rural tourism. The Table 8 reveals that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between knowledge and attitude

among villagers regarding rural tourism. From the data it may be interpreted that with increased knowledge, attitude may be improved.

Table 8. Correlation between knowledge with attitude of the villagers regarding the rural tourism as an avenue for livelihood security

Variable	'r' value	Sig. value
Knowledge vs. Attitude regarding rural tourism	0.339	0.000**

** Significant at 0.01 level probability (2-tailed)

Differences in the level of existing knowledge of the villagers regarding rural tourism

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was applied to assess the significant difference of knowledge of the respondents regarding rural tourism in relation to selected variables:

- Age
- Educational qualification
- Occupation
- Mass media exposure
- Extension contact

Table 9. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) indicating knowledge of the respondents in relation to their selected variables n=240

Variables	Source of variance	DF	Sum of square	Mean square	F	Sig
Age	Between the groups	2	128.895	64.448	1.187	.307
	Within the groups	237	12866.100	54.287		NS
Educational Qualification	Between the groups	7	999.967	142.852	2.763	.009**
	Within the groups	232	11995.029	51.703		
Occupation	Between the groups	5	848.464	169.693	3.269	.007**
	Within the groups	234	12146.531	51.908		
Mass Media Exposure	Between the groups	1	543.941	543.941	10.397	.001**
	Within the groups	238	12451.055	52.315		
Extension Contact	Between Groups	2	399.672	199.836	3.760	.025*
	Within Groups	237	12595.324	53.145		

** Significant at 0.01 level probability

* Significant at 0.05 level probability

The results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) presented in the Table 9 signifies that there was no significant difference in the level of knowledge about rural tourism based on age. The data also represents the comparative picture of the level of knowledge in relation to selected variables. The findings for the same indicates that there were significant differences in the level of knowledge concerning their educational qualification, occupation, mass media exposure and extension contact.

This suggests that the knowledge acquisition might not necessarily dependent on age, probably due to individuals across different age groups have access to similar sources of information and learning opportunities. It may be due to some factors such as exposure to external knowledge sources, professional engagement and personal interest play a more crucial role than age alone in determining knowledge levels. The findings for the same also indicates that there were significant differences in the level of knowledge concerning their educational qualification, occupation, mass media exposure and extension contact. This implies that individuals with higher education tend to possess greater knowledge, as formal education enhances cognitive skills, analytical abilities, and exposure to diverse information sources. Education also facilitates better comprehension of technical subjects related to rural tourism and livelihood security, making it an important determinant of knowledge among respondents. Similarly,

different professional backgrounds expose individuals to varying degrees of information and experience. Those engaged in occupations closely related to tourism, agriculture, or self-employment may have higher knowledge levels due to direct involvement in livelihood-related activities. Occupational roles that encourage interaction with experts, customers, or training programmes may also contribute to better understanding of rural tourism opportunities. Additionally, the findings highlight the crucial role of information dissemination through various media channels. Mobile phones, Television and online platforms serve as major sources of knowledge, keeping individuals informed about government policies, tourism prospects, and livelihood strategies. Findings from the present study also reveal that majority of the respondents had medium level of mass media exposure, which might ensure access to a wide range of updated and relevant information, contributing significantly to the respondents' knowledge base. Similarly, direct interaction with extension personnel, training programmes, and awareness campaigns provide respondents with valuable information tailored to their specific needs. Extension services play a key role in rural development by facilitating knowledge transfer, capacity building, and skill enhancement, ultimately improving the understanding of livelihood security and tourism-related opportunities.

Conclusion

It was encouraging to note that villagers possessed medium level of knowledge regarding rural tourism. In terms of ranking of knowledge test, statements related to benefits from rural tourism received highest rank. Moderate knowledge was observed in terms of villagers, with significant variation based on education, occupation, mass media exposure and extension contact while there was no significant different in the level of knowledge about rural tourism based on age. It can be concluded that the respondents' moderate level of knowledge was based on their experience in the field of tourism rather than their formal trainings and exposures which limits their initiatives in certain dimensions deriving benefits of government schemes. However, there is scope for improving their knowledge with enhanced intervention from different stakeholders. In the light of above findings, it may be concluded that rural tourism has strong potential to thrive in Assam due to the acceptance and willingness of villagers and the state's rich and unique natural and cultural resources.

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