

# **Tourist Prospects Post-Coronavirus Pandemic With Perspective To Destination Brand Image, Perceived Value, Health Safety And Tourists Re-Visit Decision At The Hill Stations In India.**

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## **Abstract**

The researcher intends to apply empirical approach to study the tourism prospects about the hill stations in India in post-Coronavirus pandemic. An effort is done to understand the significance between the re-visit decision of the tourists and the variables like hill station brand image, perceived value and health safety and security at the destination. A causal relationship is determined on the basis of data collected from 159 tourists who had visited the hill stations in India in post-coronavirus pandemic for tourism purpose. The researcher has adopted PLS-SEM techniques to test the hypothesis. The research proposes a theory regarding the tourist behaviour and planning especially during the scenario of health crisis and risk involved. It studies the impact of pandemic on the perceived value, destination image and re-visit decisions of the tourists to the hill stations in India. The study will help the hill stations of India to understand the customer evaluation about them and will learn the areas where they will need to improvise.

## Introduction

The dawn of Coronavirus pandemic since the late of 2019 brought the mankind to a standstill with a traumatised uncertainty. The Economies and healthcare around the world had to confront a never seen before manifold challenges. The terror of the disease hit in various waves weakening the system of the countries. The precautionary lockdown declared by the government repeatedly by many countries across the globe adversely impacted the confidence of the people as well as the trade and commerce. The government laid restrictions or protection and wellbeing of the citizens during the various unlocking phases. The norms included social distancing, restrained road, railways and air travelling, mandatory quarantines, work from home, controls on social gathering etc. This made all the industries and sectors of economy to undergo through suffocating situation. The Tourism and hospitality industry was among the worst hit due to their perishable nature of the product and high overheads.

Tourism has proven itself from many decades as a fastest developing economic sector across the globe. It is characterised with a deep diversification and continuous growth. Tourism industry is one of the key sectors which significantly contribute to the growth of the nation's economy. It not only boosts the economy but also creates substantial jobs directly and indirectly. Due to tourism development of infrastructure is undertaken, locals are benefitted, cultural exchange occurs and truly the environment is developed and sustained. Tourism in fact is a "Passport to Peace".

India is enriched with its heritage, culture, natural attractions, adventure, culinary delights and many more. Due to this it is one of the most preferred tourism destinations for domestic and inbound tourists. As per NCAR report in the year 2019-20, Tourism in India has contributed directly 2.7% and indirectly 5.2% to the nation GDP. It had provided 6.7% of total employment of the country directly and 15.3% indirectly (Anil Sharma' 2021). WTTC mentioned that India ranks 10<sup>th</sup> amongst 185 countries on the basis its contribution to the country's GDP. By 2027 the market of travel will reach to 125 billion US dollars and the hotel industry turnover will reach to 52 billion US dollars. Moreover, the international tourists' arrival will reach to 30.5 billion generating 59 billion US dollars.(IBEF 2022)

Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic compelled a nosedive for the sector's economy and also endangered its future progression.

The Coronavirus was introduced to the world in the last quarter of 2019. It started spreading rapidly crossing the boundaries of cities, states, countries and ultimately the continents. The impact was so severe that eventually the WHO was compelled to declare it as an emergency to the mankind in form of pandemic. Almost 14.9 million people died and

### **Objectives:**

1. To understand the concept of destination brand image, perceived value, health safety and tourists re-visit decision.
2. To study the impact of coronavirus pandemic on the re-visit decision on the basis of destination brand image, perceived value, health safety at the hill stations in India.

### **Review of Literature:**

#### **Hill Stations:**

The hill stations in India were unknown settlement till 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was during the colonial rule when the British officers who hunted for locations for their sojourn. They were in search for destination which was more comfortable for them and resembled European climatic conditions. The destination selected by them was at high altitude generally in the range of 1200 metres to 2250 metres above sea-level. The East India Company developed the hilly destinations with accommodation, transportation and other required services making it a safe habitat. These hill stations were primarily used by the British Officers, civil servants and soldiers for vacations, scorching summer alternative and rejuvenation. They were also been used as summer administration offices. The British also introduced tea and coffee plantation to make it look mesmerising as well as financially viable. After independence the colonist departed and the locals along with government authorities developed and promoted it as hill stations. They started becoming integral settlements of India. Many resorts were been established with technological advancement over the period of time (Ravi Shekar, 2018).

The Hill stations in India were categorised in various group viz., Kashmir group, Dalhousie group, Shimla group, Musoorie group, Nainital group, Darjeeling group, Assam group, Northeast Deccan group, Central and Northwest group, Bombay group and Southern Group. 80 resorts were developed over the period of 30 years (1820-1850) Kirtida Unwalla(2000). Hill stations have become most preferred gateways for long weekends, vacations and festive seasons mainly due to their aesthetic and mesmerising natural beauty. This is fortified with

solitude and pleasant climate on higher altitudes taking one away from the noise and air polluted cities (Manasi Karandikar,2015).

The phenomenon of tourism is the result of the services provided by the destination and the process procuring and consuming of those services by the tourists. Furthermore, tourist satisfaction is closely associated with the quality and professionalism of services at the destination (Casarin,2005). It is also affected with variables like image and attitude of the destination, amenities, natural scenery, recreational activities etc. Features like accessibility comfort, value for money, pricing, manmade attractions (amusement parks) also influence tourist satisfaction (Lee T.H 2009). Tourist satisfaction is closely associated to the destination loyalty. Only a high level of satisfaction can assure tourist loyalty towards the destination (Suzan Coban,2012)

### **Hill stations Brand image:**

A tourism destination brand image is something that is perceived by the tourists. A brand can't be copied, it's unique. A successful brand never gets out-dated quickly rather it is timeless. –Stephen King

A destination brand is a distinguishing name which intends to recognise the goods or services at the destination. It helps the tourists to differentiate between two destinations. It protects the destination service providers and the tourists from the competitors providing similar kind of products. An established brand image leads to brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is qualitatively diverse from various other dimensions of brand equity. It can only exist after purchase and consumption of the product or services and experience it. It results in creating habitual buyers who ensures a steady stream of revenue for a long time.

Brand loyalty is influenced by destination marketing, destination awareness, perceived value of the destination and associations. (David Aaker, 1991).

An image is a significant factor that ascertains growing relationship. Destination image has a great influence of the decision patterns of the tourists while deciding a destination for tourism. It is a tourist's personal mental perception based on the destination attributes. These attributes of the tourism destination inspires them to visit and have an affirmative experience. In true sense destination image is an personal belief, awareness, feelings, overall impression and bonding towards the destination (Abdelbaset Alkhalil,2022). Apparently

the influence of supposed destination image on destination choice decision is indubitably complicated. Post Coronavirus pandemic the destination brand image was one of the influential tourism motivator for the tourists in making their re-visit decision.

### **Hill Stations Perceived Value:**

The tourist perceived value is a subjective kind of benefits professed by the tourist which is made after comparing it with the cost he bears for the services consumed by them. In tourism industry the perceived value is always determined by the tourist as consumer and not by service providers. It is decided on the basis price fairness, that is, the tourist finds it the product or service appropriate and reasonable with respect to the value he is charged (Ryo Sakiyama, May 2022). In other words, perceived value is related to the offerings made by the tourists in form of efforts, time and price to achieve personal and social benefits. Perceive value is very important marketing processes which foster strong relationship with tourists and helps identifying changes in tourist's expectation and trends. It is an inclusive assessment of prospective benefits related to tourist destination. The perceive value of the destination is directly proportional to positive tourist satisfaction and influential behavioural outcome. Hence higher perceived value about the tourist destination will result in re-visit intention of the tourist. (Abdelbaset Alkhaldeh, 2022).

### **Health and Safety risk at the hill stations in India:**

Risk is a futuristic possibility that involves a probable problem or a situation which if comes into reality may unfavourably affect the concerned person. The presence of risk is everywhere. Few disappear, few materialize into problems that need to be dealt with promptly and few intensify to a level of crisis and create destruction in any form to the concerned. The risks need to be identified, categorised, mitigated and managed for safety (Dr. Atef M. A Moneim,2005). Risk can be considered as one of the vital aspect of the sensitivity of tourist behaviour. The tourist perception will relate to any possible problems that the tourist may encounter during his journey or stay at the destination(Perpiña et al., 2021).

The medical field has shown massive advancement but still the tourist of present age are prone to health risks that form an integral part during their travel and stay at the tourist destinations. This health risk line-up to be the prime interpreted danger to the safety of the tourists. WHO states that the health risk is more vulnerable to the international tourists and

majorly depends on the hygiene and sanitation at the hotels and destination, accommodation standard and conditions at the destination like water and food quality. It also is impacted by the characteristics of the tourist and his behaviour. The health risk confronted by the tourist or his known person while experiencing the travel or stay at the destination shapes the perception about the risk resulting in his behaviour and choice. This is significantly important for tourism service providers, tourist and sustainability of the destination. Apart from this, viral epidemics and pandemics have shown their presence in past two decades which were not confined to a city or state but have crossed the borders of the countries also. For example Coronavirus pandemic, hand-foot-mouth disease, Swine flu etc. They have negatively impacted the tourist perception of the tourism destination (Goran Peric 2020)

A tourist feels safe and comfortable at the tourism destination where assurance of good security is provided in the local area as well as hotels where they accommodate themselves. Security can be showcased through locals and police authority's presence and prompt assistance. A strong vigilance should be there through CCTV or guarded premises. There should be no negative attribute beggars, street vendors, thieves, pick-pockets or tricksters. The hotels need to be fire and structurally safe with compounded boundary. The destination should safe pertaining to natural disasters or emergencies, terrorist attacks etc. Previous studies have recommended that safety and security is vital factor that creates positivity in the mind of tourists. It influences their choice decisions about destination visit and re-visit (Khuong & Phuong, 2017).

The researcher wish to study the risk related to health and safety post coronavirus pandemic that will impact on the tourism at hill stations in India. This had gained a global concern due to uncertainty and consequences. In the post coronavirus pandemic era, initially this was the prime variable in visit or re-visit decision to hill stations and other detinations. Health risk pertaining to Coronavirus pandemic is one of the most influential variables that can moderate the linkage hill station destination image, perceived value and re-visit decision of the tourist.

### **Re-visit decision:**

Re-visit decision is related to the tourist behavioural aspect of deciding whether to come back to the destination again. It is related to the experience gathered from his visit in terms of tourism services received by him, safety and security, cosy and comfort at the destination, value for money and many more. This intention of the tourist is very essential as it may lead

to recommendation of the destination to his friends and family. Indisputably, positive re-visit decision is a key determinant of sustainability and profitability at the tourist destination. Re-visit decision is considered as a valuable parameter to justify Destination loyalty (Chien, 2017:45). Re-visit decision directly reflects the tourist overall satisfaction at the destination. It is the result of tourist's assessment of tourism product as services at the destination. In tourism, the revisit decision phenomenon is considered as very important at the level of independent tourism product or service provider as well as the economy as a whole. Revisit decision as explicit behaviour are influenced by following features of the tourists, that is, age, marital status, disposable income, disposable time, cost, distance, risk, offers and complementary products.(Nilanjan Ray,2017)

Comprehension of this challenging co-relation between re-visit choice decision of tourists and Health & safety risk is very important for the sustainability of the tourism destination. It is important to understand the role of health and safety risk on the effectiveness of destination image and perceived value of hill station in India on re-visit to hill stations decision. Hence the researcher has proposed the following hypothesis:

H<sub>11</sub>: There is positive impact of hill stations perceived value and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no impact of hill stations perceived value and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic

H<sub>12</sub>: There is positive impact of hill stations brand value and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no impact of hill stations brand value and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic

H<sub>13</sub>: There is positive impact of hill stations health safety and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no impact of hill stations health safety and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic

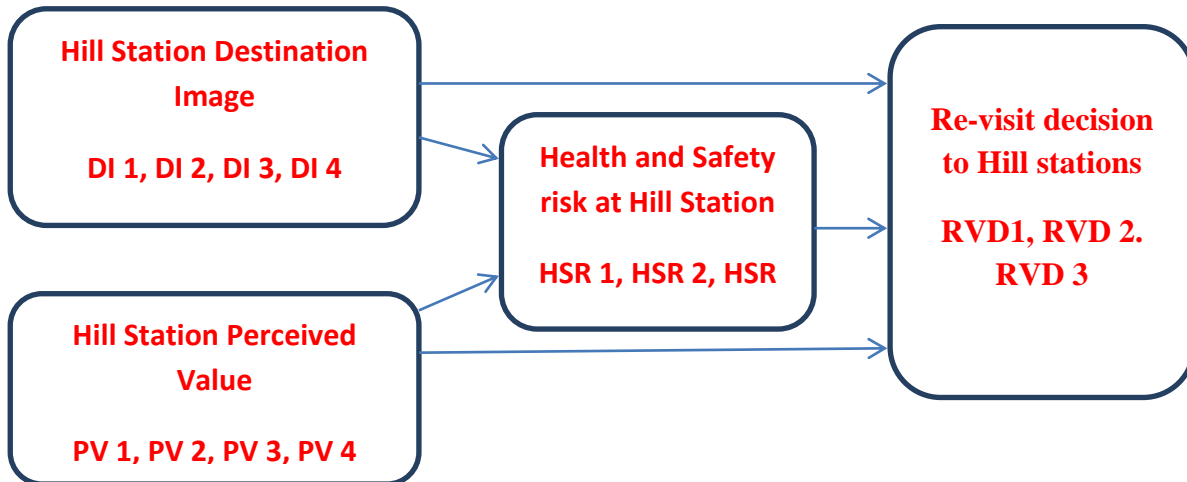


Fig. 1 Researcher proposed Theoretical Model for Re-visit decision to the Hill stations.

### Research Methodology:

Hill Stations in India as the prestigious heritage assets of India Tourism. They are popular around the world and provide a unique blend of natural beauty and historic significance. These hill stations have undergone a huge impact due to Coronavirus pandemic. Hence a systematic research will serve them to focus and plan right sustainable strategies. The researcher intends to collect primary data by systematic sampling. A quantitative data will be collected through well-structured close ended questionnaire answered a 5-point likert scale. In order to achieve the test the hypotheses proposed and to achieve the objectives the researcher's survey was conducted on 15 items with a well-established scales. These 15 items were developed and modified to cover information pertaining to Destination image of the hill station, Perceived value to the hill station; Health and safety risk at the hill station and re-visit decision of the tourists. The researcher has gathered the information from Matheran (Maharashtra), one of the oldest hill stations of India. Due to the influence of Coronavirus pandemic the researcher has been able to get the questionnaire filled from 159 tourists throughout the period from 5<sup>th</sup> Jan 2022 to 13<sup>th</sup> Feb 2022, who had toured in Matheran. With reference to Hair J.F (2019), for factor analysis a minimum of sample measuring ten times of the variables is required. It is suggested to have minimum 1:15 ratio between analyst variables and sample size (Van Voorhis, 2007). The questionnaire was been offered to 258



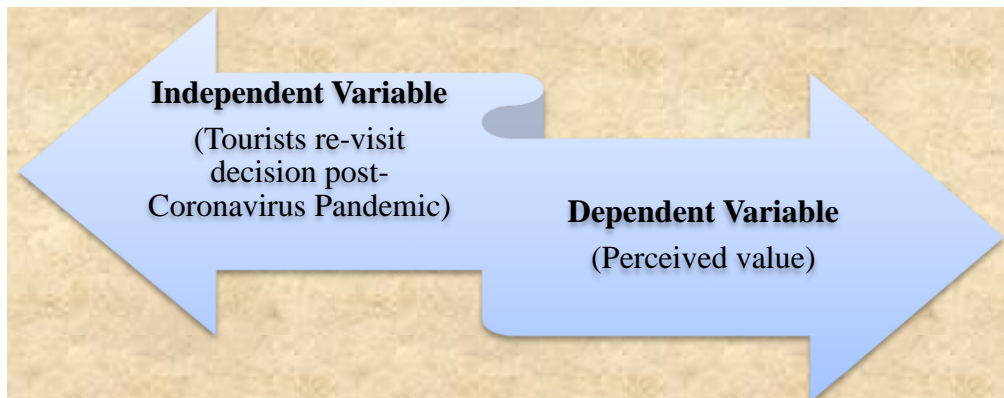
tourist at Matheran Hill station in India but due to coronavirus pandemic only 159 respondent positively and supported the research work.

**Data Analysis and interpretation:**

The researcher intends to apply Test of Between- Subject Effects, regression analysis and ANOVA test to the coded data collected from the responses by the sample to the close ended questionnaire. The respondent data is collected on five point likert scale.

H<sub>11</sub>: There is positive impact of hill station perceived value and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no impact of hill station perceived value and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic



**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.301 <sup>a</sup>	.091	.082	.48565

a. Predictors: (Constant), D\_1

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.404	1	2.404	10.192	.002 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	24.058	102	.236		
	Total	26.462	103			

a. Dependent Variable: PV\_1

b. Predictors: (Constant), D\_1

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

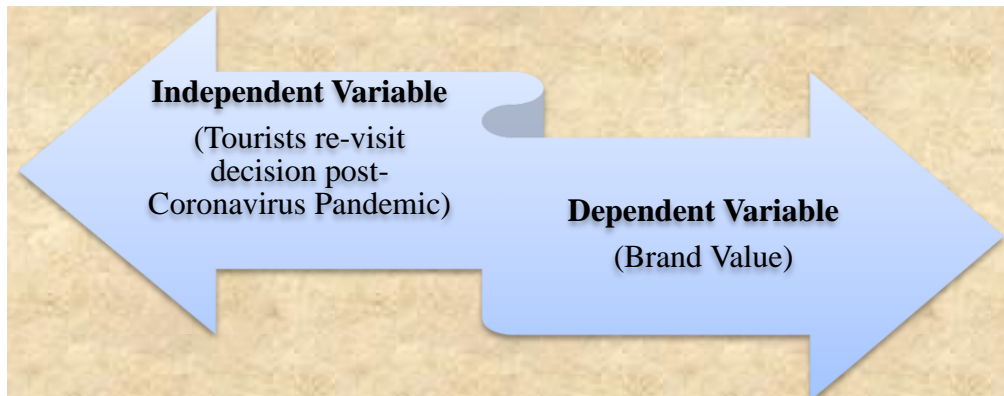
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.470	.410		8.467	.000
	D_1	.274	.086	.301	3.192	.002

a. Dependent Variable: PV\_1

For testing this hypothesis the researcher has considered hill station perceived value as a dependent variable and tourists re-visit decision as independent variable. On the basis of collected data and subsequent analysis the above table is generated. Since the significance value (*p-value*) of the table is 0.000 which is less than 0.5 the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted. This means that the hill station perceived value has a positive impact on the tourists revisit decision after post corona virus pandemic.

H<sub>12</sub>: There is positive impact of hill station brand value and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no impact of hill station brand value and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic



**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.075 <sup>a</sup>	.006	-.004	1.42436

a. Predictors: (Constant), D\_1

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.176	1	1.176	.580	.448 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	206.939	102	2.029		
	Total	208.115	103			

a. Dependent Variable: BV

b. Predictors: (Constant), D\_1

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

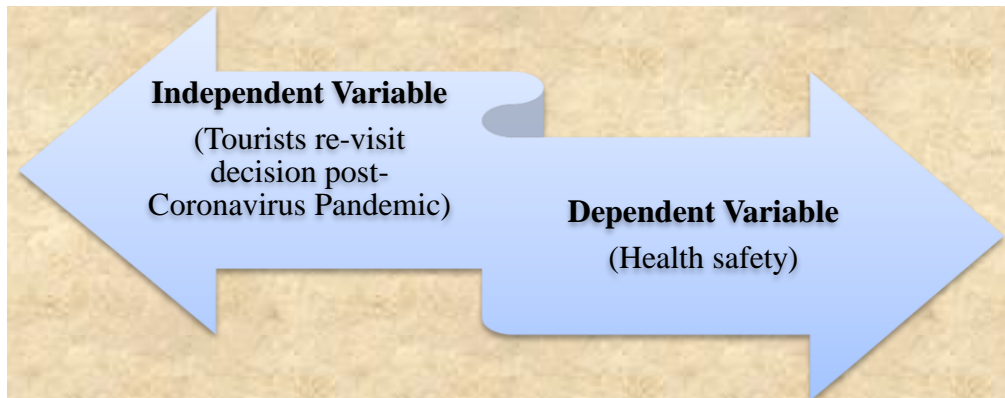
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.274	1.202		2.724	.008
	D_1	-.192	.252	-.075	-.761	.448

a. Dependent Variable: BV

For the testing of second hypothesis the researcher has considered hill station brand image as a dependent variable and tourists re-visit decision as independent variable. On the basis of collected data and subsequent analysis the above table is generated. Since the significance value (*p-value*) of the table is 0.000 which is less than 0.5 the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted. This means that the hill station brand image has a positive impact on the tourists revisit decision after post corona virus pandemic.

H<sub>13</sub>: There is positive impact of hill station health safety and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no impact of hill station health safety and tourists re-visit decision post-Coronavirus Pandemic



**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.263 <sup>a</sup>	.069	.060	.94003

a. Predictors: (Constant), D\_1

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.704	1	6.704	7.586	.007 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	90.133	102	.884		
	Total	96.837	103			

a. Dependent Variable: HS

b. Predictors: (Constant), D\_1

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.224	.793		2.804	.006
	D_1	.458	.166	.263	2.754	.007

a. Dependent Variable: HS

For the testing of third hypothesis the researcher has considered hill station health safety as a dependent variable and tourists re-visit decision as independent variable. On the basis of collected data and subsequent analysis the above table is generated. Since the significance

value (*p-value*) of the table is 0.000 which is less than 0.5 the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted. This means that the hill station health safety has a positive impact on the tourists revisit decision after post corona virus pandemic.

#### Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: D\_1

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	10.781 <sup>a</sup>	18	.599	4.614	.000	.372
Intercept	434.871	1	434.871	3349.796	.000	.960
PV_1	1.413	2	.707	5.444	.005	.072
HSR_1	1.596	2	.798	6.145	.003	.081
RV_1	1.949	3	.650	5.005	.003	.097
PV_1 * HSR_1	1.423	2	.711	5.480	.005	.073
PV_1 * RV_1	1.545	4	.386	2.976	.021	.078
HSR_1 * RV_1	2.022	3	.674	5.191	.002	.100
PV_1 * HSR_1 * RV_1	.649	2	.324	2.499	.086	.034
Error	18.175	140	.130			
Total	3700.000	159				
Corrected Total	28.956	158				

a. R Squared = .372 (Adjusted R Squared = .292)

The researcher has also applied the Tests of Between- Subject effects, where Hill station Brand Image is considered as dependent variable and Hill station perceived value, health and safety risk is considered as dependent variable. On the basis of collected data and subsequent analysis the above table is generated. Since the significance value (*p-value*) of the table is 0.000 which is less than 0.5, It clearly indicates that there is a positive significant relationship between both dependent and independent variables. That means the hill station brand image , tourists perceived value , tourists health safety risk and re-visit destination have significance.

#### Empirical observations:

The researcher during his visit to the hill stations observed that the tourists were highly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic in terms of their decision for visiting tourism destination. They were very much concerned about the health safety at a paramount level. The pandemic changed the approach of the tourists in visit decision in a very different way. But the Hill stations brand image and the perceived value that was been developed over the years in the minds of the tourists had a significant impact. The tourists confirmed that they had more trust on the destinations and hotels they have been visiting in comparison to

unknown destinations. The destination brand image and perceived value was the trigger to retain the customer's loyalty even during the difficult hour of coronavirus pandemic. The hoteliers and the destination places of interest which maintained required standards of health safety were found to be doing well with their services and business.

### **Conclusion:**

The hill stations in India are very unique, historical and popular destination across the nation and worldwide. Over the period of time from decades to decades they have developed a strong destination brand image in the mind of tourists. They have established a good perceived value amongst the tourists due to their better services in relation to the value for money. The coronavirus pandemic had a worst impact on the tourist outlook about walking out of their houses. The fear of infection raised the bar of vigilance and expectation in relation to health safety risk. The researcher study reveals that hill stations brand value and perceived value by the tourists has a positive impact on the re-visit intentions of the tourists even under the influence of post coronavirus pandemic trauma. The hill station destination brand value and perceived value have successful able to get the tourists back with an accompanying healthy and safety risk combat strategies and practices. Hence the researcher would like to conclude that the hill station destinations, hospitality industry, government, locals should strive utmost to maintain and uplift the destination brand image so that it can attract the tourists. Moreover, they should provide best of their ability services and experiences to the visiting tourists. This will ensure high perceived value. If this both variables are developed by them, whichever crisis they would confront in the future, they will be more sustainable and revive back quickly.

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