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Harnessing Media for Risk Communication: Enhancing Tourist Safety Amid Multi-Hazard Threats in Puri, Odisha

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Abstract: Puri, a coastal city in Odisha, is both a major religious tourism destination and a region frequently exposed to natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, and heatwaves. Tourists, especially those unfamiliar with the local environment, heavily depend on media for disaster-related information and safety guidance. This study investigates the effectiveness of media in delivering disaster risk communication to tourists in Puri. Using a quantitative survey method, data was collected from 86 tourists, including both domestic and international respondents. The findings reveal that most tourists rely on smartphones and social media for disaster updates, while trust in the clarity, timeliness, and reliability of such information varies. Many participants expressed moderate confidence in responding to disasters based on media messages and identified mobile alerts, visual clarity, and multilingual communication as key areas needing improvement. The study highlights the importance of tailored disaster communication strategies that consider tourists' temporary and vulnerable status. Recommendations include strengthening digital communication tools, involving hotels and travel agents in awareness dissemination, and enhancing accessibility through multilingual platforms. These improvements can ensure that tourists receive timely, clear, and actionable information during disasters, ultimately promoting safer and more resilient tourism in hazard-prone areas like Puri.

Keywords: *Communication, Disaster, Media, Puri, Tourism, Vulnerability.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Puri, located on the eastern coast of Odisha, is a significant religious and cultural hub in India, attracting millions of tourists annually (Gupta & Basak, 2018; Caitanya, 2019). Known for the famous Jagannath Temple and its pristine beaches, Puri holds a special place in both domestic and international tourism circuits (Patnaik, 2007). However, its geographic location along the Bay of Bengal also makes it highly vulnerable to natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, droughts, heatwaves, and even occasional tsunami threats (Danda, 2023; *mapping climatic and biological disasters in india*, n.d.). These events pose serious risks not only to the local population but also to the large number of tourists who may be unfamiliar with the region's disaster history, geography, and safety protocols (Ziegler et al., 2021; UNISDR, 2017; Sah et al., 2025).

Tourists, unlike local residents, often lack access to local networks or detailed knowledge of emergency procedures. This makes them heavily dependent on external sources (primarily the media) for real-time disaster information, safety instructions, and evacuation alerts (Vaiciulyte et al., 2025; World Health Organization, 2002; Sah, 2025). In this context, the role of media becomes central to disaster risk communication (Sah & Prashar, 2025). Whether through traditional outlets like television and newspapers or newer platforms such as social media, government apps, and mobile alerts, effective media communication can significantly influence tourist safety and decision-making during emergencies (Danda, 2023; *mapping climatic and biological disasters in india*, n.d.).

Despite its importance, the effectiveness of disaster communication targeting tourists in India remains underexplored. This study aims to assess how tourists visiting Puri access and interpret disaster-related media messages, what media channels they trust and rely on (Sah & Prashar, 2025a), and how such communication influences their preparedness and response (Sah, 2025a). By evaluating

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current communication practices and identifying key areas for improvement, the research seeks to contribute to safer, more informed tourism in disaster-prone regions like Puri (The Asia Foundation et al., 2022; *CHARTERED SECRETARY*, n.d.).

➢ *Research Question*

How effectively does media-based risk communication enhance tourist safety in disaster-prone Puri, Odisha?

➢ *Research Objectives*

- To analyze how different forms of media (print, electronic, and digital) are used to communicate disaster risks to tourists in Puri.
- To evaluate tourists' awareness, understanding, and behavioral response to media-delivered disaster alerts and safety instructions.
- To explore challenges in the current media-based risk communication system and suggest improvements for better disaster preparedness among tourists.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative survey research method to understand how media helps in sharing disaster-related information with tourists and how it improves their safety in Puri, Odisha. A survey with close-ended questions is used to collect clear and measurable data about tourists' awareness, media usage, and response to disaster messages.

The study is carried out in Puri District, a popular tourist place in Odisha that often faces natural disasters like cyclones, floods, droughts, heat waves, earthquakes, tsunamis, and fire accidents. The survey takes place in well-known tourist spots like Jagannath Temple, Puri Beach, and nearby areas that attract both Indian and foreign tourists. A total of 86 tourists take part in the survey. Among them, 18 are international tourists and the remaining 68 are from different parts of India. Tourists are selected using a convenience sampling method, which means participants are chosen based on who is available and willing to respond during the survey period.

The questionnaire has four main parts. The first part collects basic details like age, gender, where the tourist comes from, and the reason for their visit. The second part focuses on media usage, such as which platforms (TV, radio, internet, social media, etc.) tourists use to get disaster-related news. The third part looks at how aware tourists are of local disasters, their past experiences, and how they react to warnings. The last part asks for their opinion on how clear, timely, and useful the disaster messages are. The data collected is studied using simple statistics like percentages and frequency to understand patterns in tourist behavior and media use. The study also checks if there are links between types of media and how prepared tourists feel. All participants give their consent before taking part in the survey. Their names and personal details are kept private, and they take part voluntarily without any pressure.

➢ *Study Area*

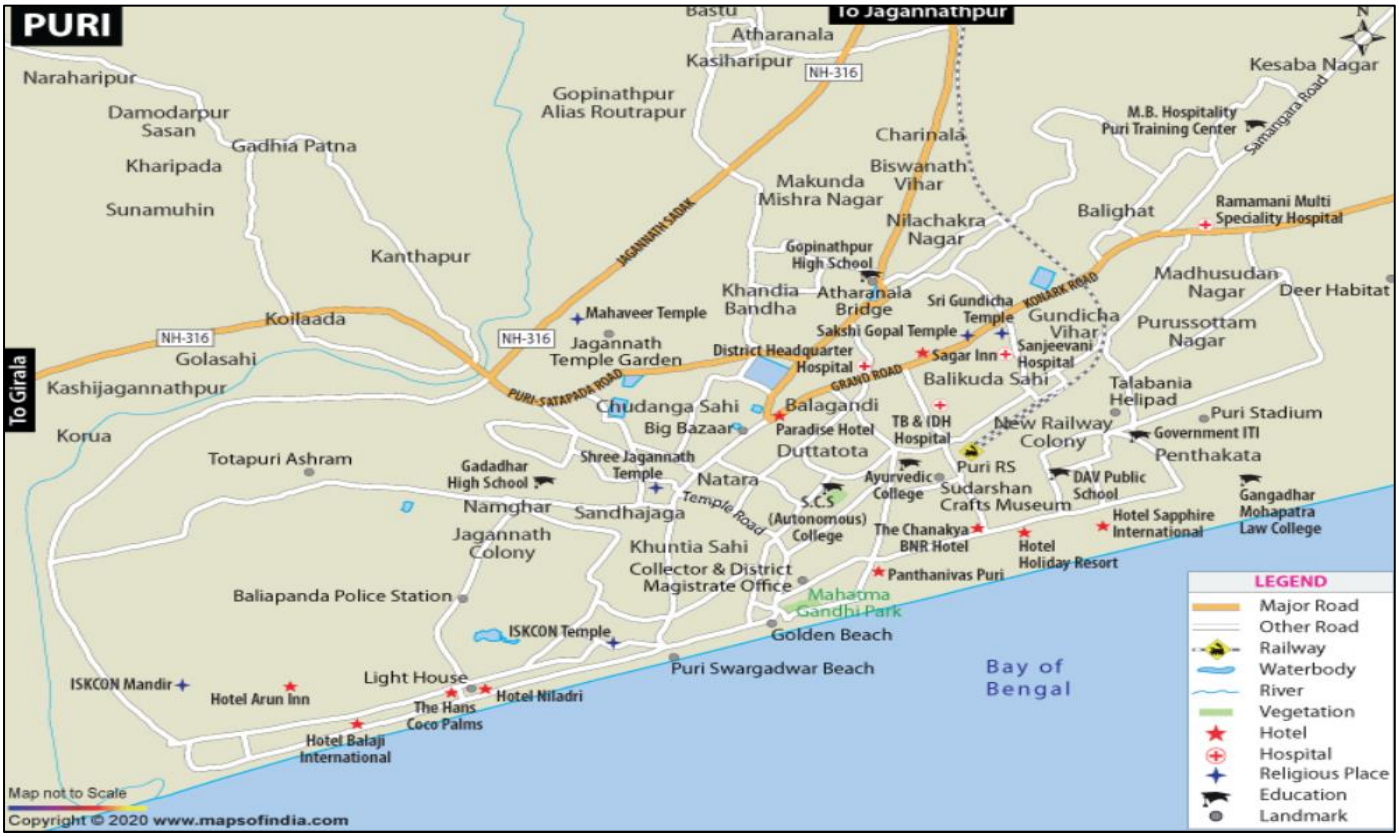

Fig 1 Geographical Map of Puri District
(Source: mapsofindia.com)

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➢ *Geography & Topography*

Puri is one of the coastal districts of Orissa. It is situated on the Eastern Coastal plain of Odisha. It is surrounded by the district Cuttack and Jagatsinghpur in its north, Khordha in its west, Ganjam to the southwest and the Bay of Bengal to its East and South-East.

- Latitude- 19˚ 28' N to 26˚ 35' N
- Longitude- 84˚ 29' E to 86˚ 26' E
- Altitude - 0 meters
- Time Zone - UTC+5:3O 2.4.1

➢ *Geographical Area of the District*

Geographical area of Puri district is 3051 km2 or 264988 Ha.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Age Distribution of Tourists Visiting Puri

Q1. What is your age group?	
Response	**Frequency**
Below 18	4
18–25	22
26–35	30
36–50	20
Above 50	10
Total	86

Table 1 shows data collected about the age group of 86 tourists in Puri. The most represented age group is 26–35 years with 30 respondents, showing that young adults are the most common visitors. This is followed by 22 people aged 18–25 and 20 people aged 36–50, indicating a good presence of both youth and middle-aged tourists. Ten respondents are above 50, and 4 are under 18, showing fewer very young and senior visitors. The overall pattern suggests that the majority of tourists in Puri are between 18 and 50 years old. This age range is more likely to use digital media and be active online, which could affect how they receive disaster information. Knowing the age group helps in understanding which communication methods will work best, such as mobile alerts or social media updates. It also helps authorities plan safety instructions suitable for different age groups during emergencies.

Table 2 Gender Composition of Tourist Respondents

Q2. What is your gender?	
Response	**Frequency**
Male	49
Female	36
Other	1
Total	86

Table 2 shows data about the gender of tourists. Out of the total 86 respondents, 49 are male and 36 are female. One respondent identifies as "Other." This shows a fairly balanced distribution between male and female tourists, with males making up slightly more than half. The nearly equal gender ratio indicates that disaster communication strategies should be inclusive and reach all types of travelers. Since both genders are actively traveling to Puri, it is important that safety messages, evacuation plans, and emergency contacts are easily understandable and accessible to everyone. Gender-sensitive communication is especially important when providing information in public spaces like temples, beaches, and markets, where both male and female tourists are present.

Table 3 Nationality Profile of Tourists in Puri

Q3. What is your nationality?	
Response	**Frequency**
Indian	68
International	18
Total	86

Table 3 gives information on the nationality of respondents. Out of the 86 tourists surveyed, 68 are from India while 18 are international tourists. This means that about 79% are domestic travelers, while 21% come from outside India. The presence of international tourists highlights Puri's appeal as a global tourist destination, possibly due to its religious and cultural significance. The difference in nationality suggests that information related to disaster safety must be available in simple English or visual formats that can be understood by people from different countries. International tourists may not be familiar with local weather conditions or emergency contact systems, so it's important that hotels and tourism offices provide them with clear, easy-to-follow instructions.

Table 4 Primary Purpose of Visiting Puri

Q4. What is the main purpose of your visit to Puri?	
Response	**Frequency**
Religious	38
Leisure/Tourism	30
Business	9
Other	9
Total	86

Table 4 presents the main reasons why tourists visit Puri. The highest number of respondents (38) mention religious purposes, which is expected due to the presence of the famous Jagannath Temple. Leisure or general tourism is the second most common reason, with 30 respondents. Nine tourists are in Puri for business, and another 9 selected "Other" reasons, which could include family visits or events. This information is useful for disaster planners because different types of tourists may behave differently during an emergency. Religious tourists often gather in large groups, especially during festivals, which increases the need for crowd safety and early warnings. Leisure tourists might be more dispersed around beaches and hotels. Understanding the purpose of the visit can help design targeted alerts and safety guidelines based on where and how tourists spend their time.

Table 5 Duration of Stay Among Tourists in Puri

Q5. How long are you staying in Puri?	
Response	**Frequency**
1 day	10
2–3 days	34
4–7 days	30

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More than 7 days	12
Total	86

Table 5 describes how long tourists stay in Puri. The largest group of respondents (34) stays for 2–3 days, followed by 30 people who stay for 4–7 days. Twelve tourists are staying for more than a week, and 10 plan to stay only for one day. This shows that most tourists stay in Puri for a short to medium time. This is important because tourists with shorter stays may not seek out local disaster information unless it is given to them directly. They may miss news or alerts if communication is not quick and simple. For those staying longer, there is more opportunity to provide detailed information through hotels, mobile apps, or local guides. The data helps tourism officials and disaster managers decide how frequently and through which channels they should share important safety updates.

Table 6 Preferred Media Sources for Disaster Information

Q6. Which one media source do you rely on most for disaster-related information?	
Response	**Frequency**
Television	20
Radio	5
Newspaper	9
Social media	26
Govt Apps/Websites	11
SMS Alerts	7
Hotel/Travel Info	6
None	2
Total	86

Table 6 shows the most trusted media sources for disaster-related information among tourists. Social media is the most preferred, with 26 people choosing it. Television is also popular with 20 responses. Government websites or apps come next with 11 users, while newspapers and SMS alerts are chosen by 9 and 7 tourists respectively. Hotel staff and travel information are trusted by 6 tourists, and radio is the choice for 5. Only 2 people say they don't rely on any media source. This data indicates that both digital and traditional media still play a role, but social media is the leading choice. Since tourists may not carry radios or read local newspapers regularly, platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, or Twitter are more useful for real-time alerts. This finding suggests that authorities should strengthen their presence on these platforms to reach tourists quickly and effectively.

Table 7 Tourists' Frequency of Following Disaster Updates While Traveling

Q7. How often do you follow disaster-related updates while traveling?	
Response	**Frequency**
Always	10
Often	22
Sometimes	32
Rarely	16
Never	6
Total	86

Table 7 explains how often tourists follow disaster-related updates during their travel. A total of 32 respondents say they "Sometimes" follow updates, while 22 do so "Often." Only 10 tourists "Always" check for disaster news. Sixteen rarely follow updates, and 6 never do. This data shows that while some tourists are alert, many do not regularly look for disaster-related information. The largest group falls into the "Sometimes" category, which means they could benefit from timely reminders. The lower numbers for "Always" and the presence of people who never check updates show a clear need for better communication systems. This includes putting up disaster alert posters, using hotel staff for information sharing, and sending notifications through apps. Encouraging regular checking of updates can improve tourist safety during sudden emergencies.

Table 8 Most Common Devices Used for Accessing Disaster Information

Q8. Which device do you use most to access disaster information?	
Response	**Frequency**
Smartphone	53
Television	14
Radio	3
Laptop	11
None	5
Total	86

Table 8 focuses on which device tourists use most to get disaster-related information. A majority of 53 respondents use smartphones, showing a clear preference for mobile access. Fourteen people use television, while 11 use laptops. Radio is the choice for 3 respondents, and 5 people do not use any device. This shows that smartphones are the top tool for receiving disaster information, possibly through apps, social media, or browser alerts. This finding is useful for planners because it confirms that mobile-friendly content should be the priority. Websites and apps should be easy to use and work on low internet speeds. Although some people still use television and laptops, the trend clearly favors mobile communication. Emergency alerts, safety tips, and evacuation routes should therefore be optimized for smartphone users, especially in tourist-heavy areas like Puri.

Table 9 Tourists' Awareness of Puri's Disaster Vulnerability

Q9. Are you aware that Puri is vulnerable to disasters like cyclones and floods?	
Response	**Frequency**
Yes	70
No	16
Total	86

Table 9 shows whether tourists are aware that Puri is at risk of disasters such as cyclones and floods. Out of 86 respondents, 70 answered "Yes," indicating that a large majority know about the disaster risks in the area. Only 16 people said "No," meaning they are not aware of these dangers. This high level of awareness is a positive sign, especially in a coastal city like Puri where cyclones and floods are common. It shows that many tourists come

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prepared or have at least heard about past disasters. However, the fact that 16 people are unaware also highlights a need to improve pre-arrival information, such as what hotels, travel websites, or tourism boards provide. Informing every visitor about local risks can help them act quickly in emergencies and stay safe.

Table 10 Prior Experience of Tourists with Natural Disasters in India

Q10. Have you ever experienced a natural disaster during a trip in India?	
Response	**Frequency**
Yes	41
No	45
Total	86

Table 10 presents responses to whether tourists have personally experienced a natural disaster during a trip in India. Among the 86 respondents, 41 said "Yes," while 45 answered "No." This indicates that nearly half of the tourists have faced some kind of natural disaster in the past while traveling in India. Such experience can make tourists more alert and responsive to disaster warnings. On the other hand, those who have never experienced such events might not be as cautious or aware. This data suggests that disaster communication should be designed for both experienced and first-time travelers. Messages should be simple, clear, and quick to understand, helping all tourists respond effectively in case of sudden disasters.

Table 11 Confidence in Responding to Disasters Based on Media Guidance

Q11. If a disaster occurs, how confident are you in responding correctly based on media messages?	
Response	**Frequency**
Very confident	18
Somewhat confident	39
Not very confident	21
Not at all confident	8
Total	86

Table 11 looks at how confident tourists feel about responding to a disaster based on media information. Out of the total, 18 said they are "Very confident," 39 said "Somewhat confident," 21 are "Not very confident," and 8 are "Not at all confident." This means that while most tourists trust media messages to guide them, there is still a significant number who doubt their ability to act correctly. The highest number falls under "Somewhat confident," showing a moderate level of trust and understanding.

This data highlights the importance of making disaster messages easier to follow. More practical tips, visuals, or multilingual support may improve confidence among travelers, especially those who are unsure about what actions to take in emergencies.

Table 12 Level of Trust in Media for Disaster-Related Information

Q12. How much do you trust media for disaster information?	
Response	**Frequency**
Strongly trust	9
Trust	32
Neutral	26
Distrust	14
Strongly distrust	5
Total	86

Table 12 shows how much tourists trust the media for disaster information. Among 86 tourists, 9 strongly trust media, 32 trust it, 26 feel neutral, 14 show distrust, and 5 strongly distrust it. The mixed responses show that while a good number of people rely on media, a sizable group remains unsure or even doubtful. The neutral and negative responses may stem from past experiences where media messages were either unclear or not timely. To build more trust, media outlets and disaster agencies need to ensure that their information is accurate, fast, and easy to understand. Tourists are more likely to follow guidance if they believe the source is reliable, so building trust is essential for improving disaster readiness.

Table 13 Perceived Clarity of Disaster Information in the Media

Q13. How clear is the disaster information you receive through the media?	
Response	**Frequency**
Very clear	11
Clear	35
Neutral	22
Unclear	12
Very unclear	6
Total	86

Table 13 describes how clear tourists find the disaster-related information shared by media. Eleven respondents say it is "Very clear," and 35 say it is "Clear." Another 22 feel neutral, while 12 say it is "Unclear," and 6 say it is "Very unclear." Most tourists find the messages understandable, but a noticeable portion still struggles with clarity. This suggests that while communication efforts are working for many, there is room for improvement. The use of visuals, symbols, or multilingual content could make a big difference. For tourists who may not speak the local language or are unfamiliar with local terms, making disaster messages more accessible can increase safety and reduce panic during emergencies.

Table 14 Perceived Timeliness of Disaster Information Received

Q14. How timely is the disaster information you receive?	
Response	**Frequency**
Always on time	9
Often timely	33
Sometimes delayed	26
Mostly delayed	12

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Very delayed	6
Total	86

Table 14 shows how timely tourists think disaster information is when shared by the media. Out of 86 responses, 9 believe it is "Always on time," 33 say "Often timely," and 26 feel it is "Sometimes delayed." Twelve believe it is "Mostly delayed," and 6 say it is "Very delayed." Although many tourists feel the messages arrive on time or often enough, a significant number still report delays. Delayed information during a disaster can be dangerous, especially in a coastal area like Puri where events like cyclones can escalate quickly. The findings suggest that authorities need to focus on real-time communication tools such as mobile alerts and fast social media updates to ensure tourists receive warnings quickly and have time to take action.

Table 15 Perception of Media's Helpfulness in Taking Safety Precautions

Q15. Do media messages help you take proper safety precautions during disasters?	
Response	**Frequency**
Strongly agree	14
Agree	36
Neutral	22
Disagree	9
Strongly disagree	5
Total	86

Table 15 explains how much media messages help tourists take the right safety steps during disasters. Fourteen respondents "Strongly agree," 36 "Agree," and 22 are "Neutral." Only 9 "Disagree" and 5 "Strongly disagree." This shows that more than half of the tourists believe media helps them act safely in disaster situations. However, a good number of people are either unsure or disagree. The neutral responses suggest that the current messages may not always be detailed or practical enough. To improve this, disaster messages should clearly tell tourists what to do, where to go, and who to contact. Hotels and local travel agents can also support this by passing on verified safety instructions from official sources.

Table 16 Key Areas Needing Improvement in Disaster Communication for Tourists

Q16. Which area needs the most improvement in disaster communication for tourists?	
Response	**Frequency**
Language accessibility	17
Visual clarity	20
Mobile alerts	24
Hotel/agent info	15
No improvement	10
Total	86

Table 16 looks at which area tourists think needs the most improvement in disaster communication. The top choice is "Mobile alerts" with 24 responses. This is followed by "Visual clarity" (20), "Language accessibility" (17), and "Hotel/agent info" (15). Only 10 tourists feel that no improvement is needed. These results show that tourists want disaster messages to be easier to understand, especially on mobile devices. Many may not speak the local language or understand text-based alerts. Therefore, using simple visuals, symbols, and multiple languages can help. Also, hotels and travel agents play a key role and should be trained to give correct safety instructions. Improving these areas will make disaster communication more effective for all types of visitors

IV. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This study explores the role of media in disaster risk communication among tourists in Puri, Odisha, a location frequently affected by cyclones, floods, and heat waves. The research uses a quantitative survey of 86 respondents, including both domestic and international tourists, to understand awareness levels, media preferences, trust, and preparedness in the context of disaster communication. The scientific findings reveal that most tourists are within the 18–50 age group and primarily rely on smartphones and social media for disaster information. A significant portion is aware of Puri's disaster vulnerability, and nearly half have experienced a natural disaster in India. While many trust the media and find the information clear and timely, a notable number remain neutral or skeptical. Confidence in acting during disasters based on media guidance is moderate, and tourists believe mobile alerts and visual clarity are areas that need improvement. These findings confirm the importance of digital communication tools for real-time updates and the need for simplified, multilingual, and visual content. The results extend previous work on disaster communication by focusing specifically on a tourist-heavy coastal area, where transient populations have unique communication needs. Unlike local residents, tourists may lack local knowledge and depend heavily on quick, clear, and easily accessible media messages. Scientifically, the study's implications lie in emphasizing the necessity for integrating tourism perspectives into disaster risk reduction strategies. It highlights how media platforms, especially digital ones, must adapt to users' behaviors and trust levels to enhance the effectiveness of emergency communication. The findings contribute to future research by offering a structured approach to assessing disaster communication readiness in tourist zones. It also provides a framework for comparing communication effectiveness across regions or tourist destinations with similar disaster exposure.

In summary, this research provides valuable insights into how media communication affects tourist awareness and preparedness in disaster-prone regions like Puri. It shows that tourists are partially aware and equipped, but the quality and delivery of disaster messages need strengthening. This work facilitates scientific research by presenting data-backed evidence on the media's role in disaster preparedness from a tourism perspective, a relatively under-explored area in disaster studies. It opens new avenues for studies focusing on media strategy design for temporary populations. However, the study has some limitations. It is based on a single location and a small sample size, which may limit its generalizability. It also relies on self-reported data, which could include biases

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or inaccuracies in recall and interpretation. Future studies should explore longitudinal or comparative approaches across multiple tourist sites for broader insights.

V. CONCLUSION

Puri, a popular tourist destination in Odisha, is frequently exposed to natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, and heatwaves. Tourists visiting such high-risk regions often lack local knowledge and depend on media for real-time information and guidance. However, the effectiveness of media in delivering timely, reliable and understandable disaster-related communication to tourists remains under-examined. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how tourists in Puri receive, trust, and respond to disaster information shared through different media platforms.

The key findings reveal that the majority of tourists rely on smartphones and social media for disaster updates, while traditional sources like radio and newspapers are less preferred. Awareness about Puri's disaster vulnerability is relatively high, yet trust and clarity in media messages vary. Tourists expressed a strong need for improvement in mobile alerts, visual clarity, and language accessibility. While many respondents feel somewhat confident in acting based on media messages, a notable portion lacks full trust and preparedness, especially among those unfamiliar with local conditions. These insights have several implications for disaster management and tourism planning. Strengthening digital infrastructure, using multilingual content, and training hotel or travel service staff in disaster communication can significantly improve tourist safety and resilience. Media channels, especially digital ones, need to focus on accessibility and clarity to cater to diverse tourist profiles.

Despite these findings, the study has some limitations. It focuses on a single geographic location with a relatively small sample size, which limits broader generalization. Additionally, the data is self-reported, which may include response bias. Expanding the study to include other tourist destinations and conducting interviews or focus groups could provide deeper insights. Future research should explore longitudinal studies to measure changes in tourist behavior and preparedness over time. Comparative studies across regions with similar vulnerabilities would also help build a broader understanding of how media can adapt to different tourist profiles and risk contexts.

In conclusion, this study highlights the critical yet under-recognized role of media in disaster communication for tourists in disaster-prone regions. By identifying gaps and potential improvements in media messaging, it provides a foundation for enhancing disaster preparedness and response strategies tailored to temporary populations like tourists. Ensuring that tourists receive timely, clear, and trustworthy disaster information is not just a communication challenge—it is a crucial step toward building safer, more resilient tourism ecosystems.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

To improve disaster risk communication for tourists in Puri, authorities should prioritize mobile-based alerts with multilingual support to ensure accessibility for both domestic and international travelers. Media messages should be made more visually clear and action-oriented to guide tourists during emergencies. Hotels and travel agents should be trained to deliver verified safety instructions. Government apps and local tourism websites must collaborate to offer real-time disaster updates. Increasing awareness campaigns at tourist hotspots, railway stations, and hotels can further enhance preparedness. These steps can make disaster communication more reliable, timely, and inclusive for all types of tourists visiting disaster-prone regions.

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