

# Festivals and commerce in India: A socioeconomic perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Festivals are an essential part of India's cultural landscape and serve as regular socioeconomic occurrences that affect community structures and market dynamics. There hasn't been much focus on combining these aspects into a single analytical framework, even though previous research has mostly focused on the economic multiplier impacts of festivals or their social impacts separately. In order to close this gap, the current study views Indian festivals as dual-impact socioeconomic occurrences that cause social change and economic acceleration at the same time. A thematic synthesis of secondary materials, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic literature, government reports, policy documents, trade association publications, and reliable media sources, forms the basis of the study's qualitative and conceptual research design. Economic multiplier effects, MSME participation, commercialization tendencies, social cohesion, public safety hazards, environmental externalities, and governance issues related to large-scale festival events are the main topics of the analysis. The results show that festivals boost domestic demand, create jobs, encourage regional trade, and increase the involvement of local businesses. They support community involvement and cultural identity at the same time. However, structural vulnerabilities that could jeopardize long-term sustainability are shown by growing commercialization, improper crowd control, environmental deterioration, and regulatory deficiencies. The study comes to the conclusion that sustainable festival ecosystems require balanced governance frameworks that combine economic opportunity with regulatory discipline, environmental protections, and organized catastrophe preparedness. The study provides a thorough conceptual explanation of festivals in emerging countries by combining economic and social viewpoints. It also emphasizes the necessity of policy-oriented involvement to manage the festivals' dual socioeconomic character.

**Keywords-** Festivals, India, Commercialization, Implication.

## Motivation of the Study

The word "fest" comes from the Latin word "festivus," which was acquired from Anglo-Norman French and was first used as a noun in 1589 (Srikanth, P., & Ram, M. R. (2013)). Festivals are defined by Getz (2005) as public celebrations having a special subject, while Smith (1990) describes them as public, annual, or infrequently organized special events or themed celebrations. As a religious and secular nation, India celebrates many different festivals all year long. Many of these festivals are religious in nature, honoring saints, gurus, gods, and goddesses as well as the triumph of good over evil (Sanjaya S. Gaur and Mandar Chapnerkar, 2015). Thirty-four of India's fifty-one official festivals are regional, and seventeen are observed nationally (Government of India list of festivals—Rajya Sabha, 2013). The Indian calendar reflects India's history, culture, and civilization through a continuous series of festivals and fairs (Bhalla, K. S. 2005). (P. Chauhan, 2023) While Eid-ul-Fitr for Muslims, Christmas for Christians, and Baisakhi for Sikhs also embrace cultural and spiritual status, providing a window into their traditions for broader society, festivals like Diwali, Holi, and Navaratri carry unique symbolic significance, symbolizing the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. These celebrations are distinguished by distinct rituals, joyful dedication, and deep spiritual meaning, making them more than just occasions for fun. Some celebrations are more local or regional in nature, while others are observed in all regions (Gaur and Chapnerkar 2015). (Bhalla, K. S. 2005) Celebrations provide charitable deeds, skill development, and empowerment, enhancing the general well-being of people who are frequently disregarded. Festivals become agents of social change by bringing joy and celebration to underserved groups, dismantling barriers, and fostering a sense of dignity and belonging among all societal members. It is reasonable to suggest that festivals

educate people, strengthen ties, and promote a sense of collective pride, all of which benefit the economy and society (Pote, R. T., 2023). (Ritu Kumari 2024) According to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAT), the market may see liquidity of over Rs 2.5 lakh crore from Diwali-related seasonal purchases and other services. India is one of the main economies with the quickest rate of growth in 2024 based on nominal GDP, according to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) World Economic Outlook Update for July 2024. Festival planning has long been seen as a solution to the social and economic issues facing communities today (Waite, 2008). Indian festivals are a patchwork of many customs that, despite their diversity, do not cause division; regardless of the festival's name, people from all walks of life participate emotionally, if not physically, in the festivities, which has helped India endure for generations (Bhalla, K. S. 2005). Some studies (Sharma and Sharma 2015; Babu and Munjal 2015; Tiwari 2015; Durgamohan 2015) summarize the effects of festivals on the nation, the society, and culture. The majority of research emphasizes the economic effects of festivals, with less attention paid to their societal effects. Local festivals' social effects are generally viewed as "external" and more intangible than their economic effects from the standpoint of economic evaluation (Yozukmaz, N., Bertan, S., & Alkaya, S. 2020). Although social effects may occasionally have a greater influence on the local population, economic effects are undoubtedly significant (Fredline et al., 2002). The impact of Indian festivals on the economy and society is thoroughly examined in this research, as social impacts are undoubtedly as significant as economic impacts (Delamere et al., 2001).

In light of the identified gap, this study is guided by the following objectives:

To examine the economic implications of Indian festivals.

To examine the social implications of Indian festivals.

To critically assess the socioeconomic distortions associated with increasing commercialization and market expansion during festival periods.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on festivals has mostly focused on their social and economic effects in the fields of community studies, tourism, and regional development. Festivals are viewed as temporary demand stimuli from an economic standpoint that have a multiplicative influence on the retail, hospitality, transportation, handicraft, and informal sectors (Dwyer, Forsyth, & Spurr, 2005; Getz, 2010). While Kumari (2024) highlights the function of festivals in increasing domestic demand and liquidity flows, Srikanth and Ram (2013) found a "Diwali effect" in stock market behavior in the Indian context, suggesting that festive cycles influence financial and consumption patterns. Micro-level assessments also show localized economic benefits, such as increased trade during festival seasons, MSME engagement, and employment creation (Gaur & Chapnerkar, 2015; Tiwari, 2015; Sharma & Sharma, 2015; Pandey, Singh, & Bora, 2024).

Festivals are widely acknowledged as tools of social capital building that support cultural continuity, communal pride, and collective identity in addition to economic growth (Delamere, Wankel, & Hinch, 2001; Fredline, Jago, & Deery, 2002). Festivals are integrative forums that uphold common traditions and foster communal harmony in varied civilizations like India (Bhalla, 2005; Nair, 2022). The potential for empowerment is also highlighted by research, especially for women artisans and underprivileged groups who benefit from festival markets' visibility and revenue opportunities (Pandey, Chaturvedi, & Soni, 2025). The growing commercialization of festivals is criticized by new research, which contends that market-oriented growth may change traditional value systems and unequally distribute economic benefits, particularly when local producers face competition from low-cost imports (Babu & Munjal, 2015; Nema & Sharma, 2024). Although the literature currently in publication provides strong evidence for either social cohesion or economic multiplier effects, these aspects are frequently examined separately, leading to a lack of theoretical integration regarding the coexistence of social transformation and economic growth in festival ecosystems. The necessity for a cohesive analytical framework that can synthesize the socioeconomic dualism of festivals in emerging nations is shown by this fragmented treatment.

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on a thorough analysis of secondary materials, this study uses a qualitative and conceptual research design. The analysis looks at the socioeconomic effects of Indian festivals using peer-reviewed journal papers, academic books, government reports, policy documents, trade association reports, and reliable media sources. A number of important theme areas, such as economic multiplier effects, MSME engagement, commercialization, social capital building, public health concerns, environmental externalities, and crowd management issues, were taken into consideration when choosing the literature. In order to find trends, inconsistencies, and gaps in the body of existing scholarly and policy debate, the study uses thematic synthesis rather than direct empirical investigation. The study offers policy-oriented recommendations for attaining balanced and sustainable celebration frameworks and builds a thorough analytical knowledge of festivals as dual-impact socioeconomic events by combining economic and social perspectives.

### Social Implications (Evidence from Prior Studies)

Like the complexity of everyday life, festivals are socially or culturally complex events that are sometimes repeated or varied (Gerrard, 2000). A community's quality of life is improved by festivals because they give people a chance to escape their everyday routine and interact with friends and family (Earls, 1993). (K. S. Bhalla, 2005) Festivals frequently include charitable deeds, workshops for skill development, short-term employment opportunities, cultural expression of under-represented groups, social issue awareness-raising, teamwork, and cultural diversity celebration. (Chapnerkar and Gaur, 2015) The Lord Ganesha celebrations promote unity and coordination between different governmental and non-governmental organizations and also give regular people a great chance to develop their leadership, coordination, and interpersonal skills, which opens up a world of opportunities for small businesses and creates jobs for artists, decorators, transporters, and other professionals. Festivals tend to have an indirect positive impact on industries such as food processing, forestry, fisheries, agriculture, and handicrafts (Muresan et al., 2016; Su et al., 2016). Festivals are essential for promoting tribal products, increasing their demand and visibility, giving tribal women a platform to display and market their crafts and goods, encouraging self-reliance and confidence in these women, and showcasing improved living conditions for their families, which in turn leads to better healthcare, education, and general community welfare (Pandey, N., Chaturvedi, P., & Soni, V. K. 2025). According to Nair (2022), festivals promote family values and national identity while fostering communal harmony and national cohesion. Local festivals and other social and cultural events are important components of cities' and towns' contemporary national and international identities and can also set off social, cultural, and economic processes (Barrera-Fernandez and Hernández-Escampa, 2017). Longson (1989) divides the social effects of festivals into two groups: good and bad and lists the effects on public services, interpersonal relationships, tradition, lifestyles, personal well-being, and local identity. From an optimistic standpoint, festivals can boost locals' incomes or job prospects, energize the area, and instill a sense of pride in the community (Pavlukovic et al., 2017). Festivals also have negative effects, such as shifting social values, destroying the environment, raising the cost of basic services, migration, disrupting regular work, noise, crowds, unsafe sexual behavior, drug and alcohol use, disputes amongst festival attendees, xenophobia, commodification, exploitation of culture and traditional life, etc. (Arcodia and Whitford, 2007; Dwyer et al., 2000; Reid, 2007; Saayman, 2000). Events, particularly religious ones, are becoming more crowded due to India's growing population and people's propensity to congregate for a shared goal or interest (Census of India, Provisional Population Totals Paper 1 of 2011). (Illiyas, F. T., Mani, S. K., Pradeepkumar, A. P., & Mohan, K. 2013), large crowds cause annoyances and challenges for a portion of the population, resulting in significant traffic delays, increased crime, pollution, diseases, landscape alteration, chaotic development of the area, etc. Mass gatherings have regularly resulted in numerous fatalities and injuries across a variety of occasions and nations (Hanna JA 1994). (Illiyas, F. T., Mani, S. K., Pradeepkumar, A. P., & Mohan, K. 2013), India is the nation with the second-highest population; communities hold religious events where a lot of people congregate in public or private areas, which leads to human stampedes, the most frequent hazard that occurs during mass gatherings. Suffocation from the intense pressure (up to 4500 N/m) on the chests caused by the crowd's push is the main cause of death in stampedes (Fruin, J. J. 1993). Diseases are also spread by the event attendees. (R. B. Lal, 1937) A clear example of how festivals contribute to the spread of this epidemic disease is the history of cholera in Punjab, Haridwar, Allahabad, Bihar, Orissa, the Ratlia Jatra fair in Puri, the Sinhast fair in Nashik and Godavari, the Puskaram fair in Rajahmundry, Krishna Puskaram at Bezwada, the Mahamakshan fair in Kumbakonam, and Sagor Mela in the Sundarbans. A few of the diseases linked to these fairs have spread

throughout the entire planet. The greatest number of firecracker-related injuries occurred during Diwali, according to Safdarjung Hospital in Delhi, one of the biggest burn care centers in India (Tandon, R., Agrawal, K., Narayan, R. P., Tiwari, V. K., Prakash, V., Kumar, S., & Sharma, S. 2012; Kota, S. H., & Garaga, R. 2018). During ten days in 2015, which coincided with the Diwali fireworks festival in northeast India, the study examined the quantities of metals and ions in PM10. Findings showed that ambient noise levels during Diwali were 101 dB, 40 dB higher than levels on non-Diwali days, and that metal concentrations rose by 51% and ions by 74%. (Jangid, A., Kumar, R., & Bartaria, V. 2025) Particulate matter (PM) concentrations in Agra city increased significantly before, during, and after the celebrations, surpassing both the National Ambient Air Quality Standard of India and the 24-hour average criteria set by the World Health Organization. Human respiratory problems are caused by elevated particulate matter concentrations. (Bagiran and Kurgun 2013), festivals have both positive and negative social effects. Demands should be made of the Indian government and regulatory agencies regarding the societal costs of Indian festivities.

### **Economic Implications (Insights from Prior Studies)**

According to Srikanth, P., and Ram, M. R. (2013), festivals can demonstrate their impact on the nation's economic climate. The advantages of festivals are numerous and offer a comprehensive framework for addressing the issue of community livelihoods, mostly in support of immediate financial gains such as the creation of jobs and revenue (Dwyer et al., 2005; Sharpley, 2002). Large-scale economic activity on the day of the festival or in the days leading up to it will raise demand for goods and services in the nation, which will raise production of those goods and services and raise the firm's revenue from profit distribution to different stakeholders while adding to people's purchasing power and government revenue from taxes (Srikanth, P., & Ram, M. R. 2013). A survey conducted by the Confederation of All India Traders found that Indians spent over 1.25 lakh crore on products at the festive market (Pote, R. T., 2023). E-commerce sales during the Dussehra festival alone in 2024 topped \$11 billion, reported by Economic Times; MSMEs that depend on online platforms for their operations benefited greatly from this (Cheruku Srikanth, 2024). Due to strong demand from nations including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates, exports of traditional products rose 6.2% (3.75 lakh crore overall) during the Diwali season of 2023 compared to the same period the previous year. According to the Confederation of All India Traders Report 2024, businesses are completely ignoring Chinese items in favor of domestic ones, and Ganesh Chaturthi, a significant Hindu holiday in India, is predicted to generate an economic boom of Rs 25,000 crore. In the first four days of their festive sales, major e-commerce giants sold goods valued at Rs 24,500 crore. Flipkart claimed that their sales had doubled over the festival season compared to the previous year, while Amazon declined to comment on its overall sales but noted a 150% increase in smartphone sales and a 3.7 times sales rate for major appliances (Pote, R. T., 2023). According to research by Sharma and Sharma (2015), festivals have a beneficial economic impact on the neighborhood since they boost the local economy at the times when they are held. Fairs and festivals are powerful drivers of Uttarakhand's tourism industry, drawing both local and foreign visitors looking for genuine cultural experiences (Pandey, M. K., Singh, A., & Bora, M. P. 2024). Festivals in India boost the country's economy, but according to a study by Gaur and Chapnerkar (2015), a few months before the festival starts, costs for things like fuel, decorations, kitchenware, and logistics tend to rise in anticipation of high demand. (V. Nema and M. Sharma, 2024) It is still very difficult to strike a balance between economic viability and cultural preservation as India's traditional industries, like handlooms and handicrafts, have had to contend with the twin challenges of commercialization, which has given them access to larger markets and increased exposure, as well as the pressure to satisfy consumer demands, which occasionally undermines the distinctiveness and authenticity of traditional goods. According to Babu and Munjal (2015), local-made authentic art, crafts, and other things are being pushed aside in favor of low-cost Chinese goods, making economic advantages not reachable to the local community since the negative effects outweigh the positive ones. Globalization expanded the competitive landscape and produced a 24/7 market without regional restrictions, which acted as both boon and bane simultaneously. In addition, festivals are no longer a time for gathering with loved ones as they once were. These days, festivals are used to showcase wealth and social status (Nema, V., & Sharma, M. 2024).

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

According to this study, Indian festivals are dual-impact socioeconomic phenomena that cause social change and economic acceleration at the same time. According to the report, festivals serve as recurring economic

multipliers that encourage the involvement of MSMEs, the growth of regional trade, and the creation of livelihoods. They also strengthen cultural identity, social capital, community cohesion, and group engagement in society. The study does, however, also point out important socioeconomic distortions brought about by growing commercialization, uncontrolled crowd growth, environmental deterioration, and poor risk management. Even though festivals boost the economy, structural weaknesses are shown by inadequate legal frameworks and inadequate crowd control systems, especially when it comes to sizable religious groups. Public safety hazards are further increased by the lack of integrated catastrophe preparedness and event-specific legal clarity. A balanced governance framework that concurrently protects public health, maintains cultural integrity, and maintains economic rewards is necessary from a policy standpoint. Sustainable festival administration requires integrated disaster management planning, real-time surveillance technologies, organized crowd control methods, promotion of indigenous products, and regulatory oversight on commercialization. Systematic enforcement of environmental protections is necessary, especially with regard to contamination of the air, water, and noise. By combining risk externality analysis and economic multiplier perspectives, the study adds to the body of knowledge by providing a thorough analytical framework for comprehending festivals in emerging economies. This conceptual framework could be expanded in future studies by doing empirical research to quantify the extent of both positive and negative externalities connected to extensive festival ecosystems.

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