Readings of Customer Psychology over Spiritual and Cultural Tourism: An Overview

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Abstract

Purpose -This paper intends to develop a background for quality hospitality during tourism in India and its contribution to the growth of nation's economy.

Design-The paper discusses the importance of followers experience and provides insights on destination management approaches. It reviews the factors beyond the control of a specific service provider which impact the follower's experience. The paper also discusses the tourism potential for selected spiritual and cultural sites and gives an overview of the approach followed to assess followers experience at each of these locations.

Findings -The paper focuses on elements that contribute to followers experience at selected spiritual and cultural places. It also focuses on technology and its impact on creating a superior experience. Further, aspects of infrastructure and hygiene are also reviewed.

Originality/value-The paper explores spiritual and cultural tourism in the context of India where there is very little formal research in this area.

Keywords- Tourism, Culture, Religion, Tourism development, follower's satisfaction, psychological factor, India

"No day shall erase you from the memory of time." - Virgil

Introduction

A vital orientation point and positive means for growth and change, the characteristic heritage and collective reminiscence of each locality or community is inimitable and an imperative basis for development, both now and into the future.

There is a significant business opportunity in terms of sensitizing domestic and foreign tourists to the culture and heritage of India. This can be accomplished by deploying a combination of technology and human interfaces. In such a scenario it is important that the local administration, entrepreneurs, civil society, the management of tourism sites, NGOs, international, state and

central government should partner to create an outstanding experience at each of these destinations.

Tourism is a growing global leisure industry and international tourist arrivals have been growing over the past five decades – from 25 million in 1950, to 277 million in 1980, to 438 million in 1990, to 684 million in 2000, and reaching 922 million in 2008 (UNWTO, 2008). As per the UNWTO's Tourism 2020 vision projections, international arrivals are expected to reach nearly 1.6 billion by the year 2020. As compared to the world average of 4.1 per cent, East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, the Middle East and Africa are forecast to grow at over 5 per cent per year. Tourism from developed nations, notably Europe and the Americas – is expected to grow at lower than average rates.

The total tourist arrivals by region shows that, by 2020, 1.2 billion will be intraregional and 0.4 billion will be long haul travelers. By 2020, the top three receiving regions will be Europe (717 million tourists), East Asia (397 million) and the Americas (282 million), followed by Africa, the Middle East and South Asia (UNWTO, 2009).

The tourism industry is seen as a significant contributor in achievement of national goals by the developing industries as it creates good employment opportunities, stimulating small business and curtailing poverty (Conrad and Barreto, 2005). The interest in spirituality has become an important area of research (Hill, 2002; Pesut, 2003). It has also impacted the tourism industry (Cohen, 2006; Timothy and Iverson, 2006) in addition to other industries. Haq et al. (2008) undertook research to develop strategies for the effective marketing of spiritual tourism. He observed that by focusing on market penetration and product development strategies, the high involvement spiritual tourists could be further influenced. For other medium to low intensity tourists, the market development and product development strategies may work better and the least interested followers could be involved by operators for applying some highly targeted diversification strategies.

Tourism is the largest service industry in India, with a contribution of 6.23 per cent to the national GDP and 8.78 per cent of the total employment in India. Religious tourism has proved to be resilient to the pressures of global recession (Selja, 2010) and as religious tourism is seen as travel with a purpose and not a luxury it is fairly resistant to the current economic slowdown. If the motivations for visiting religious places can be identified, it will have significant implications for marketing of religious tourism. In a recent study carried out by Chand (2010), on religious motivations among NRI visiting sacred sites in India, no significant differences were found in motivations among NRI tourists across countries studied, whereas significant differences were found between domestic and NRI tourists. However, for both the groups, it was found out that cultural immersion, novelty and religious attraction were some of the key motivational factors for tourists visiting sacred sites in India and that tourists paid little heed to seeking camaraderie and family togetherness

"There is a continuum of spirituality inherent in tourism, though this related to tourist's experience rather than initial motivation (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005). According to the 11th five year plan (2007-2012), Report of the Working Group on Tourism, Government of India, there should be a substantial development of tourist facilities at places of important religious pilgrimage." The report places emphasis not only on developing new attractions but on reviewing activities and plans to increase length of stay, money expended and satisfaction levels.

To enhance tourism, it is important to understand the destination management perspective as well. A sustainable and integrated view of destination management includes some of the following (Canadian Universities Consortium, Training and Technology Transfer Program, 2010):

- blends the interests of the tourists with the economic needs of the region;
- mitigates the side effects of the tourism in that region; and
- protects the local environment, heritage and culture of that region

The same document covers various aspects linked with destination management in the context of tourism. These factors are:

- Product and marketing development. These include elements of marketing, product development and training.
- Destination planning. These include elements of destination planning, land use, transportation, carrying capacity, urban environment management.
- Organisational and management structures. These include elements of environmental management, disaster planning, security, training, etc.

An outstanding consumer experience is a pre-requisite for building a positive disposition towards a tourist destination. Tourism could be undertaken for a variety of reasons. These could range from, adventure, socializing, nature, spiritual and cultural reasons among others. The history of India begins with the birth of the Indus Valley Civilization, more precisely known as Harappan Civilization. The civilization flourished during 2500 BC When many cultures were only nomadic forest dwellers over 5,000 years ago, Indians established Harappan culture in Sindhu Valley (Indus Valley Civilization) (Ministry of Finance, Government of India, 2010).

It is also a birthplace of four religions – Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. "The four religions born in India – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, are followed by 25 per cent of the world's population. Jainism and Buddhism were founded in India in 600 and 500 BC, respectively. Islam is India's and the world's second largest religion. There are 300,000 active mosques in India, more than in any other country, including the Muslim world. Varanasi, also known as Benaras, was called "the Ancient City" when Lord Buddha visited it in 500 BC, and is the oldest, continuously inhabited city in the world today" (Ministry of Finance, Government of India, 2010).

A rich history and cultural roots has led to architectural monuments and sites which offer a unique journey back to ancient times. The Indian culture embeds spirituality and pilgrimage which is a part of all religions. The journeys to some of the very well known shrines or holy places in India may have elements of a long journey, bath in the water and a circular clockwise locomotion (in India referred as "parikrama") (Singh, 2004). The journeys undertaken with a spiritual intent may have some unique attributes which may not be present in other tourist destinations. These would include rituals to be conducted at the holy place of visit, focus on prayers, bonding and chanting with fellow travellers, a long walking journey may be on top of a hill, dip in the holy water, donations, a deep reverence, simple vegetarian food, patience with long queues and inconvenience as well. Spiritual travel in India has deep religious roots and may be linked with pleasing Spiritual and cultural tourism a deity or asking for something that one deeply desires, thanks giving or a belief that it will wash away the sins or bonding with the Supreme Power

There are many places in India which evoke lot of spiritual travel. Some of these are: Amarnath, Badrinath, Kedarnath. Pilgrimage in India was strengthened in India when AdiShankaracharya set up four institutions and a visit to these is considered by Hindus as sacrosanct – Badrinath in north, Dwarka in west, JaganathPuri in East, Rameshwaram in South (Singh, 2004).

Bill Bryson says about tourism, "I can't think of anything that excites a greater sense of childlike wonder than to be in a country where you are ignorant of almost everything." It is like a mental therapy for human beings when in unknown land of tourism you have child like behaviour full of glee when you are far away from the maddening crowd of your own town with lots of stress. To maintain the mental equilibrium keep travelling since it teaches you a lot and your mind becomes calm to adjust to a new situation.

About the theme

The articles featured in this theme issue address aspects of the customer experience at some of the most visited destinations in India. The objective is to identify ways in which larger numbers of tourists might be encouraged to visit these sites and in so doing, increase revenues.

The destinations that have been reviewed for this theme issue:

- Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu and Kashmir (Hinduism).
- Golden Temple at Amritsar (Sikhism).
- Iskon Temple (Lord Krishna with global following)

As noted above, spiritual tourism has certain differences as compared with conventional tourism and there are certain distinct cultural underpinnings which are unique in spiritual and cultural tourism. There is a wide array of research on the management of spiritual and cultural tourism sites and many factors that play a role in influencing the tourist experience. These include infrastructure, accommodation, transport, variety of food, management of queues and other

engagement options for the children and tourists. Technology also play a role in managing travel and access to the various spiritual destinations and a discuss of prior research on destination management gives an insight into alternate approaches such as systems thinking, yield management and dynamic modelling.

Approach to the studies featured in this theme issue

We choose different destinations which are revered in Indian culture and attract large number of tourists every year. The economics of these destinations are profiled below.

Vaishno Devi Shrine in Jammu and Kashmir

This is an ancient shrine and is revered by a significant proportion of the population of India and by many in other countries. There were 8 million tourists who visited Vaishno Devi in 2009 (Kumar, 2010).The nearby regions of Patnitop, Bhaderwah, Poonch-Rajouri have been taken up for development on priority by creation of separate Tourism Development Authorities.

The Golden Temple at Amritsar

Guru Arjan Sahib got its foundation laid by a Muslim saint HazratMian Mir ji of Lahore on December, 1588). The construction work was directly supervised by Guru Arjan Sahib himself and he was assisted by many other devoted Sikhs. The temple is 400 years old and was conceived by Guru Anjan Singh. It was completed in the year 1601 AD (Shiromani GurdwaraParbandhak Committee, 2010). It is one of the most important spiritual centres for Sikhs across the globe. The number of pilgrims visiting the Golden Temple is 20,000 on a normal day and as high as 200,000 on festivals and special days (cited in Tripathi et al., 2010). Roughly 400-500 foreign nationals visit this place daily. Most of the foreign visitors come from Canada the UK, Israel, Norway and Japan (Kaur, 2008).

The ISKON temple at Vrindavan

"The ISKCON temple constructed by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness is a beautiful temple dedicated to the Hindu God Krishna" (Isango.com, 2010). It is famous for three hi-tech robots of Krishna, Arjuna and SrilaPrabhupada, the founder of ISKCON. It was built in 1975 and is one of the most lavish and grand temples of the city. It is an example of architectural excellence. The fine art paintings by Russian artists here depict lives and events related to Hindu mythological The deities of the temple are Krishnaand Balarama, at the central altar. On the right altar are Radha Krishna with Gopi, Lalita and Vishakha. On the left altar is aMurtiof Chaitanya Mahaprabhu with Nityananda, and of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and his spiritual teacher Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. Krishna-BalaramMandir enforces one of the highest standards of cleanliness and of deity worship in all of Vrindavan. Dedicated mainly to Lord Krishna, the elegant temple was built by the followers of "Hare-Rama Hare-Krishna" cult. One of the largest temple complexes in India, it also boasts of a Robot, which was built especially to

enact and preach "Gita" (Exploredelhi.com, 2010). Each of these places are very crowded. The journey is long and on account of the crowding there are access challenges to public facilities. A lot of improvements could be made in terms of managing long queues and managing the accommodation and food at these locations. The logistics and access also require more attention specially during the peak seasons. Each team of researchers collected data from the guests/tourists who have actually visited these sites and had firsthand experience. Some of the groups also met with the management boards of these sites to get their perspective. The empirical nature of work in each case yields rich insight into tourists' feelings and their experiences at all these destinations and there are many lessons to be drawn from each study featured. There are also implications for marketers, entrepreneurs, members of the boards managing these locations and for civil authorities and state level governments.

Management of tourism destinations: insights from earlier research

As enumerated above, spiritual tourism has certain differences as compared to conventional tourism. There are distinct cultural underpinnings which are unique to spiritual and cultural tourism.

Crotts and Pan (2007) have justified and highlighted an actionable destination appraisal method proposed by Pritchard and Havitz. They have adopted open ended responses to the visitors likes and dislikes and then subsequently coded and analyzed them by category. These provide inputs foractions by various stakeholders.

Some of the aspects covered in the likes category are: food, history, heritage attractions, shopping architecture, safety, weather, parks, lodging, variety of things to do, entertainment, affordability, music, festivals and events. Some of the variables in the dislikes category are: weather, parking, disappointing service encounters, public transport, too crowded, construction, power, lack of public facilities, travel distance, park facilities, lack of variety, late night noise, too commercial.

It is clear that the consumer experience is influenced by numerous factors which may be beyond any single service provider. A unique confluence of different stakeholders can though provide a unique experience to the consumer. Carlsen (1999) has elaborated on the systems approach to tourism destination management. He suggests a soft systems approach which enables tourism planners, researchers and destination managers to understand the relationships between stakeholders more closely. He deploys the criteria referred to as the CATWOE test by Flood and Jackson (1991) and asserts that customers (tourists), actors (activities undertakers such as private sector developers), transformation process (that converse inputs into outputs), owners, world view and environmental constraints are the key constituents of a system.

Laws (1995) deployed the systems thinking approach in the context of a tourist destination model. The inputs comprise of:

- tourist expectations- access, promotion, and forms of visit;
- entrepreneurial creativity;
- employee skills; and
- investors capital.

The destination system comprises infrastructure, services such as transport, accommodation, shopping avenues, entertainment, etc. The outcomes are measured in terms of stakeholders outcomes – tourists, investors, entrepreneurs. Other outputs include the impact on the national and local economies, community, environment and ecology.

There is yet another approach to destination management. Scott and Breakey (2007) applied the yield management principles as a performance indicator for destination management. They (p. 441) quote Butler (1980), "Unmanaged growth in a destination has been suggested to follow a pattern of growth and decline." It is a method to manage the demand and supply and also is an surrogate indicator of profitability for the service as well. They have concluded that yield could be deployed as an indicator of economic performance and revenue as an appropriate measure of yield. There could be other measures used which measure the social and environmental carrying capacity which could be balanced scorecard approach (Kaplan and Norton, 1996).

Scenario planning is another tool that could be deployed in destination management. Schwartz (1991) has discussed the deployment of this approach. Alternate scenarios can be built up by changing various factors affecting the growth in that particular region (Formica and Kothari, 2008). The changing characteristics of various stakeholders could be used to build up alternate scenarios and determine the actions required.

Pechlaner (2000) has highlighted the challenges for destination management in the context of the cultural tourist. His work focuses on cultural heritage and destination management in the Mediterranean region. He reviews the problems faced in the management of traditional destinations which span from lack of integration between various service suppliers to suboptimal offerings, insufficient positioning (Bieger, 1998 in Pechlaner, 2009).

Sainaghi (2006) has proposed a dynamic model of destination management. The model suggests two main areas of intervention for destination management – primary processes and support processes. "The primary processes play an important role in new product development, communication and marketing of the district. The support processes are in the realms of internal marketing, training and research." Singh (2004) provides an insight into pilgrimage and tourism in India in the context of the Indian Himalayas. He has pointed out that pilgrimage in India is almost as old as Indian civilization.

Singh (2004) postulates the definition of pilgrimage as "religious travel that is institutionalised and helps in the maintenance of those relations between humans and nature that are concerned with the geographical basis/bounds of society and culture. It is a celebration of living heritage

revolving around what is sacrosanct in nature and symbolically links the natural with the supernatural."

Summary

Global tourists who are fond of genuine experiences in the places of unexploited and unexplored cultural heritage are a welcome treasure for the rural poor communities with collaboration of Government support in underdeveloped countries for economic growth.

From ancient days Indians have been travelling for the purpose of commercial trade as merchants and for seeking knowledge. The inventions of all types of vehicles like boat, ship, aero planes, buses, cars, trains are the result of man's love for tourism. India was called a golden bird which thrilled many travellers from foreign countries. Tourism helps many persons to get employments and helping a nation for its economic growth. It is the bounden duty of any nation to protect its environment, the historical and cultural heritage and to maintain the optimum use of resources and provide opportunities for the local communities.

To sum up, there are lot of lessons to be drawn from the literature on destination management. Though the spiritual and cultural tourism have components have deep reverence and rituals as well, the issues of hygiene and customer experience need to be better managed.

A dynamic approach needs to be adopted where different stakeholders come together to offer various linkage points for the tourist to encourage return visits. Unlike the other places of tourist interest, spiritual sites are revisited by tourists again and again.

A good experience helps to increase the frequency and hence generate more opportunities for entrepreneurship at these places. It is important that a single solution point is offered to visitors so as to address the various challenges and obstacles. Whether it is accommodation, logistics, darshan (visit to the shrine/diety), it should be seamless by using technology and multiple customer service points.

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