



VOICE OF INDIA: CUSTOMER OPINION ON INCREDIBLE INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This study builds on previous research on the impact of state tourism advertising and argues that there are a number of likely routes through which tourism advertising influences destination choice, furthermore checks the relation between the portrayals of the advertisement of the states to the reality on ground. The results confirm that there are strong linkages among top-of-mind awareness, ad awareness, requesting travel information, and the likelihood of visiting a destination, and therefore, these constitute important routes to influencing destination choice. Differences in the effects of advertising by media channel also appear to be substantial.

Keywords: State tourism; tourism advertising; services marketing; gap 4 analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

India is a large market for travel and tourism. It offers a diverse portfolio of niche tourism products – state tourism, cruises, adventure, medical, wellness, sports, eco-tourism, film, rural and religious tourism. India has been recognised as a destination for spiritual tourism for domestic and international tourists.

Total contribution by travel and tourism sector to India's GDP is expected to increase from US\$ 136.3 billion in 2015 to US\$ 275.2 billion in 2025. India ranked third among 184

countries in terms of travel & tourism's total contribution to GDP in 2016. Travel and tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner for India. A sum of US\$ 24.655 billion was earned under foreign exchange through tourism during January-November 2017. The employment in the sector is expected to rise to 46.42 million by 2026. During January – November 2017, 9.001 million foreign tourists have arrived in India.

The launch of several branding and marketing initiatives by the Government of India such as 'Incredible India!' and 'Athiti Devo Bhava' has provided a focused impetus to growth. The Indian government has also released a fresh category of visa - the medical visa or M visa, to encourage medical tourism in the country. Incredible India 2.0 campaign was launched in September 2017.

The Government has also been making serious efforts to boost investments in tourism sector. In the hotel and tourism sector, 100 per cent FDI is allowed through the automatic route. A five-year tax holiday has been offered for 2, 3 and 4 star category hotels located around UNESCO World Heritage sites (except Delhi and Mumbai). Total FDI received by Indian hotel & tourism sector was US\$ 10.6 billion between April 2000 and September 2017.

This research aims to find the relation between the promotion of state tourism advertisements and their effect on the decision making process of the consumers. Do they choose a state because of the services provided by the state or purely based on the advertisement? Is there a demographic trend seen in the kind of choices made? This paper even tries to analyse the state's point of view about which direction is better to capture the market, should they ditch giving discounts and only go for services? Or is the combination of the two required? Should there be an integrated approach towards promoting state tourism, including the mapping of what is depicted to what is the reality. The analysis has been done by taking 222 responses across India and primarily Pune city. Secondary data has been taken by numerous articles and research material from the internet.

1. LITRATURE REVIEW

The WTO forecast indicates an increasing tourism preference towards East Asia, the Pacific, West Asia and South Asia, although Europe and America still remain the world's foremost tourism destinations commanding 77% of the global market. East Asia/Pacific achieved the highest rate of growth of 15% in tourism and travel in 21st century followed by West Asia and South Asia. In Asia, China has emerged as a leading tourist destination and is poised to

become the world's top tourist destination by 2020. The WTTC has identified India as one of the world's foremost tourist growth centres in the coming decade with 65.8% of regional Tourism receipts. India is expected to achieve the fastest rate of growth of economic activity which is likely to be generated by travel and tourism, at 9.7 per cent over the next 10 years. Also, the largest employment creation after China is expected to take place in India over the same period. The growth in 'visitor exports' and spending by international tourists, is likely to be the fastest in India at 14.3 per cent per annum over the next decade. It is estimated that tourism in India could contribute Rs. 8,50,000 crores to the GDP by 2020 (approx. 1800 million USD) (Gursharan Jeet Kaur)

There is a study built on previous research on the impact of tourism advertising and argues that there are a number of likely routes through which tourism advertising influences destination choice. The results confirm that there are strong linkages among top-of-mind awareness, ad awareness, requesting travel information, and the likelihood of visiting a destination, and therefore, these constitute important routes to influencing destination choice. Differences in the effects of advertising by media channel also appear to be substantial. (Kim, 2005)

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Sample size: Data collected from 222 respondents in the city of Pune. The distinction among the respondents have mainly been limited in two ways i.e. age groups and employment factor.
2. Data collection method: First, a pilot study was conducted where in the respondents listed out factors that they rated the highest when it came to the question of what affects their loyalty the most in selecting a particular state.
3. Survey: after the pilot study, based on the data collected, a questionnaire was developed, which asked the respondents to rate most of the factors on a scale of **1 to 5** [5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest].

3. LIMITATION

The study suffers from limitations such as location (Pune) and sample representativeness due to which the results may differ. The data has been collected from a survey that was conducted among 222 respondents.

Motivation for choosing the destination for a holiday

FIGURE 1

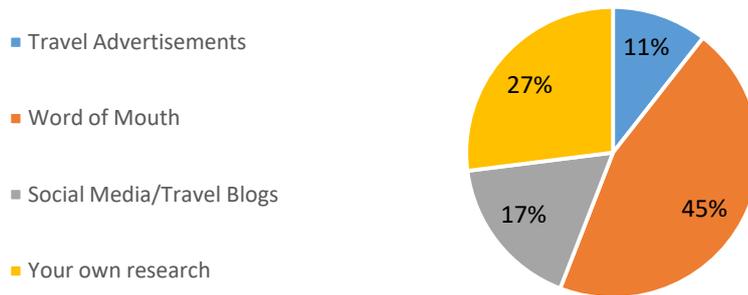


Figure 1: The figure describes the motivation for choosing the holiday destination, *Mary* is a working professional and after viewing the Madhya Pradesh advertisement planned a holiday with her friends.

This question was asked to know the motivation which encourages them to visit the holiday destination, most of the tourists, around 150 of them preferred the state on the basis of word of the mouth from family and friends, coming in next is the research done on a personal level by the individuals, after a conversation with them we realised that they wanted to visit a new place of their own choice, this includes the “spontaneous and random plans” parameter. Furthermore, we can see that people are influenced by the experiences of other travellers; this was interpreted in the terms of travel blogs and social media.

Sources visited for further information

STATE WEBSITES 24.3%

INCREDIBLE INDIA WEBSITE 21.2%

STATE TOURISM INFORMATION CENTERS

20.03%

State Services Availed

FIGURE 2

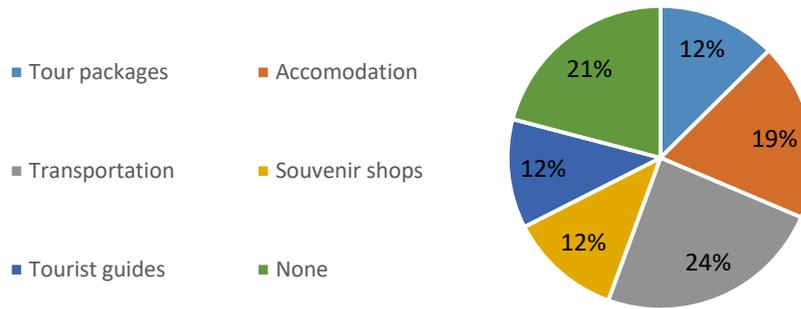


Figure 2: *Jane* after deciding to visit Khajurao (MP) went on the Madhya Pradesh State Tourism website and booked her government-accredited hotel where she got a balanced priced tour package of a 4 days-3 nights stay.

In relation to accommodation, which of the following did the consumers use or have used in the past.

FIGURE 3

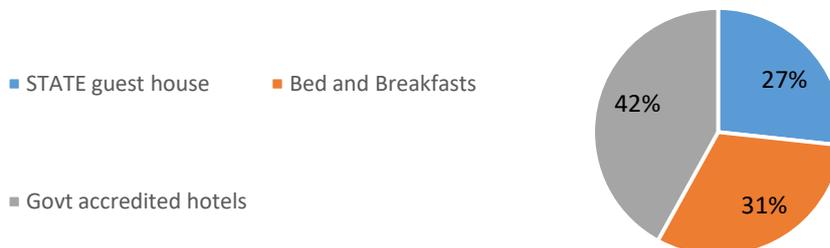


Figure 3: *Jane*, generally prefers to stay at the State Guest House or at a Bed and Breakfast.

State Tourism Board in terms of promoting these attractions

43.2% people say that the board is doing a good job (rating of 4/5), as in, they believe the limited advertisements that are available are attractive and made well, whereas **32%** (rating of 3/5) are indifferent to the same, they don't have an opinion, and this chunk

is the one State tourism should concentrate upon, so as to form a positive impression which can be capitalised upon in the near future.

However,

44.6% respondents (majority) gave a good rating of 4 for their holiday experience in terms of meeting their expectations from promises made by tourism advertisements and campaigns and majority agreed that state tourism advertisements changed the way they select their holiday destination.

4. CONCLUSION

Tourism and hospitality have become key global economic activities as expectations with regard to our use of leisure time have evolved, attributing greater meaning to our free time. With a higher premium on leisure time, customer expectations from multi attribute hybrid services like tourism have also increased. As a result, state tourism boards are striving to create a sustainable competitive advantage that can lead to greater customer satisfaction and positive word of mouth. Our study aims to identify if the efforts by the state tourism departments in their external communication strategies accurately advertise the service and not under-exaggerate or over-exaggerate some of the features i.e. if there exists a gap between service delivery and external communication.

It is an accepted fact that India has tremendous potential for development of tourism. The diversity of India's natural and cultural richness provides the basis of a wide range of tourist products and experiences, which embrace business, leisure, culture, adventure, spirituality, eco-tourism and many other pursuits. These broadly serve as the foundation of almost all state tourism campaigns. These attributes were further categorized into the following State tourism offerings, namely, Tour Packages, Accommodation, Transportation, Souvenir Shops and Tourist Guides.

Through the findings of our survey, what stood out for us was that despite cumulatively spending nearly 500 crore on promotions and publicity of state tourism offerings, and efforts to revamp communication infrastructure like websites and social media pages, when it comes

to seeking further information about a state, or availing services like accommodation and transportation, customers continue to prefer private sources and players over state offerings.

Similarly, despite a spike in popularity of some of the state tourism campaigns (MP and Kerala Ad films) on social media platforms and blogs, people still trust WOM, social media groups and travel blogs when it comes to deciding on a holiday destination over travel advertisements.

Communication in State Tourism campaigns has undergone a huge change in the last few years. No longer are the ads only about showcasing the places one can visit, but the focus is more on the experience and the warmth, which accentuates the beauty of the place. For example, Kerala, Jammu & Kashmir and Rajasthan tourism campaigns focus on highlighting their unique landscape, while states like UP and Delhi have generously promoted their monuments and historical sites. States like Uttarakhand, Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim and the Andamans are increasingly gaining popularity for adventure tourism and the same is promoted on various mediums by the respective state departments. This trend concurs with our findings as natural landscape, monuments and adventure activities are the top three tourist attractions for people on a holiday and 43 percent respondents felt that the above attractions were rightly advertised in state promotional campaigns.

Along the lines of the social awareness campaign of the government called '[Atithi Devo Bhava](#)' that aims at providing the inbound tourist a greater sense of being welcomed to the country, 56 percent of respondents were somewhat satisfied with the response of state authorities such as the local police to their queries and problems.

Taj Mahal receives the highest footfall (62 lakhs in 2016) amongst monuments in India. Our respondents gave average ratings to the government for their efforts in conserving the Taj Mahal. State tourism boards also received average ratings for organizing festivals like Rann Utsav, Goa Carnival etc.

In our survey, those who had availed state government services like accommodation (**government-accredited hotels**) and transportation (**IRCTC**) were fairly satisfied with the service quality. Even then, many of our respondents did not take the help of state tourism campaign tools or offerings when it came to decisions pertaining to their holiday destination and preferred to avail the services of private players.

With regard to services, customers often rely on advertisements or word of mouth before undergoing the service themselves. It is important for the service provider to accurately advertise the service and not under-exaggerate or over-exaggerate some of the features. You want the customer to feel sufficiently satisfied with the service they experienced based on their original perception they gained as a result of viewing an advertisement or hearing a first-hand account from the company itself, for example.

Identifying the presence of a Communication Gap is difficult since respondents in our survey preferred to choose their holiday destination based on information from travel blogs and forums, social media groups and family and friends. While majority agreed that state tourism campaigns did impact their decision of selecting a holiday destination, but when it came down to making the final decision, they seemed to depend more on others travel experiences over promises made in advertisements.

However, there may still be a gap as there was not 100 percent satisfactory rate for services like accommodation and travel that are adequately promoted on state tourism websites.

There is also evidence of Gap 1 i.e. Gap between customer expectation and management perception. Tourism boards need to get a better understanding of customer expectations through research, complaint analysis, etc. to ensure that customer expectations are delivered through their campaigns and offerings.

Recommendations

- “Keep it Real”: Realism in advertising- Adding a touch of realism to advertisements can go a long way in building trust with the viewers. Although Ad films by state tourism boards are popular in their reach, customers would rather gain insights from someone who has already visited that place. Therefore, some elements like traveller anecdotes can be incorporated in Ad campaigns.

- Pull factors: Evidently, there is greater preference for private players (MakeMyTrip, Trivago etc) while planning holidays. Therefore, state tourism boards should consider collaborations with private players for better visibility.
- Social media: An active and engaging social media page of state tourism boards can generate positive interest in the state. Social media can also be used as a platform to address grievances, conduct polls, stream live videos of special festivals/occasions, answer queries etc. A more interactive social participation can be very appealing to the youth.
- Participation in Trade Fairs and setting up kiosks in public spaces: State tourism boards can set up stalls in frequently visited public spaces like malls and trade fairs where they can promote their offerings like tour packages, transportation options etc. and clarify any doubts of interested customers. Such stalls serve as an ideal platform to seek inputs and feedback and gauge customer perception through personal interactions.
- Consistency in experience across all offerings: There were mixed reactions w.r.t. ratings given to governments in their efforts to conserve famous monuments. This shows inconsistent standards in service delivery across multiple locations and one bad experience can result in negative perceptions about other services offered by the same entity.
- Transportation services: Provide special, comfortable, well connected and timely transport service to customers. Most of the state players lack quality customer care services, the same can be worked upon to enhance trust.

(Disclaimer: All characters used are fictitious)

Table of Figures

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1	Motivation for choosing the destination for a holiday
2	State Services Aailed
3	In relation to accommodation, which of the following did the consumers use or have used in the past.

References

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