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Creating Awareness of Tourism Friendly Culture in India

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Abstract:

India, although a lucrative tourist destination is unable to attract international tourists in large numbers. An effort is made in this paper to find out ways and means of developing tourism friendly culture. Through research, it is found that the job is not of only Government or semi-Government institutions; but of all the citizens, who are either aware or unaware of importance of tourism and who either come or do not come in contact with tourists. Author also used the 7S framework to understand nuts and bolts of creation of tourist friendly experience. One important conclusion of research was the reduction in importance of information to be provided by Government run agencies. With emergence of social platforms sharing information and smart-phones coupled with apps, the variable is now less important.

Keywords: *Tourist, culture, information, experience, safety*

1. Introduction

India, as a tourist destination is like a rubick cube to many international tourists. Those who are aware of intricacies involved are comfortable during their visit to India and do not face issue of culture shock. However, this does not mean that we, the Indians, do not have any responsibility to develop tourist friendly culture back at home. The onus lies not only with the central and respective state governments but also on each Indian citizen as an individual. Only top down approach will certainly not work. Recent Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (Clean India Campaign) is one important step in this direction. Celebrities, authors, academicians have described India in their own ways. Few such quotes as under amplify importance of India as an important tourist destination.

"So far as I am able to judge, nothing has been left undone, either by man or nature, to make India the most extraordinary country that the sun visits on his rounds. Nothing seems to have been forgotten, nothing overlooked."

Mark Twain

"If there is one place on the face of earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India."

Romain Rolland

2. Review of Literature

Culture can be defined as a patterned way of thinking, feeling, and reacting that exists within a particular group, organization, profession, subgroup of a society, nation, or a group of nations (Carroll and Gannon, 1997). Culture is the collective programming of the mind – the software of groups in society (Hofstede, 2003). 'One of the most important factors affected by globalization is the significance of culture to organizations, making it both more important and less important. It is less important because the dominant culture of any society becomes less significant to an organization. Similarly, the organizational culture becomes less important because of the way it must change in an era where the organizational boundary is less important..... It is more important because of the need to recognize different cultures across the world and the way they affect established mores of organizing.' Crowther and Green (2004).

According to Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015 published by World Economic Forum, India takes 52nd place overall. T&T already accounts for 5% of India's employment and its huge potential for further growth is made visible by comparing the country's 7 million international visitors to China's 55 million. The country's natural resources (17th) are vast and diverse and its cultural resources (10th) include a unique intangible heritage (8th), sports events and a large entertainment offer. India's relevance as business travel destination is increasing along with its economic growth, it remains a price-competitive destination (8th) and recent changes in its visa regime: not yet reflected in the data rankings—have the potential to boost international arrivals. However, longstanding infrastructure gaps remain, especially in tourism-specific infrastructure (109th) and the quality of roads. Despite some uneven progress, India also lags on health and hygiene (106th) and ICT readiness (114th). The safety and security situation is unsettling, with a perceived increase in the impact of crime and violence (97th), and India ranks only 139th for environment sustainability.

Tourism today is one of the largest global industries and a major engine for economic growth and employment generation. International tourist arrivals have grown steadily from 25 million in 1950 to over 1.1 billion in 2014. At present, 1 in every 11 people worldwide are employed by the tourism sector, with the industry generating US\$ 7.6 trillion or 10% of the global GDP in 2014.

“Tourism enriches individuals, families, communities and all the world’. This is a central, simple but crystal clear campaign of UNWTO which proposes to create awareness of positive impact of tourism on life of an individual, culture and economy of a country. To promote inbound tourism, GOI, in their National Tourism Policy 2002, came with 7 S formulae as under:-

These were:

- *Swagat* (welcome),
- *Soochana* (information),
- *Suvidha* (facilitation),
- *Suraksha* (safety),
- *Sahyog* (cooperation),
- *Samrachana* (infrastructure development) and
- *Safai* (cleanliness).

International tourist arrivals worldwide are expected to increase by 3.3% a year from 2010 to 2030 to reach 1.8 billion by 2030, according to United Nations World Tourism Organisation’s (UNWTO) long term forecast *Tourism Towards 2030*. Between 2010 and 2030, arrivals in emerging destinations (+4.4% a year) are expected to increase at twice the rate of those in advanced economies (+2.2% a year) as per UNWTO estimates. However an important issue is to reach the target. How can we back at home, develop a tourist friendly culture so as to make the stay of tourist an enjoyable experience.

As a consequence of rise in flow of tourists, the theoretical discussion of intercultural adaptation becomes critical as indicated by the popularity of the U-curve of culture shock (Furnham 1984, Pearce 1982 and Ward, Bochner and Furnham 2001).

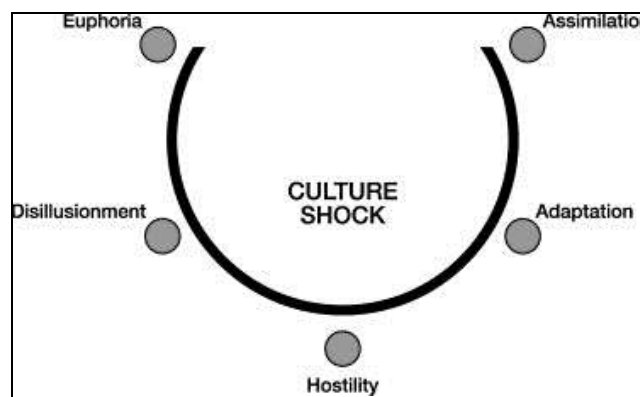


Figure 1

An effort is made in this paper to develop tourist friendly culture so that disillusionment and hostility is minimized if not eliminated and adaptation and assimilation becomes easier for an international tourist.

When we talk of attracting domestic or foreign tourists to various destinations in India; one thing emerges loud and clear – we have enough number of attractions both natural and man-made to pull them. In fact the kind of thousand years old cultural heritage we have and preserved, we have a strong power – in fact to be precise in word of Prof Joseph Nye – SOFT POWER. The mute question is – then why is it that we score very poorly in terms of both tourist arrivals and also their satisfaction?

3. Research Methodology

Author has used personal interview method and purpose of interview was to understand expectations of international tourists in context of 7S framework. The expectations and findings would help in developing tourist friendly culture at our end. Sample size was 50 and respondents were chosen at random at various star category hotels, reception counters of travel agents, Kumbh Mela at Nasik and at tiger safari in Nagpur. Majority of them were from northern hemisphere. Their expectations and responses in context of each S are as under, which helped me a developing a matrix.

4. Research Findings

4.1. General Findings

We have exceptions like Kerala or Goa where large tourists visit these states and many pay a repeat visit. The question is – is this a pure success of tourism product coupled with good marketing strategies or an adulterated one taking into consideration the allegations of drugs menace in Goa and Child abuse in Kerala ?

From the responses of tourists it was concluded that both the hardware and software were critical and so was their compatibility.

When I refer the term hardware, I was referring to the various sites developed, infrastructure created, and so on

With software I implied the promotion part, the marketers of these products – which included both the operators and others who come in contact with tourists and also those who did not come in contact with the tourists but created a frame of reference, an impact which would be long lasting.

With the changes brought in by LPG (liberalization, Privatization & Globalization), a larger number of people are taking keen interest in India. Few other factors which were favoring India as a preferred tourist destination were –Sunny weather , relatively cheaper currency ,culture showcased by Hindi movies around world , availability of information on net , open sky policy of Indian Government, visa on arrival for citizens of selected countries and so on .

What we needed to do was to take advantage of these favorable changing conditions, attract tourists in India, create a favorable impression on them, and make them our ambassadors for other new tourists by creating positive WOMs (word of mouth).

This could be done by whom? Only by Government officials? Or by tour operators? Or local Guides? Or public in general?

This could be and this should be done by EVERY INDIAN – whether he came in contact with the tourist or not. If this is true; then what are we doing about it? Why were we supposed to do it? When and How?

4.2. Why Development of Tourist Friendly Culture?

Answer could be found in the changing tourism scenario at global level in general and in India in particular .Tourists world over were not only interested in seeing sites and claiming – been there and done that .They were in need of an experience , they wanted to experiment with local culture, cuisine and wanted to check their expectations with reality and come to some conclusion .The reason why mere visit to a sit had lost its importance , was the use of technology , A tourist intending to come to any spot in India could visit net , see the live video ,contact the persons earlier visited and gather information . The net result was – when he actually visited the place –this actual visit was his second visit – he has already paid the first virtual visit thru technology and the second visit did not have much excitement left except cross checking the expectation with reality.

4.3. When?

We needed to develop tourist friendly culture RIGHT NOW .We were at a strategic inflection point of growth from where the economy was changing gears .World was taking keen interest in India (reasons – may be for their self-interest and survival) .We could create a platform on which a strong edifice could be built .What we needed was prioritization from Government to this department which till recently was ill-treated, witnessed frequent changes at ministerial level .This gave wrong signals to all those who were interested in India . Also mentioned earlier was the paradigm shift from a visit to an indulgence with intention of experiment and experience –because of popularity of newer concepts as hardship tourism, disaster tourism, and one way tourism and so on.

4.4. WHY?

- To attract tourist
- To motivate them for repeat, longer visits
- To bring foreign exchange to reserve
- To create employment opportunities
- To showcase India's culture to world at large
- To preserve monuments and heritage sites
- To generate better understanding among humanity world over
- To create favorable short term and long term positive impact

4.5. Prerequisites

What was important to understand was Tourism was not only bread, but butter and jam for many.

That tourist was a guest coming from a different world, culture, had other value systems –which were diametrically opposite to ours.

What we needed to do was follow -I am OK , You are O K philosophy , unless he created a situation contrary and highly damaging to our value system .

Understanding that first impression was the last impression and that first impression could be created in first 30 seconds which was difficult to change.

Understanding that one small mistake could wipe out all good efforts done earlier.

That one happy tourist would tell ten others; one unhappy tourist was like wildfire – would tell thousands, in fact would go out of way and communicate to the other prospects through social media.

Not to overdo anything. Spontaneity and sincerity was a must.

Just as tourist arrival was important, his departure was also equally critical. Not to forget both- Primacy effect and also remember Regency effect.

Never Over promise and under deliver. Right choice would be under promise and over- deliver

Believe in power of ONE.

Like charity; this task of development of tourist friendly culture should begin from home.

Stakeholders needed out of box thinking ; needed to convert threats into opportunities (Ref empty gold mines in south Africa were converted into underground cafes)

Needed to understand that sum would be more than the total of parts.

Co-ordination among various Government semi-government and other agencies was a MUST.

4.6. Who?

A two – dimensional model was developed which was self-explanatory and various options to create positive impact – short term and long term and avoidance of negative impact were discussed

Come in contact/aware	- 3	Do not come in contact/aware	-2
Come in contact /unaware	-1	Do not come in contact /Unaware	-4

Table 1

1. *Come in contact/Unaware*: - These were the ones who needed to be trained .They normally were lower level, sometimes illiterate operators, coolies, misc service providers .The tendency was to MILK the tourist .Instead of providing a pleasant experience at a reasonable cost with a win-win situation, they normally looked to a one time transaction .Either they went for a win lose situation or did not provide service at all to the tourist.

They needed to have a bird-eye view of tourism product , its long term and short term implications .They had to promote other tourist sites in immediate vicinity and saw to it that the tourists either extended his stay or spent more during his limited interaction .Steps were taken in this direction by various government run organization –particularly to train the guides who were important influencers as far as international tourists was concerned .The bottom line was - stop milking cow excessively –rather feed her well nourish her and then get advantage of bumper benefit on a regular basis .The tendency on part of shopkeepers also needed to change .True, shopkeepers disliked to negotiate – but right pricing strategies , no discrimination to Indian vis-a-vis International tourist (common in Goa) would go a long way .

2. *Come in contact/Aware*: They were the real ambassadors. Normally they came from organized tour operator category ,understood the importance of tourism and implications of one bad word of mouth on other tourist .Today when Government intends to promote a large number of newer sites (ref intention to reduce footfalls on Taj) ,they have to play a major role .They could also motivate the quadrant 1 ,because their nature of work was supplementary and complimentary to each other .They were the first contact point for tourist and could even mould the behavior of tourist and reduce their cognitive dissonance ,explain the concept behind a product /site (which on many occasions was not done).In short ,they could have a multiplier effect and could make or break marketing program if they wish to do so .They needed to be handled carefully ,motivated monetarily and otherwise on regular basis if further better performance was expected of them .Because of dealing with tourist, who was well-informed due to internet ,they needed to up-date themselves and required high quality of co-ordination with other operators who played a support role in providing tourism service .

3. *Donot come in contact/Aware*- They came from educated class ,may or may not have traveled to other places ,but were very well aware of the importance and delicacies involved in tourism .Their services could be utilized to promote tourism culture in a particular area .Just we had concept of NAGARIK POLICE – (a citizen performing duties of policeman for a brief period-after duly selected by authorities)they could be used as Tourism Police/FRIENDS to guide the tourists .Information in foreign language was conspicuous by absence , Information Kiosks were limited in number and in such a situation they could play a role of an advisor or even a watchdog also.

4. *Donot come in contact/Unaware* –They were the largest in number but certainly important from tourism point of view .First they could provide context , frame of reference to the canvass ;secondly if not in immediate future, they were expected to be aware of the importance of tourism and proactively come in contact with tourists and create a positive word of mouth .In fact successes of some countries lies with least number of people in this quadrant

5. Specific Findings in Context of 7s

- i. *Swagat* (welcome):- Unless part of a luxury travel package such as palace on wheels, none was expecting a special reception. However, nobody wanted to be greeted by beggars or by aggressive taxi/auto drivers. Respondents were upset at inordinate delay at Mumbai airport if flight landed after 2 am. Delays were at disembarkment counter and at baggage claim area also.
- ii. *Soochana* (information):- International tourists in general and those from USA and Europe in particular believed in DIY (Do it yourself) and not DIFM (Do it for me) as was in case of Indians. Hence all respondents expected brochures in English/Spanish/French languages. However, they were comfortable with signage's in English. With pre-paid A/C taxis, GPS services on smart phone and apps related to restaurants, this component has lost its criticality.
- iii. *Suvidha* (facilitation):- Repeat visitors to Indian were skeptical of toilet facilities in general and for ladies in particular. Some had also seen videos of spurious mineral water sold at railway stations and hence expressed concern. In case of group check in and check out, they expected speedy service. In absence of facilities at public places, majority of respondents wanted to visit India through conducted tour operator only.
- iv. *Suraksha* (safety):- Everyone had heard of Nirbhaya case through various social platforms and have expressed concerns particularly trips in Golden triangle and also in Western and eastern India. Safety was not an issue down south in general and Kerala in particular. Inputs were given to them on recent launch of phone number 182 by railways. Respondents wanted more information on specific places on safety issues.
- v. *Sahyog* (cooperation):- All respondents without exception did not treat this as a major issue. The reason being, majority of them were not FIT- free individual traveler but were part of a conducted group tour. However, they expected coordination among various tour related agencies and operators for a better experience.
- vi. *Samrachana* (infrastructure development):- The biggest concern expressed was related to poor road conditions, potable drinking water at remote places, unreliable schedule of bus services, traffic congestion at major airports, inordinate delay at wee hours at Mumbai airport due to arrival of multiple flights. Practically everyone preferred star category hotel near airport over other good hotels at far of places. More than 50% respondents expected Wi-Fi facility at all public places. Such facility, in their opinion, would solve many issues.
- vii. *Safai* (cleanliness):- To the surprise of author, majority of the respondents were aware of the recent initiative taken by GOI. They were concerned with cleanliness in both public places and also at heritage sites.

To conclude to create a tourist friendly culture is not task of one person or agency .What was required was out of box thinking, a positive attitude to human beings from other culture, and a bird eye view instead of myopic vision. Technology would play in future a major role in both attracting and repelling tourists.

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