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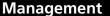
Scenario of Online Tourism Marketing in India and in the State of Tamilnadu

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is travelling for predominantly recreational or leisure purposes with a view to enhancing the knowledge and widening the wisdom of an individual. Tourism is the world's largest civilian industry whose growth, economic significance and potential are phenomenal across the globe. Technology and the Internet have created a revolution in tourism marketing. The Internet not only inspires and provides consumers with information on potential travel destinations, but enables them to take immediate action by booking online. And, this is only the beginning of their online engagement, as the Internet continues to play a role during the vacation as well as long after the visitor returns home. Online tourism is rapidly becoming a growing topic of research and its importance as future mode of acquiring information and purchase of tourism products and services is growing day by day.

This Paper reflects on how Online Tourism has caused several changes in the tourism industry in India out of which the main impact has been on the interrelation between service providers and traditional intermediaries. Moreover, it also ascertains why this scenario has given an upper hand to travel agents while looking for information or details about tourists market trends, service providers, destinations, facilities, availabilities, prices, tour packages and also in maintaining direct contacts with their partners.

KEYWORDS | Online , Tourism , Marketing , Internet , Service-providers.

Introduction

Tourism in today's world is no more a luxury or mere sight seeing. This has been made possible by the recent advances in transportation and information technology, which has enabled tourists to reach even the remotest parts of the earth by spending much less. Tourism in India was seen as a mere service sector for a long time. It has now been recognized as an export industry due to its multiple advantages. Though Tourism gained importance belatedly, it has grown at a rapid pace and enhanced its share in international tourist arrivals as well as in foreign exchange earnings. The department of Tourism, Government of India has been assisting the states for the development of tourist infrastructure through the central financial assistance schemes. The far-sighted approach of creating affordable infrastructure, exploring new markets and focused marketing have contributed to sustained growth as far as Tamil Nadu is concerned.

The Background

Tourism is a rapidly evolving industry that has become increasingly competitive in the global marketplace. Tamil Nadu is a state in the south-eastern part of the Indian Peninsula. One of the four Dravidian states of India, it has had more than 4,000 years of continuous cultural history. Tamil Nadu has some of the most remarkable temple architecture in the country, and a living tradition of music, dance, folk arts and fine arts. Tamil Nadu is well renowned for its temple towns and heritage sites, hill stations, waterfalls, national parks, local cuisine and the fabulous wildlife and scenic beauty. The state boasts the largest tourism industry in India, with an annual growth rate of 16%. In 2013, the number of domestic arrivals was at 244.2 million making the state the most popular tourist destination in the country, and foreign arrivals amounted to 3.99 million, the second-highest in the country, and the combined aggregate gives it the most popular state for tourism in the country.

What is Online Tourism

Online Tourism has been defined as a new form of travel product distribution where a supplier/service provider offers products/services mainly through the medium of Internet to a group of customers, irrespective of their physical location (Singh 2003). Online tourism equips a tourist, tour operator or travel agent for convenient exchanges using electronic medium. Even in its introductory stage, Tourism Industry has largely been benefited by online tourism in certain countries. It has led to electronic marketing popularly known as e-marketing or internet marketing. Online tourism is one such natural outcome of online marketing that boomed in last two decades. The concept has gained much attention among modern business organizations.

Online Tourism Scenario in India

Tourism industry in India is making tremendous contribution to global economy. This substantial growth of the tourism makes it one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomena of the century. Demand for tourism depends on the economic conditions of a country. Tourism has a very strong linkage with socio-economic progress of the country and has a multiplier effect on the economy.

Tourism in India was seen as a mere service sector for a long time. It has now been recognized as an export industry due to its multiple advantages. Though Tourism gained importance belatedly, it has grown at a rapid pace and enhanced its share in international tourist arrivals as well as in foreign exchange earnings. Now, it is one of the largest service industries in India, with a contribution of 6.23 percent to the national GDP and 8.78 percent of the total employment in India. According to World Travel and Tourism Council, India will be a tourism hot spot from 2009 to 2018 having the highest ten year growth potential. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2007 ranked tourism in India sixth, in terms of price competitiveness.

Online Tourism – scenario in the State of Tamil Nadu

In recent years, tourism has become a priority sector in the State. Tamil Nadu, placed strategically an Asia's growth axis, is certainly India's Asian gateway. Provision of well integrated

and world class Infrastructure and amenities at tourist spots would continue to receive attention during the ensuing year. Tamil Nadu is proud to attain the number one status in use of information Technology in promotion of tourism.

Apart from its temples age spanning over millennium, places of archeological importance, long beaches, wild life sanctuaries, varying landscapes, friendly people etc., the remarkable thing is its enormous growth in hospitality industry in recent years. The growth story started from mid-90s when the Government opened up the Indian skies for private and foreign operators. Opening up of the Indian aviation industry enabled even a common man to fly across the length and breadth of the country. Many global auto majors started setting up shop in the country – some of them in and around Chennai. All this together brought in a lot of prosperity to the country's economy. Foreign tourist arrival – both on business and leisure – started picking up. Even, Indians started travelling a lot, all over the world.

It is a fact that the growth of the hospitality industry is linked with the growth of tourism both inbound and outbound. Recreational, medical, business and education tourism thrive here. Tamil Nadu's tourism industry is the second largest in India, with an annual growth rate of 16%. According to the World Tourism Organization, by the year 2020, it is expected that India will become the leader in the tourism industry in South Asia, with about 8.9 million arrivals. Naturally Tamilnadu will get the lion's share of its tourists.

India's travel and tourism industry will directly contribute INR 3,345 billion (USD 61 billion) to the GDP by 2019, allowing 100% foreign direct investment in hotel infrastructure development. This will prove to be a major growth driver for the industry. Unlike the Northern states, Tamil Nadu has a much even distribution of famous hotel brands. Almost all big cities boast all international hotel brands. Many international hospitality brands such as Novotel, Sheraton, Le Meridien, Westin, Choice Hotels, Carlson, Marriott, Hyatt and Ascot turned to South. Big Indian domestic players such as Taj, Oberoi and ITC all started expanding fast.

Online Tourism Marketing: The Accomplishments Travel and tourism products are ideal for marketing on the Internet because of their intangibility. Tourists have, for the long time, relied on limited information from holiday brochures and other literatures to evaluate tours and destinations. The modern capabilities of the internet, however, have bestowed an invisible hand to the erstwhile mammoth task of communication. At the same time, it has greatly facilitated the promotion and distribution of tourism products and has potentially enabled tourism destinations and enterprises to compete on a level playing field. Electronic marketplaces rely on advance uses of IT to perform essentially the same functions as traditional markets, albeit with increased efficiency and reduced transaction costs. According to Kuttner (1998, p. 20), "The Internet is a nearly perfect market because information is instantaneous and buyers can compare the offerings of sellers worldwide". It's satisfying to find that customers across the globe have shown faster adoption for online tourism marketing as pioneers or early majorities. The fierce price competition and the increased value of speedy information have resulted into higher amounts of Internet use for non-shopping activities and an increased amount of Internet product purchases as an after effect. Studies have also shown that different products/services have acquired different levels of customer acceptance via online shopping/marketing . The success of eBay has primarily been in the sale of physical products than services; however, services like tourism could have been sold more easily using this portal. Given the reduction in information asymmetries between sellers and buyers, there is a growing interest among the participants in understanding online tourism marketing environments. At such a time, when the tourism industry across the globe is growing by leaps and bounds, the online orientation to tourism can be a deciding factor for most of the countries and the firms claiming stakes therein.

Conclusion

Unarguably, online tourism has successfully emerged as a platform that enables direct bookings, electronic payments, Business to Business (B2B) and Business to Consumer (B2C) trading among product marketers, travel agents, resellers and customers. Internet and related developments have been quite instrumental in growth of online tourism and online economy. For securing better propositions, emerging technology has always given big leaps to tech savvy organizations from time to time. Its contribution in Computerized Reservation System (CRS) of 70's, Global Distribution Systems (GDS) of the 80s and the most flexible internet and intranet based systems of the present days is highly significant. Internet enabled portals launched by various government as well as private organizations have offered a wide range of tourism products and services, viz. airlines, hotels, restaurants, adventure tours, activity centres, concerts, festivities, shopping and many more assortments of services. The performance of developed countries has been satisfactory towards online tourism marketing. However, developing countries like India need some measures to be taken. The following suggestions can be fruitful towards successful online marketing for them:

(a) There is a strong need for creation of suitable and sustainable infrastructure within countries to facilitate online marketing of tourism. The countries need to strike a balance between their internal capacity and the technological requirements.

(b) Developing and Least Developing Countries (LDC's) needs to put certain effort towards the incorporation of technological advancements and better share in tourism revenues.

(c) There is a need to develop sound organizational information system which provides citizen an interface towards the introduction of online technologies.

(d) Countries need to create much awareness among the people towards the access ,analysis and use of online technologies.

(e) Introduction of basic online technologies e.g. credit cards, net-banking, online kiosks, reservations systems are a must to provide initial awareness to people so as to boost their confidence in global online exchange mechanism.

(f) Multiple channel approaches need to be developed that involve cross-connected web platforms, thematic web sites, e-mail marketing, CRM, e-brochures, and virtual tours as physical evidence.

(g) Traditional channel in less e-oriented destinations needs strengthening and integration with global online channels.

(h) Every destination needs to have a strong brand for itself to differentiate it with the brands of other countries and for securing better partnerships within and across nations. The countries need to continuously analyze and monitor effectiveness of e-marketing through effective market researches.

Tourism is stress buster and it changes the mindset of an individual completely. The awareness, growth and significance of online tourism are increasing day by day. Various available technologies are relentlessly active in shaping the future of tourism, albeit with differing involvement of people, business organizations and nations. It strives to showcase the various facets of people in our country to cater to the requirements of different age groups. Increased globalization and continuous advances in Internet technology has made traveling abroad an important aspect of people's lives. There is no doubt that the Online tourism activities in India and particularly in our State of Tamilnadu will boom manifold over the coming years.

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