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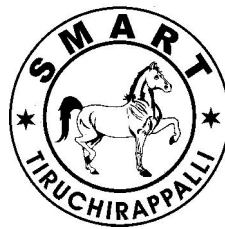
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INDIA'S DESTINATION IMAGE - EVALUATION OF ITS UNIQUE SELLING POINT (USP) : AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract

The present paper offers a brief outline of the concept of Destination Image and how the Destination Image is determined by two significant factors - quality of infrastructure and quality of services. Hence the empirical survey which was undertaken in January 2006 by taking the opinion of foreign tourists to assess the image of incredible India. The survey foregrounds the issues associated with facilities, amenities and quality of services at the destinations. The paper has also discussed extensively the issues and suggested solutions to deal with the two major issues of grave concern that mostly impede the creation of a better Destination Image for India in the overseas tourist market. The need of the hour is to evolve a mechanism for showcasing India's glorious cultural heritage as well as natural and picture-perfect scenic wonders in a fascinating fashion by enhancing the quality of facilities and services. In this context, the dire need is for a synergized participation of both the public and private sectors.

Keywords : *Destination Image, Quality of infrastructure, Quality of Service and Evaluation.*

Introduction

Tourism is one of the leading growth - driven sectors recognized as a major engine for socio- economic and cultural development by all countries in the world. It is an unvarnished fact that International Tourism has witnessed a phenomenal growth in the era of globalization and liberalization. The movement of people across international boundaries has risen spectacularly over the last one and a half decades. The resurgence of International Tourism may be attributed to the buoyant growth in Information and Communication Technology, a plethora of travel choices with cost-effective and personalized travel services, low cost air services, simplified and hassle free travel formalities etc. Today, more countries have given utmost preference to revenue generation by focusing on the promotion of International Tourism.

The degree of motivation and expectations related to habits and life style of tourists has undergone substantial changes. These changes are indicators for destinations to take into account the tourist's profile, activities and interaction with the environment. These destinations should be thought of as evolving a competitive Destination Image in the form of a definite brand image that have to be managed effectively and positioned strategically. More particularly, a tourist destination such as India that remains untapped and unexplored in many ways needs to foray into an aggressive brand campaign to position the country's fabulous tourist attractions in the international tourist market. Thus, the Destination Image has turned out to be a strategic tool to realize a competitive advantage and leverage to the Indian Tourism Industry.

Review of Literature

The destination is a location that travellers desire to visit during the ideal time and where they spend time, in tandem with their motivations, needs, and expectations. A destination can be as small as a single building or structure to as large as an entire continent. However the size of the destination may be, adequate facilities and services must be developed to satisfy the needs of visitors. Crompton (1979) suggests a Destination Image as 'the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination'. Um and Crompton (1990) have put forth the process of the formation of overall image from evaluation of an object and described that the image of a place as a pleasure destination is a Gestalt. It is a holistic construct which, to a greater extent, is derived from attitudes towards the destination's perceived tourism attributes'. MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997) have argued that a Destination Image is a composite of various products (attractions) and attributes woven into a total impression. Predominantly, since present destinations are competitive in nature with other destination markets for acquiring massive share of business, it is therefore essential to have a thorough understanding of destination formation to undertake fundamental steps and procedures to enhance destination attractiveness as well as market competitiveness. The image correlates with the tourist's attitudes towards a number of attributes. The image concept has by and large been considered as an attitudinal construct consisting of an individual's mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings and global impression about an object or destination (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). Fakeye and Crompton (1991) expanded these dimensions into three dimensions: (1) organic, (2) induced, and (3) complex. Dann (1996) and Gartner (1993) in their socio-linguistic model of destination image formation also delineated three components of images: (1) affective

(internal sources or stimuli), (2) cognitive (external sources or stimuli), and (3) conative image, which was distinguished on the basis of their sources of stimuli and motives. Recently, Baloglu (1999) has proposed and tested two different distinct components but these are interrelated to each other such as affective (feelings) and cognitive (beliefs) image. Affective image deals with the emotional response of individuals to a place or product. Cognitive image, on the other hand, represents knowledge of the place, environment or product features. However, each destination creates different images to tourists so that the separated measurement of image for each destination is necessary (Gartner, 1993). In this regard, Destination Image can also be seen as an umbrella construct for different products and services. The Destination Image is influenced by two important attributes of tourist behavior one is Atmospheric Attributes and another is Environmental Attributes. Atmospheric Attributes are related to the climate, weather, temperature, humidity etc; and the Environmental Attributes encompass the socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of a destination.

Methodology

The objective of the study is to evaluate various Destination Images and examine the opinion of foreign tourists as target respondents regarding India's Destination Images and its Unique Selling Points. The study emphasizes the significance of tangible and intangible destination attributes by taking the empirical results to be derived from the data analysis. A Survey was carried out by interviewing respondents comprising of foreign tourists for gaining further insights into the evaluation of Destination Images during January 2009. Thus, 110 foreign tourists from four continents such as the North America, Europe, Asia and Australasia were asked to complete five point Likert Scale Questionnaires concerning various

destination attributes. Finally, 100 properly filled-in questionnaires were included in the coding and data analysis. The primary questionnaire survey was conducted on site which is Puducherry. The respondents were interviewed by the students of Department of Tourism, Pondicherry University and students were trained to select the respondents on the basis of Convenience - cum - Judgment Sampling Technique.

The previous studies on the measurement of Destination Images have been reviewed to get a final list of destination attributes. These destination attributes are broadly classified into two major variables which are Quality of Infrastructure and Quality of Services. The Quality of Infrastructure encompasses Night life/entertainment, Shopping facilities, Quality of cities, Local cuisine/food quality, Local traffic/transport infrastructure, Quality of accommodation, Sports/recreation facilities, Banks, Telecommunication, Post office, etc and the Quality of Services comprises of Hygiene/cleanliness, Safety/security, Honesty/authenticity, Accessibility, Luxury, Experience/adventure, Variety/fun, Freedom, Open mindedness, etc. Respondents were requested to evaluate these two attributes on a 5 point Likert Scale including tangible as well as intangible factors. The data collected were analyzed using the SPSS data analysis package. Statistical tools such as Mean and Standard Deviation were applied to find the results about the perception of foreign tourists regarding the attributes of Destination Images in India. One way ANOVA and Regression Analysis were also computed for hypothesis testing. The results of the analysis are presented in the following tables.

Hypothesis

H1 : The Quality of Services is not the determining factor for the Destination Image Building.

H2: The Quality of Infrastructure is not the predictor for the Destination Image building.

H3: There is no significant variance among the three categories of tourists about the Quality of Infrastructure and Quality of Services as USP of India's Destination Image on the basis of the duration of stay.

Data Analysis

The primary data, collected by using the structured questionnaire, was interpreted by using the SPSS data analysis package. Regression Analysis was performed upon the dataset to find the association between the Quality of Services and the Destination Image as opined by the tourists. The output of the data analysis furnished in the following tables (**Table 1.1 to 1.3**) denote that while making a pessimistic estimate, 40 % of the variance in the Destination Image was predicted by the Quality of Services ($p < 0.01$). However, the high residual sum of squares means that there are some more important additional factors that have to be brought in for explaining a major proportion of the variation. At the same time, a moderately high value of 't' ($= 8.158, p < 0.01$) corresponding to the Quality of Services indicates that it is still a very useful predictor. Hence, the hypothesis that perception by the tourists in terms of the Quality of Services is not the determining factor for the destination image building, is rejected. The rejection of hypothesis implies that the Quality of Services is of utmost significance for the creation of Destination Image.

The data gathered through the collection of primary data is presented in the following tables (**Table 2.1 to 2.3**). The results of the data explain the role of the Quality of Infrastructure in influencing the Destination Image. Unlike the Quality of Services as a determining factor of Destination Image, the Quality of Infrastructure has a better effect on the Destination Image as it is shown in table 1.1. While making a

pessimistic estimate, 61% of the variance in the Destination Image was predicted by the Quality of Services ($p < 0.01$). However, the high residual sum of squares means that there are some more important additional factors that have to be brought in for explaining a major proportion of the variation. At the same time, a moderately high value of 't' ($=12.622$, $p < 0.01$) corresponding to Quality of Infrastructure indicates that it is still a very useful predictor. Hence, the hypothesis that perception by the tourists i.e., the Quality of Infrastructure is not the predictor for the Destination Image Building, is rejected. The rejection of hypothesis implies that the Quality of Infrastructure is regarded as a key factor for the formation of Destination Image.

The descriptive statistics of the three groups of respondents are exhibited in table 3.1. The analysis was made on the variable of Quality of Infrastructure by using the mean and standard deviation method in order to determine the difference of means and square of means of three categories of respondents. The group having stayed for maximum duration in the two destinations has attributed the Quality of Infrastructure as a major image building attribute relatively compared to other two groups of respondents such as minimum and least duration of stay in the two destinations. There is the highest mean value of 4.51 in the case of group having maximum duration of stay and 3.91 and 1.53 mean value in the case of minimum duration of stay groups respectively. The results of the standard deviation are also equally important in establishing the degree of deviation among respondents from a particular group. It is reported here in the Table that there is not much dispersion in the opinions of the groups irrespective of their duration of stay and on the Quality of Infrastructure as one major deciding attribute of Destination Image. Considering the Quality of Service as another vital attribute of Destination Image, it is ascertained from the results of mean and

standard deviation that the maximum duration of stay group has surpassed other two categories such as minimum and least duration of stay group on the Quality of Service as an essential image building attributes of destination. In a similar case, it is also assumed that there is not much dispersion among the respondents in each group about the Destination Image by taking the Quality of Service as one of the attributes.

The results of the ANOVA are presented in **Table-3**. It explains the variance of means between and within the groups of respondents. While taking the instance of the basic tourism infrastructure as a major image building attribute for destination, the F- statistics is 54.529 and F distribution with $df = (3, 97)$ and an associated P- value = .000. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 5 % significance level. It may otherwise be stated that the effect is said to be significant. The data provide sufficient evidence to conclude that a difference exists in the perception of foreign tourists about basic tourism infrastructure as one of the determining factors of the Destination Image.

When the effects of the one way ANOVA are significant, it obviously implies that the means differ more than what would be expected by chance alone. In terms of the above experiment, it would signify that the Destination Images were not equally effective in building a magnificent Destination Image for India in the overseas tourist market. When the effects are significant, the means must then be examined in order to determine the nature of the effects. The measure which examines the difference of means among the three categories of tourists is "post-hoc test" to assist the Researcher in this task, but often the analysis is fairly evident simply by looking at the size of the various means. When the null hypothesis is rejected in a one way ANOVA, the conclusion is that the means are not all equal. An attempt has been made to analyze further i.e., which

means are different, which is the highest, or, more generally, the relation among means can be ascertained. Thus it is essential to adopt the Tukey Multiple Comparison Method to distinguish between the individual confidence level and group confidence level. The Tukey Multiple Comparison Method is based on the standardised range distribution for obtaining confidence intervals for the differences between means which are similar to the pooled t- interval formals.

Having found out the significant differences of means between groups and within groups in respect of Quality of Infrastructure and Quality of Services, an attempt was made to undertake Tucky's post hoc test to find out whether there were any differences of means among the groups such as maximum duration, minimum duration and least duration stay groups. In **Table -3.2**, hypothesis was significant and hence that hypothesis is rejected. To further validate the significance of hypothesis, post hoc test was conducted to look into the actual differences between the groups about the Quality of Infrastructure and Quality of Services. While analyzing the out put of post hoc results given in table 3.3, it is understood that there is a difference between maximum duration of stay group tourists with the minimum and least duration of stay of tourists. It is further tested that each group is very much significant ($p < 0.01$) about the Quality of Infrastructure that has been perceived differently by three categories of tourists. The Quality of Services was considered to be another significant factor to decide the building of image of destinations. It is also indicated in table 3.3 about the output of Tukey's Multiple Comparison Test and about the differences of perceptions as it is observed in Table.3.3 about the Quality of Services. The Quality of Services is also regarded as important determinant of Destination Image Building. It is also observed that there is a difference of perceptions between maximum

duration stay tourists and minimum duration stay tourists and vice versa. Similarly there is a difference of perceptions about the Quality of Services between minimum duration tourists and least duration tourists and vice versa. Furthermore, there are also differences of perceptions between least duration stay tourists and maximum duration tourists and vice versa. However, maximum differences are reported in the case of maximum duration of stay tourists rather than in the other categories.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the present paper, an attempt has been made to identify the probable reasons for which the differences have occurred among the groups in realizing the image of destinations. It is inferred from the analysis that foreign tourists have shared their varied perceptions on the Quality of Infrastructure and Quality of Services. The paper has drawn three relevant hypotheses to test the results of primary data directly collected from the tourists. All three hypotheses are rejected on the basis of the output presented under various Tables. The rejection of the first hypothesis has tentatively proved that the Quality of Services is the significant predictor for the Destination Image Building. It is clearly perceived from the results of the rejection of hypothesis that tourists attached a high degree of importance to the Service Quality as it gives them a kind of comfort and respite during their visit to tourist destinations. It can be compared with the common parlance of human beings where the basic understanding is a need for better and improved Service Quality at the place of stay. Therefore, tourists have clear-cut expectations and the demand for safe and comfortable places of stay is very intense. The unit of accommodation, which they prefer for the sojourn, should cater to the services as per the needs and expectations of the guests. It is obvious that there is a significant difference among the three groups of tourists. Tourists

having least duration of stay in the present study have given less importance as compared to tourists undergoing minimum duration of stay. Similarly, tourists having minimum duration of stay have also become indifferent to the Quality of Services than the maximum duration of stay group of tourists. It is inferred from the results of the hypothesis that the difference will exist among the three groups because the Quality of Services is the major pulling factor of destinations. Those who have stayed for the maximum duration of days must have sincerely scanned all dimensions of services because their stay will be longer and their dependence and reliability on the services will be much more as compared to the other two categories of tourist groups in the Study. While bringing out the test results of the second hypothesis, as the second hypothesis, "The Quality of Infrastructure is not the predictor for the Destination Image Building", it was rejected. The rejection of hypothesis has given much scope for the discussion in the present Study. The overall perception of three respondent groups of the Quality of Services is as good as the results of the Quality of Infrastructure. There are significant differences of perceptions of three categories of tourists of the Quality of Infrastructure. The results have demonstrated that the least duration of stay tourists were indifferent to the quality part of the infrastructure because their stay and movement at the destinations were very short. It is the maximum and minimum duration of stay group of tourists who treated the Quality of Infrastructure as a major determining attribute of selecting these destinations. The results of hypothesis in the ANOVA test have also been examined further by using the post hoc Tucky Test. The outputs of the analysis have demonstrated the differences among the three groups in the case of Quality of Infrastructure and so also in the case of Quality of Services.

While the present research implies qualitative improvement of infrastructure and services at the destinations as having a significant impact on the overall Destination Image, destination planners, promoters and developers should plan for much investment on research and development on varied areas of Destination Image building measures. Unlike other neighbouring countries like China - which is the major competing force for India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, India is bestowed with diversified tourist destinations which are known for their intrinsic charm and uniqueness. Thus these incomparable and incredible destinations have created a better image for India whereas the two other major destination image building determinants like the Quality of Infrastructure and the Quality of Services should equally match with the original value of the destinations. The present paper has categorically argued for greater Destination Image building exercise in India in the coming decade because India recognized as the fifth best preferred would be destination in the world by 2010. Thus, the paper has earnestly put forth the ground for further research work in the area as the future piece of research work will open a Pandora's box of impediments affecting India's Destination Image in the overseas tourist market. Finally, the undertaking of future work will certainly throw open more latent discussions on the critical aspects of Destination Image.

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Table-1.1 : Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.636(a)	.404	.398	.720

a Predictors : (Constant), Quality of Services

Table 1.2 : ANOVA (b)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	34.503	1	34.503	66.553	.000(a)
	Residual	50.807	98	.518		
	Total	85.310	99			

A Predictors : (Constant), Quality of Services

B Dependent Variable: Destination Image

Table 1.3 Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.886	.254		7.438	.000
	Quality of Services	.513	.063	.636	8.158	.000

a Dependent Variable Destination Image

Table - 2 :1 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.787(a)	.619	.615	.575

a Predictors : (Constant), Quality of Infrastructure

Table - 2.2 : ANOVA (b)

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	52.820	1	52.820	159.323	.000(a)
	Residual	32.490	98	.332		
	Total	85.310	99			

a Predictors : (Constant), Quality of Infrastructure

b Dependent Variable : Destination Image

Table 2.3 : Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.809	.173		10.453	.000
	Quality of Infrastructure	.554	.044	.787	12.622	.000

Dependent Variable : Destination Image

Table. 3.1 : Deceptive Statistics

Destination Image Attributes	Duration	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Quality of Infrastructure	Maximum duration of stay	27	4.51	.752
	Minimum duration	58	3.91	1.04
	Least duration	15	1.53	.516
	Total	100	3.72	1.31
Quality of Service	Maximum duration of stay	27	4.70	.465
	Minimum duration	58	4.05	.574
	Least duration	15	1.66	.975
	Total	100	3.87	1.15

Table. 3.2 : ANOVA

Variables	Groups	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Quality of infrastructure	Between Groups	91.117	2	45.558	54.529	.000
	Within Groups	81.043	97	.835		
	Total	172.160	99			
Quality of Service	Between Groups	93.502	2	46.751	119.945	.000
	Within Groups	37.808	97	.390		
	Total	131.310	99			

Table.3.3 Tucky HSD : Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable	Category of Tourists on duration basis	(J) Category of Tourists on duration basis	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Quality of infrastructure	1.00	2.00	.60473(*)	.21295	.015	.0978	1.1116
		3.00	2.98519(*)	.29435	.000	2.2846	3.6858
	2.00	1.00	-.60473(*)	.21295	.015	-1.1116	-.0978
		3.00	2.38046(*)	.26477	.000	1.7502	3.0107
	3.00	1.00	-2.98519(*)	.29435	.000	-3.6858	-2.2846
		2.00	-2.38046(*)	.26477	.000	-3.0107	-1.7502
Quality of services	1.00	2.00	.65198(*)	.14545	.000	.3058	.9982
		3.00	3.03704(*)	.20105	.000	2.5585	3.5156
	2.00	1.00	-.65198(*)	.14545	.000	-.9982	-.3058
		3.00	2.38506(*)	.18085	.000	1.9546	2.8155
	3.00	1.00	-3.03704(*)	.20105	.000	-3.5156	-2.5585
		2.00	-2.38506(*)	.18085	.000	-2.8155	-1.9546

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level