An Analysis of the Role of Communication in the Selection of Tourist Destination

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Abstract:

The Indian Tourism Industry has flourished in the past few years, significantly contributing to the nation's Gross Domestic Product, foreign exchange earnings and employment. India, with her enriched natural beauty, is unambiguously one of the most viable candidates for promoting tourism. The present study attempts to find out the important determinants of the attractiveness of a tourist destination based on tourists' expectation, experience and satisfaction with the tourist related attributes of the destination. An attempt is made to understand the role of communication in selecting the tourist destination. Communication includes both message from all media sources and personal sources. A factor analysis carried out on 19 items pertaining to the expectation of visitors on touristic attributes gives rise to six meaningful constructs.

Key words: Indian Tourism Industry, tourist attractiveness, communication, amenities, attractions, support services

1. Introduction

Tourist destination is often viewed as a complex product of tourism industry consisting of natural resources, infrastructure, superstructure, services, distinctive local features, and cultural attributes among others. Tourism product can be analyzed in terms of attraction, facilities and accessibility (Jha 1995) for the purpose of finding out its

attractiveness. Attractions are the major factors, which generate tourist flow to a particular location. The tourist facilities are those elements in tourist product which do not normally themselves provide the motivation for tourist flows. But the absence of these facilities may deter the tourists from travelling to enjoy the attractions. Accessibility relates to the mode of transportation to the destination chosen by tourist and is best interpreted in terms of time and cost to reach the destination.

Tourism has become an important source of foreign exchange reserves and employment generation in India. It is becoming a main driving force of economic growth in India. Given the importance of tourism in Indian economy, the volume of foreign exchange and the level of employment that depends on the tourism sector, it is necessary to analyze factors that are determining tourist arrivals to India.

India	
No of Foreign Tourist arrivals in India	6.58 million
Annual Growth Rate	4.3%
No of India Nationals Departures from India	14.92 million
Annual Growth Rate	6.7%
No of Domestic Tourist Visits to all States/UTs	1036 million
Annual Growth Rate	19.9%
Foreign Exchange Earnings from Tourism	
In INR terms	94487 crore
Annual Growth Rate	21.8%
In US$ terms	US$ 17.74 billion
Annual Growth Rate	7.1%
World	
No of International Tourist Arrivals	1035 million
Annual Growth Rate	4.0%
Asia and the Pacific Region	
No of International Tourist Arrivals	233.6 million
Annual Growth Rate	7.0%
India's Position in World	
Share of India in International Tourist Arrivals	0.64%
India Rank in World Tourist Arrivals	41
India Rank in International Tourist Arrivals (in Asia)	11

Table 1: Important facts about Tourism, 2012
Source: Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, for 2013

Researchers have investigated various factors that determine tourist arrivals in different contexts. Mahesha (2011) used a gravity model approach using the panel data for the period from 1991 to 2009 for the selected countries. The criterion for selection of countries is the tourist arrivals to India; the countries which have larger share in total tourist arrivals are selected for the analysis. The study indicated that the GDP, the exchange rate, and infrastructure of other countries had a positive influence on the tourist arrivals to India. The exchange rate of India and the distance have inversely related to tourist arrivals. Infrastructure was also significant except the internet users in India. The number of the people using internet in India has not so much influenced tourist arrival, it has a negative coefficient but it is not a significant one.

Gearing *et al*. (1974), Ritchie and Zins (1978), and Tang and Rochananond (1990) studied the relationship of attractiveness of a destination vis-à-vis various attributes of tourist destinations. Studies on gap analysis between perceptions and expectations on different attributes were conducted by Cho (1998) and Chaudhary (2000).

The present study is an attempt to develop a simple framework for finding out the determinants of the attractiveness of a tourist destination by incorporating both attribute analysis as well as holistic impressions of the destination.

2. Research Methodology

Objective of the study: The main objective of the present study is to determine the factors responsible for determining the attractiveness of a tourist destination in India.

Sample: A descriptive study was conducted to achieve the objectives. Judgmental sampling method was followed. The study was conducted on 200 respondents. A well-structured

questionnaire was developed for conducting the study. The questionnaire consisted of a list of 19 statements pertaining to various attributes of tourist destinations. The attributes and statements were collected from literature review. Respondents have to choose one parameter of each statement depending on the response to the statement as, "Definitely (score 1)", to "Definitely agree (score 9)". Thus, a higher mean score implies that the respondent favors that particular statement.

3.   Factor Analysis

A factor analysis of all independent variables pertaining to the expectation of tourists on key attributes and support services was conducted in order to reduce the number of items into a manageable number of factors. A varimax rotated principal component analysis was used on 19 items for a sample of 200 tourists. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistics of 0.736 and Bartlett's test of Sphericity statistics indicated that the data was suitable for conducting factor analysis.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.736
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6.692E3
	df	171
	Sig.	.000

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

A Six-factor solution was obtained on the basis of minimum Eigen value of one and the interpretability of the solution. These factors cumulatively explained 83.32% of the variance in the original data set. Table 3 shows domain descriptions and factor loadings and Table 4 shows the extracted factors.

Domains	Eigen Values	% of Variance explained	Cumulative % of variance explained
1	4.198	22.093	22.093
2	2.703	14.225	36.318

3	2.484	13.073	49.391
4	2.456	12.924	62.315
5	2.358	12.411	74.726
6	1.633	8.593	83.318

Table 3: Eigen Values and Percentage of Variance Explained by Six Factors

Item Description	Factor1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
Different means of communication	.951					
Advertisement Media	.939					
Historical importance of that place	.928					
Recommendations of friends and relatives	.921					
Recommendations of tour operators	.833					
Purpose of visit is fulfilled		.961				
Availability of different facilities		.956				
Awareness of the place		.903				
Suitable accommodation			.938			
Security			.907			
Transportation facilities			.878			
Natural beauty				.946		
Main tourist attractions of the place				.946		
Different leisure activities at the place				.798		
Distance from your place					.940	
Culture and language of that place					.927	
No of tourists visiting that place					.754	
Banking and support services						.902
Travel arrangements						.901

Table 4: Factor Analysis Following Varimax Rotation
Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

The six conceptually meaningful domains from factor analysis were then tested for reliability, which was assessed by Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. The coefficients ranged from a high (0.95) to a low value (0.77) indicating that the variables

displayed moderate to good correlation with their factor groupings and thus may be cautiously regarded as internally consistent and stable.

4. Interpretation and Naming of Factors

All the factors have been given appropriate names according to the variables that have been loaded on each factor. The six factors are discussed here:

Factor 1: Communication
The rotated matrix has revealed that respondents have perceived this factor to be the most important factor with the highest explained variance of 22.093%. Five out of 19 service features load on significantly to this factor. This factor has been named as communication as it includes statements like advertisement media, availability of means of communication, recommendations of earlier visitors and recommendations of tour operators. Hence, it can be concluded that communication about the places (including word of mouth) is the most crucial factor considered by the tourists.

Factor 2: Related to Purpose Fulfillment
It is second most important factor with explained variance of 14%. Three statements were loaded on to this factor. Facilities available at that place, completion of purpose of visit as well as level of awareness are highly loaded on this factor and thus researchers have named this factor as objectivity and this is the second most important factor influencing tourist's choice of a particular place.

Factor 3: Amenities
This is the next important factor which accounts for 13% of the variance. Three types of features were loaded on to this factor: availability of suitable accommodation, transportation facilities,

and safety measures.

Factor 4: Attractions

Two types of features load on to this factor and together account for 12% of the variance. This factor includes main tourist attractions and natural beauty.

Factor 5: Nearness to the place

Three types of features load on to this factor and together account for 12% of the variance. This factor includes: distance from one's place, the culture/languages of that place and the number of tourists visiting that place (which is the indirect advertisement as highlighted by the media).

Factor 6: Support Services

Two types of features load on to this factor and together account for 8% of the variance. This factor includes banking and support services and travel arrangements (travel agents and guides).

5. Conclusion

The aim of the present study is to determine the factors that are considered important by the tourists while selecting their destinations. Factor analysis suggests that there are six factors namely: communication, purpose fulfillment, amenities, attraction, support services, distinctive local features that tourists feel important. All the factors cumulatively explain 83% of the total variance, which is considered good in social sciences. The first factor, 'communication' that involves advertisement media, availability of means of communication at that place, historical importance of that place, recommendations from earlier visitors and tour operators is the most significant one, which must be taken into account to increase the popularity of the tourist destinations.

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