

Challenges & Prospects of Digital Marketing in Promoting Business Opportunities for Heritage Tourism with Special Reference to India

Dr. Yogesh Pisolkar,

Assistant Professor,

SCMS Pune, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune

yogesh.pisolkar@scmspune.ac.in

Dr. Navendu Chaudhary,

Associate Professor,

SCMS Pune, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune

Ms. Ananya Sharma,

SCMS Pune, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune

Ms. Sakshi Kararia

SCMS Pune, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune

ABSTRACT

The paper starts with some very important statements underlying the importance of Cultural and Heritage Tourism. It also signifies the facts of cultural tourism to boost the self-esteem and satisfaction of local community people, mainly concerning India. Present-day role of digital marketing in the tourism sector. It tries to assess the problems and concerns of digital marketing in promoting business opportunities for cultural and heritage tourism in the Indian context. It is the Authors' experience that regular participants in Workshops & Heritage Walk conducted by Indian Heritage Academy (IHA), New Delhi, India, and Indian National Trust for Heritage and Culture (INTACH), Pune Chapter, India, and Heritage India Communications Private Limited Pune, India, were largely conditioned as active supporter of Pune and surrounding region. The authors in the last part of the paper would like to suggest some solutions to integrate various stakeholders in this digital era to meaningfully promote India's Cultural and Heritage Tourism.

Introduction

In India, heritage tourism has been growing steadily in recent years. People view heritage as our connection to the past. In an increasingly globalized world, Indians are looking towards their long and diverse past to hold their communities and identities together. The vast array of monuments, the natural phenomenon as well as cultural aspects such as dance, folk art, and craft, language and songs take on an immense fascination for urbanized modern Indian population and foreigners alike. This lure is its economic significance (Chhabra 2006). It has the potential to generate great economic benefits for host communities. The difficulty in realizing its potential is in its marketing, i.e., the lure is always proportional to the extent to which the monument is well known.

A recent example, “Shaniwar Wada” in Pune, was prominently featured in the movie “Bajirao – Mastani,” which greatly enhanced its appeal. The promotional activity thus plays a major role in creating demand for heritage tourism. The paper examines the nature and status of demand generation concerning heritage tourism.

The prevalence of information and communication technologies has made it possible for Tourism and Hospitality SMEs to market their business digitally (Hausmann and Weuster, 2018). In contemporary society, digitization is the new method for preservation, education, and access to Heritage sites. Businesses can develop the commercial promotion of cultural heritage as a successful business model with possible niches, like cultural tourism, in the digital services market. Things in India are picking up in the recent past. One of the befitting examples is “Chokhi Dhani- Rajasthani Village Fair & Dining.” Apart from booking tickets, visitors can check out the site map, events, activities, pictures on their website (Chokhi Dhani Rajasthani Theme Wedding food thali in Pune) or Medical Tourism in Kerala are some successful initiatives to promote local culture and heritage. However, there are very few exemplary initiatives in the Indian context. In draft national tourism policy 2015, the Government of India is proclaiming to significantly & meaningfully promote rural tourism and marketing. Market research will be one of the main agenda. But from the observations and experiences, authors would like state Policy, Frameworks and Action Plans need to be site specifically designed with the involvement of local people when the government is targeting rural tourism. Building local community peoples’ skills is the biggest challenge.

Marketing of Heritage Tourism

Marketing for heritage tourism is concerned with identifying and promoting an appropriate target for the tourists. The real challenge in heritage tourism is the inability to change the target/heritage of the customer's desire. The minor additions can enhance the customer experience by adding better facilities in and around the heritage, but it is still limited in scope. There, one needs to balance the need for the provision of facilities against the preservation of experience attributed to the heritage. Therefore, the marketing strategies must incorporate the

education of customers to the importance of the said heritage (Rialti et al. 2018). In today's world, digital technology can harness a viable and cheap marketing strategy that can be both decentralized and localized.

Digital marketing is the process of promoting products and services using digital media, particularly through the world wide web (ROOTS 2009). It is instrumental in creating a tighter bond with tourists and helps identify the segment of the population that is more likely to be your potential customers. In comparison, traditional marketing practices are costly and inflexible. With digital marketing, you can adjust on the fly and build more efficient networks involving all the stakeholders. Digital marketing is also a very efficient tool for managing resources and budgets. (Misiura, 2006) In digital marketing, it is imperative to incorporate your knowledge about your customers who are visiting your region. You can identify the platforms commonly used by them, such as social media platforms or use of websites or specific apps, etc. The digital marketing techniques, however, have their challenges:-

Challenge 1

The traditional marketing practices were overly reliant on word of mouth publicity which results in slow penetration of the market and fragile connectivity. Advertisement in print media or television is very expensive and thus remained out of reach for most heritage attractions. Many state governments are involved in marketing heritage as tourism destinations such as the Government of Madhya Pradesh or Government of Kerala, but the advertisements lack the specifics or the information needed for the tourists to make the decisions or travel plans. Again, most people have to rely on word of mouth publicity of their friends or relatives or rely on tour operators. Digital marketing could have proved instrumental here, but until now, especially up to the end of 20th Century, the digital infrastructure of India was not inclusive of the people at the Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP) as network and internet connectivity had not reached the general population. As a result of it, the sea of opportunities, mainly digital marketing that lies in the Heritage Tourism sector's promotion, was a virgin for them.

Challenge 2

In India, cultural heritage is too focused on a single monument and does not involve the cultural influences it has created in the surrounding region. It also fails to garner any support to build associated cultural activities that complement the monument itself. While digitally marketing of heritage tourism, India has focused only on the site itself. Very few promotional activities are about this associated diverse range of cultural activities that tourists can indulge. *Prior Tourist Awareness* through digital marketing about such activities can greatly affect tourist motivation to visit a place, and it will also influence the duration of the stay at Heritage sight. The current breed of tourists, especially those below the age of 40, are more focused on the experience than the monuments.

Challenge 3

In cases where digital marketing exists, there is a digital divide between the operators and the creators of digital platforms. It is not easy for small business owners or locals to use these platforms due to a lack of training / comfortable in the use of such technology. In India, the websites of tourist attractions often found to contain outdated information, which leads to a lack of trust in the people for digital tourism platforms such as websites. The most notable example is the fact that the Chilika lake in Odisha was closed for tourists in November 2019 due to the expected cyclone “Bulbul” not being updated on their website, and tourists were being sent back after reaching the lake. The websites are clumsy unattractive and not designed in a customer-friendly way. The website themselves are passive pages and needs promotion through search engines or social media platforms. Such initiatives are sorely lacking.

Challenge 4

One of the reasons for lackluster online presence is the lack of creation of good visual content. Pictures and video content will enhance the experience of visiting heritage attraction. If there is a festival associated, it needs to be timely promoted, so that people can arrange to attend. In such cases, content creation is vital.

Challenge 5

In the Indian context, the tourism industry is quite fragmented. It lacks the mechanism to integrate various stakeholders like government officials, local community, academicians, consultants, tourism experts, hotel and motel owners, etc. The lack of integration proves a major hurdle to take collective responsibility to digitally market & build a sustainable business model & action plan for the promotion of local heritage and culture in most of the cases.

Challenge 6

With all the technology now available, people are more interested in virtual entertainment than real-world experiences. They would prefer watching a television show than to explore a new fort on a mountain. The marketing strategies lack the enthusiasm required to capture the attention of these said millennials.

Challenge 7

Stakeholders are using very limited platforms for the marketing of heritage sites. People only know about these sites if they directly search for it. The content lacks the promotion that is required to make people aware of the stories behind these historical sites.

In light of the above said challenges following suggestions are proposed:-

Solution 1

In 2015 the Government of India launched the “Digital India” campaign to empower the country digitally. The objective was to ensure the Government's services are made available to citizens electronically by improving the online infrastructure and enhancing internet connectivity. Tourism is a key sector under the Digital India campaign; grass root level plans to build the capacity gram panchayat administration, including local community people, should be made to digitally empower people & market heritage tourism to the local people as a lucrative business option. Until and unless the system is unable to take into its folds, the local people, sustainable heritage tourism will not be a success.

Solution 2

Digitally marketing the place should include glimpses of peripheral cultural activities. In the case of Konark Sun temple, the digital advertisement should also inform tourists in brief about the light and sound show, the interpretation center, and local arts and crafts available for sale and the historical Chandrabhaga beach just 3.6 km away. All this information provided in the promotional video will have a profound impact on prospective tourists.

Solution 3

The competent authority must understand that the internet and electronic media can only reap the benefits of marketing, and tourist communication is up-to-date, relevant, and agile. The whole purpose of digitally marketing and communicating with tourists is defeated when the data is stale as it is useless and often misleading for the tourists. The only and best solution for this challenge is to routinely and systematically post information, notices, guidelines, etc. on the website to keep the user interaction as smooth as possible.

Solution 4

Digital media creation is much cheaper and easier with the latest technology. Local NGOs working in the heritage sector can help build content. A governmental agency such as respective state tourism departments, the archeological survey of India, etc. can provide support.

Solution 5

The integration of various stakeholders should facilitate good digital content creation. If every stakeholder pools their respective resources, it will add significant value to the tourism prospects. One can obtain help from local NGOs or Educational institutes for training on the creation of digital content and promotion on social media. Platforms such as Facebook or Twitter provide easy and quick access to a wide range of possibilities concerning connectivity and branding. Researchers have observed that the e-governance platform to be very useful in integrating the stakeholders (Paskaleva-Shapira, 2008).

Solution 6

We need to change the way we do heritage marketing. It needs to be more emotionally attractive; for example, it should not just state facts; it should tell stories in a way that people cannot stop reading until the story is over. It should be appealing and inviting.

Solution 7

Multiple platforms are very useful in digital marketing, for which there are various websites available that allow the content creator or manager to manage multiple platforms at once. There should be pop-up advertisements and promotions on content on the most popular social media sites.

Conclusion

Heritage Tourism is evolving in India. With the advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) lot of new opportunities are now available even for rural markets. Local people can integrate various stakeholders to improve their livelihood meaningfully by digitally holistically marketing their region. However, there is a need for education, training, capacity building of local people. Here, Government with appropriate site specifically designed policy, framework & action plan can help local community people. No doubt, it is a mammoth task but is achievable in modern-day development planning.

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