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Unique Promotional Strategy for Sustainability of Community Based Tourism (CBT)

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Abstract

Community based tourism (CBT) focuses on the protection of socio-cultural values and economic benefits of stakeholder host communities of tourism destinations. It is increasingly being promoted as an avenue of sustainable tourism development. But for achieving economic sustainability in long run for CBT initiatives it is imperative to ensure revenue generation through regular tourist footfall and productive use of available resources. The purpose of the study is to examine the tourists' awareness level about CBT initiatives. The paper also seeks to analyze how far the aware tourist is able to contribute to economic sustainability of CBT destinations. It also aims to identify popular tourist information dissemination sources so that a policy prescription can be suggested for effective marketing and promotion strategy of CBT. The study used questionnaire based survey method and collected primary data of 100 domestic tourists focusing on the CBT destinations of Northern part of west Bengal region. Statistical analysis is used to develop a framework to explain the theoretical relationship of CBT awareness level and tourists' visit possibility. The findings will lead to policy prescriptions for CBT developers to achieve sustainability in long run by developing unique promotional strategy to increase tourist visit.

Keywords: Community based tourism, Sustainability, Promotion, CBT Awareness, Visit Willingness

1. Introduction

Tourism a key driver of socio-economic progress is continuously expanding to become one of the largest and

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fastest growing economic sectors of the world. According to UNWTO international tourist arrival is expected grow by 3.3% a year between 2010 and 2030 to reach 1.8 billion by 2030. But this huge potential for socioeconomic development is neutralized by precipitous and unplanned growth of mass tourism. The negative impacts of mass tourism often jeopardize the socio – economic structure and environmental balance of a region. As a result, the concept of sustainable tourism development through various alternative forms of tourism has gained acceptance and appreciation from both academicians and practitioners. Community based tourism (CBT) as a new IJTB publishes paper between 6000 to 8000 words. There is no strict formatting requirement but all manuscripts must contain the essential elements needed to convey your manuscript, for example Abstract, Keywords, Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results and Conclusions. Introduce the paper in the first section, and put a nomenclature if necessary, in a box with the same font size as the rest of the paper. The paragraphs should only be separated by headings, subheadings, images and formulae. The section headings are arranged by numbers, bold and 12 pt. Use 1.5 line spacing; font should be Times, size 10.

According to UNWTO international tourist arrival is expected tourism form became popular in the mid-1990s, reversing the development approach to bottom-up, in an effort to provide real and all-inclusive community participation at all levels of the development (Asker, Boronyak, Carrad, & Paddon, 2010). World Wildlife Fund International (2001) defines CBT as a form of tourism “where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community.”The principle objective of CBT is the participation of local communities in sustainable tourism planning, development and management processes (Beeton, 2006 ; Inskip, 1994). CBT to be successful in this increasingly competitive global tourism market needs proper planning and strategy. Promotion and awareness building is the key factor for any economic activity where the demand and supply of the product is pivotal. A promotional approach, more specifically CBT destination brand development approach is very essential for sustainability of CBT. CBT as an alternative tourism lacks connection with mainstream tourism industry thus has less access to market. The primary objective of the study is to examine the awareness level of the tourists about CBT destinations in northern part of West Bengal and also to observe the contribution of awareness level in increasing the tourist footfall. Sufficient tourist footfall will ensure financial viability of the CBT projects which can lead to economic sustainability in long run. Further, popular information gathering sources of the tourists are identified to suggest an effective and unique promotional strategy for awareness building.

2. Literature Review

Tourism will grow continuously as a result of increasing demand of the tourists. But it will also induce the adverse impact of tourism. Therefore, sustainable development approach is the future of tourism. While there does not exist a universal definition of sustainability, many scholars agree that sustainable development includes long term positive economic, social and environmental outcomes (Hunter, 1997; Goodwin H. , 2011). Sustainability is often discussed regarding different forms of tourism and their impacts. Conventional mass sufficient details to allow the work to be reproduced by an independent researcher. Methods that are already published should be summarized and indicated by a reference. If quoting directly from a previously published method, use quotation marks and cite the source. Any modifications to existing methods should also be described.

Therefore, sustainable development approach is the future of tourism. While tourism, for instance, is known to have many negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts, while at the same time the economic benefits are also very rarely realized by the local population (Telfer & Wall, 2000 ; Torres, 2003). Due to the significant negative consequences of excessive and unplanned tourism development, the focus on local involvement has been considered as one of the ways to control the pace of development, and mitigate socio - cultural, environmental and economic impacts (Murphy, 1985). CBT as a sustainable tourism is gaining popularity because local community participation in the development and practice of these projects is supposed to be high, and that the whole community benefits from the projects (Brohman, 1996 ; Hatton, 1999). CBT is generally small scale and

involves interactions between visitor and host community, particularly suited to rural and regional areas (Asker, Boronyak, Carrad, & Paddon, 2010). A Toolkit for Monitoring and Managing Community based Tourism (SNV, 2007) has suggested CBT projects, like any other small businesses, need to keep careful tabs on their performance in all aspects of a business. Most of the CBT projects collapse because of poor market access and lack of tourist awareness (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). Lack of tourist footfall will challenge the financial viability of the CBT projects. P.E. Murphy suggests CBT when entering in the tourism industry need to achieve economic sustainability. This can be achieved by increasing tourist visit. According to (Pawaskar & Goel, 2016) Service industries, like tourism constantly under pressure of growing their customer base and they need to make dedicated efforts in luring customers. So, exclusive marketing and promotion strategy is imperative to attract the potential consumers. A study by Nielson depicts that 92% consumers rely more on recommendation from family and friends over any other forms of advertising and promotion. Online consumer review secured the second most trusted source. User generated information is considered more credible than seller generated information (Willson & Sherrel, 1993). Thus, word of mouth (WOM) i.e. Influencing and encouraging organic discussions about a brand, organization, resource, or event can be an effective and inexpensive strategy for promotion. But there is no strong evidence of study and practice of promotion of CBT for tourist awareness building in existing literature. Most of the studies focused on socioeconomic impact and environmental impact of CBT. Present study tries to explore the awareness level of tourists regarding CBT and its role in increasing tourists' willingness to visit in a CBT destination. The study also seeks to understand which information sources and medium can be used effectively to promote CBT.

3. Results and Discussion

A. Measure

A questionnaire was developed to collect empirical data which covered the demographic profile of the respondents, travel characteristics (travel frequency, team size, booking medium etc.) Data is collected on respondents' CBT initiative awareness level and visiting willingness to a CBT destination in future. CBT awareness level response is collected in a dichotomous scale with the option yes and no. Data is also collected on mostly used information sources by the tourists and the responses are assessed on a five point Likert scale ranging from Most used (5) to Least used (1). A pilot study on 20 respondents was conducted and necessary correction was implemented in the questionnaire.

B. Study site

Kolkata, in the state of West Bengal was the study site for the purpose of data collection. The focus of the study was emerging CBT destinations in the North Bengal region, so the data was collected from the respondents from Kolkata and adjacent areas from where the most of the tourists in North Bengal crowds around throughout the year. Specifically the data was collected from the visitors in Travel Tourism Fair 2016 held in Netaji Indoor Stadium from 8-10th July, 2016. The approximate footfall was 8000.

C. Sampling

Simple random sampling method was used for the study. The data was collected by selecting every visitor entering on every 15th minute in the fair premises through the main entrance as a respondent. Total questionnaires were collected 104, among which 100 were used for the study after cleaning.

4. Results

Analysis of the demographic background of the respondents depicted that the majority respondents were male (68%) and belong to age group of 25-34 (42%). It also revealed that majority of the respondents were from monthly income group of 20k-40k (34.7%). Most of them (56%) go for a holiday at least once in a year and the rest go for a holiday trip more than once in a year i.e. frequent traveler. Respondents were asked regarding their

CBT initiative awareness level, with dichotomous `choice responses. Further they were asked about their willingness to visit a CBT destination in future regardless of their awareness about CBT. Responses were collected in three options: No, May be and Yes. Result in table 2 depicts that 28% of the respondents are completely unaware about CBT initiatives. Rest of the respondents (72%) who are aware about CBT among them 77.8% have shown a willingness to visit a CBT destination in future holiday trips. 13.9% are not willing to visit and 8.3 are not sure.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Variables	Description	%
Gender	Male	68
	Female	32
Age	18-25	12
	25-34	42
	35-44	28
	45 & above	18
Monthly Income	Less than 20k	10.2
	20k-40k	34.7
	40k-60k	30.6
	60k & above	24.5
Holiday Travel Frequency	Once in a year	56
	More than once	44

Table 2. CBT awareness * cbt visit willingness

CBT Awareness	Visit willingness			Total
	Not willing to visit	Not sure	Willing to visit	
Aware (72%)	10 (13.9%)	6 (8.3%)	56 (77.8%)	72 (100%)
Unaware 28%	14 (50%)	14 (50%)	0 (0)	28 (100%)
Total	24	20	56	100

Table 3. Correlation

	Visit Willingness	CBT Awareness
Pearson Correlation		
Visit Willingness	1.000	0.212
CBT Awareness	0.212	1.000
Sig.(1 – tailed)		
Visit Willingness		0.017
CBT Awareness	0.017	

Table 4. Mann- Whitney U Test

	Visit Willingness	
	Aware	Unaware
CBT Awareness		
N	72	28
Mean Rank	61.00	23.50
Sum of Ranks	4392.00	658.00
Mann-Whitney U	252.000	
Z	- 6.478	
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

The correlation table (Table 3) depicts the strength and direction of association between CBT awareness level and visit willingness of the tourists. There is a positive correlation between CBT awareness level and visit willingness of the tourists ($r = 0.212$) which is statistically significant ($p = 0.017$, less than 0.05). Further, Mann-Whitney U test is carried out to compare the difference in CBT destination visit willingness between the two groups of tourists i.e. aware and unaware. Table 4 displays mean rank and sum of ranks for the two groups. The aware group with much higher mean rank (61.00) than unaware group (23.50) indicates high visit willingness to a CBT destination. Next, we will focus on the significance value of the test. The result depicts the test statistic $U = 252$ and p value (sig.) = 0.000. From this result it can be inferred that there is higher visit willingness among the aware group than the unaware group and this result is statistically substantiate. This leads us to explore how the awareness about CBT among the potential tourists can be increased, which will lead to higher frequency of tourist visit. In the next step therefore, the popular modalities which may influence tourists are identified

Table 5. Tourist information sources

Descriptive Statistics							
Sources	Variance	Std. Deviation	Mean				
Travel Magazines	3.265	1.807	3.40				
Guide book	3.324	1.823	2.68				
Travel agency	3.161	1.778	2.68				
Hotel/ Destination	3.202	1.789	3.68				
Online review	3.487	1.867	3.32				
Social media	3.324	1.823	2.68				
Family & Friends	.857	.926	4.40				

We have asked the respondents which are their most used information sources for holiday planning. Their responses are assessed on a five point Likert scale ranging from most used (5) to least used (1). Through descriptive analysis on the basis of mean value four preferred tourist information sources for planning holiday is identified as Family & friends (4.40), Hotel/Destination website (3.68), Travel magazine (3.40) and Online review (3.32).

5. Discussion & Implication

This study observed the association between CBT awareness level among tourists and their visit willingness to a CBT destination. The result of Pearson correlation shows a statistically significant ($p = 0.017$, less than 0.05) positive linear relationship ($r = 0.212$) between the two variables CBT awareness level and visit willingness. This implies that two variables tend to increase together. Further it is observed that 72% of the respondents are aware of CBT initiative in this northern part West Bengal but 28% respondents are completely unaware of CBT initiatives. 77.8 % of the aware respondents are willing to visit a CBT destination in future holiday. Mann-

Whitney test gives a picture of the difference in visit willingness between the aware and unaware group of tourists. The test result shows a statistically significant ($p = .000$, less than 0.05) higher visit willingness among the aware tourist group than the unaware tourist group. This indicates that increasing tourists' awareness about CBT initiatives can result in higher tourist footfall which will ensure economic sustainability of CBT in long run. Focused promotional planning is very necessary for increasing awareness or to keep the tourists well informed about CBT. The study also identified largely used information dissemination sources by the tourists for holiday planning.

6. Contribution & Conclusion

After all tourism is a business, so CBT needs to make a place in global competitive market to sustain in long run. Regular tourist footfall will provide it economic sustainability and opportunity for optimum use of available resources. The study found that there is still a lacuna in awareness among tourists about CBT initiatives and also revealed that high awareness can result in increasing tourist footfall. It is observed that aware tourists have shown a high willingness to visit a CBT destination in future. So systematic promotional programmes are suggested to increase tourist awareness and popularize CBT. Continuous promotion is also essential to influence the already aware tourists. CBT as an emerging tourism offering should be widely publicized. The study suggests that identified four most used tourist information sources i.e. Family & friends, Hotel/Destination website, Travel magazine and Online review. But Recommendation from family and friends is the most preferred source of information to the tourists. This also substantiates the consumer survey result of Nielson.

An important observation of the study is that among the four identified sources except travel magazine other three sources are very cheap or almost free medium. Therefore, the promotion of CBT is possible at a very low cost or even free. This is very significant because CBT units generally lack abundant fund for marketing and promotion. Family and friends is a most preferred and reliable information source so creating satisfied tourists can ensure word of mouth publicity without incurring any additional cost. A website of a CBT destination or community Homestay can be created with very little cost, its maintenance is also inexpensive. Again, information about CBT destinations making available in state tourism corporation's website can be free of cost. Enlisting CBT destinations and properties in online travel review portals comes free or at a very negligible cost. Advertisement or featured stories can also be published in travel magazines which may be a little costly. However, even publishing stories in travel magazines can be made low cost by offering fam trip to travel writers or their representatives.

The study suggests Word of Mouth (WOM) as a unique promotional strategy for CBT which is cost effective and more personal than generic advertising. This inexpensive medium will help in CBT destination awareness building through existing customer base without additional marketing investment. But creating highly satisfied tourists with more engaging and amazing experience is essential to unleash the power of WOM. Online reviews i.e. online network of the tourists should also be nurtured as a highly potential source of WOM along with the physical medium of Family and friends. Previous researches demonstrated that CBT projects lack tourist awareness and have very poor marketing and promotion initiatives. But none has significantly focused on effective promotional strategy for CBT. The present study firstly attempts to study the effect of tourist awareness in increasing tourist footfall in CBT destinations. Further, seeks to understand the most effective way to improve tourist awareness and develop promotional strategy for CBT. The study identifies that informal communicational channels can be very effective medium for promotion of CBT. Eventually, the promotion of CBT can be executed almost free or at a very low cost through tourist involvement. This research provides a unique theoretical contribution for promotional strategy formulation of CBT and also paves the way for further research in this direction. But government support is essential for promotion of CBT as tourism communities lack adequate finance and requisite skill for marketing and promotion. There is a limitation that the study has not accounted the responses of the foreign tourists and is focused on domestic tourists.

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