

Application of Public-Private Partnership Approach in Marketing Mix of Buddhist Tourism

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Abstract

Religion since time immemorial has been a key factor in motivating and stimulating people to travel to different places. Buddhism is one of the largest and far spread religions in the world which has millions of followers in different parts of the world. Buddhist tourism is developing as a separated niche market in tourism industry. This research aims at suggesting effective tourism marketing mix for Buddhist tourism products. This paper reveals that Buddhist tourism products have lots of tourism potential if marketed in effective manner.

The paper suggests the application of the Public private partnership to construct effective marketing mix for Buddhist tourism. All the components of tourism marketing mix are analyzed and evaluated and application of each component is described. In this way we have suggested the importance of Public private partnership model for marketing strategy of Buddhist tourism. This study suggests that Public private partnership can be a key factor to enhance the competitive edge of Buddhist tourism through partnership, collaboration among different stake holders of the tourism industry. This research is based on conceptual study which offers a unique combination of marketing and economic theories to describe the importance and growth of Buddhist tourism in modern days and beyond.

Keywords: Tourism, Buddhism, Buddhist tourism, marketing mix, Public private partnership

Introduction

Over past few decades, tourism has become one of the fastest growing economic sector in the world. Continuously tourism is showing diversification and expansion in various concerned areas of tourism. As per UNWTO 2018 report, Travel and tourism contributes around 10% on total world GDP through direct, indirect and induced impact. In every ten jobs one is created in tourism. It has a contribution of US \$ 1.6 Trillion in exports which is 7% of world's exports. It touched a mark from 25 million international tourists in 1950 and 1323 million in 2017. And 1.8 billion international tourists are forecasted for 2030.

Religious tourism has enormous potential for further growth. Religious tourism is defined as a type of tourism that consists of tourists travelling for religious reasons (Lefebvre, 1996). Travellers involved in religious tourism include both religious and nonreligious people. Griffin (2007, p.17) referred to these nonreligious travellers as “accidental” religious tourists “who intentionally travel for reasons related to religion or spirituality in their quest for meaning”. Religious tourism according to Timothy and Olsen (2006) is one of the ancient forms of non-economic travel people all around the world belongs to different religious groups like Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christianity and so they travel for their spiritual and religious purposes. There is a growing trend in the religious tourism. Many factors are responsible for the growth of tourism like more disposable income, globalization, fast and easy accessibility, education, technology, sound promotional strategies, industrialization and open market of foreign countries. It is observed from historical and archeological evidences like inscription, documents, literary text, and artifacts that people travel for their spiritual religious purposes. Buddhism remains the dominant world religion in the east and is becoming increasingly popular in the west. Followers of Lord Buddha from all around the world travel to experience Buddhist monasteries, caves, festivals, Buddhist sites and other concerned places of life of Lord Buddha.

India is home to many famous and sacred Buddhist sites which attract lakhs of international as well as domestic tourists mostly of whom are Buddhists. But there are so many tourists who belong to other religions also visit these Buddhist sites. The union as well as the state governments has taken steps to promote these sites at the world level and to attract more tourists to these places. Some circuits for Buddhist tourism have also been made which are promoted by tour operators along with the government players. In contemporary scenario, there is less sound identified and recognized marketing strategy that could be applied to Buddhist tourism product. This study suggests that 8p’s of tourism marketing mix could be applied by adopting Public private partnership framework as an important business model for effective marketing for Buddhist tourism products.

Literature Review

Buddhist Tourism

Although Buddhism is the fourth largest religious group in the world after Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, with 7.13% of world population adhering to this religion (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010), it is rarely investigated in the context of tourism. Buddhist tourism is on rise because new pilgrimage routes are developed and old routes are upgraded, revived and marketed through public private partnership in south as to promote the sustainability of spiritual tourism (ADB, 2008). Philip and Mercer (1999) explained the commodification of Buddhism in contemporary Burma and found that a strong relationship has been established between Buddhism and tourism. In a study exploring the relationship between travelling and myth, spirituality, and religion, Lee (2006) discovered a political link between religion and travelling. In a latest research, Ryan and Gu (2010) investigated Buddhist thought as a means of understanding the tourist experience. Choe, Blazey and Mitas (2013) said about the growing popularity of Buddhist tourism among westerners as, “Buddhist temples are of particular interest given the growth of Buddhism themed tourism campaigns in Asian countries. Increasing number of Americans is also visiting Buddhist temples in the USA. However the popularity of Eastern spiritual activities such as Yoga and Meditation has further fuelled Westerners’ interest in Buddhism”.

David Geary did extensive research on Bodhgaya, Bihar and understood the growing importance of Buddhist tourism in context of India, hence said, “Seeing the potential of the Buddhist sites for attracting international capital, the state and central tourism authorities have been the latest actors to become involved in this global/local drama. Through image building and vigorous marketing of ‘Brand Buddhism’, not only does the government seek to capitalize on spiritual tourism and push certain development agendas, it also sees Buddhism as a platform from which to boost the stagnant economy of Bihar”.

Brian Orland and Vincent J Bellafiore (1990) said that there are seven major Buddhist religious places in Indian states Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and one in Lumbini, Nepal. The Indian government has identified these sites for development to capitalize on the already significant numbers of the pilgrims who visit many of them and the increasing wealth of followers of Buddha in south-east Asia.

Marketing Mix Strategies for Buddhist Tourism

The marketing mix of 4 P’s has been discussed by many academicians and research scholars over few decades. Gronroos (1989), Rafiq & Ahmed (1995), Moller (2006), Constantinides (2006) and Hakansson & Waluzweski (2005) have done a lot of work on marketing mix. But Booms & Bitner (1981) were the first authors who explored the gap between product marketing mix and service marketing mix. They introduced 3 more P’s to service marketing/tourism marketing. These 3P’s were Process, Physical Evidence and Participants. Morrison (2002) was the first academician who identified another ‘P’ for service/tourism marketing.

C. Michael Hall (2006), “In many ways, some of the issues associated with the development of Buddhist tourism are no different from that of any other form of international tourism development, in terms of the requirements for infrastructure, hospitality services and access. Nevertheless, a number of governments also recognize the need for sensitivity in developing Buddhist tourism sites because of concern over commodification and negatively affecting the spiritual dimension of certain sites”.

Neil H. Borden (1984), “The list of elements of the marketing mix in such a visual presentation can be long or short, depending on how far one wishes to go in his classification and sub-classification of the marketing procedures and policies with which marketing managements deal when devising marketing plans”.

Wong, McIntosh and Ryan (2013), “It is valuable in religious tourism research to take note of the spirit of a particular religion to understand how religious hosts perceive and deal with tourism development at their religious sacred sites and homes”.

Public-Private Partnership

The Ministry of Public Affairs in British Columbia (1999) defines PPP in the following terms:

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are arrangements between government and private sector entities for the purpose of providing public infrastructure, community facilities and related services. Such partnerships are characterised by the sharing of investment, risk, responsibility and reward between the partners”(Schaeffer and Loveridge; 2002, p.170).

Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has defined Private and Public Sectors by citing the researchers and academicians. APEC cited Tonge and Myott (1996) to define Private sector as:

Private enterprises provide the basic tourism products, facilities and essential services such as accommodation, transportation, restaurants, retail, various attractions and even experiences. The private sector therefore, plays an essential role in the development and management of tourism and must be equally involved with national, regional and local government, in the management and sustainable development of tourism.

APEC also defined Public sector as:

Public sector covers the whole range of public organizations from national government ministries and departments to government business enterprises and local government tourism departments. Public sector (government) involvement is very important to the sustainable growth and development of the tourism industry (Elliott, 1997).

APEC mentions Bramwell and Lane (2000) to define Private-Public Partnership in tourism as, “The partnership represents a pooling of knowledge, expertise, capital and other resources from various stakeholders”. “It ensures consistency within a framework and act as an effective agent for planning, management, problem solving and change, and therefore enhances rather than reduces the competitive advantage of tourism product” (UNCSD, 1999a).

Sharma, M. and Bindal, A. (2014) said, with growing population and developmental pressure the government is unable to look all round public activities which stimulated it to take help of private players which is termed as Private-Public partnership.

Klijin and Teisman (2002), on Public private partnership said, “Benefits can take a variety of forms: financial/material in the form of profits, working space, increased transport capacity etc or more intangibility in terms of image, knowledge development and so forth”. Stephen H. Linder (1999), mentioned (Kinnock, 1998; Canadian Heritage; 1996) as “Organizations ranging from European Union to Canadian Heritage not only endorse the partnership idea but actively employ it as a programming tool for adapting to what they perceive as changing needs and circumstances.

In agreement with OECD (1997) conference on partnership in tourism, it was concluded that Public private partnership is a key factor in improvement and effectiveness of national and tourist administration (NTA’S) and National tourism organization (NATO’S). Private public approach is very useful in marketing, education, development of locals, employment and other areas of tourism planning. Government can play an important role in organising and planning innovative activities for the betterment of tourism. Increased co-operative, innovative, effective marketing strategy for Buddhist tourism can further result in healthy competition, energy between partners of marketing of Buddhist tourism.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- To identify the application of 8p’s of marketing proposed by Morrison (2002) to Buddhist tourism.
- To explore the implications of Public private partnership approach as an effective marketing strategy for Buddhist tourism.
- To suggest how tourism marketing mix is used for Buddhist tourism.

Methodology

This research is based on conceptual framework. Literature available on religious spiritual tourism, Buddhist tourism, marketing mix, Public private partnership have been analyzed. Many research scholars and eminent academicians have given their contribution in concerned areas but it is felt that the term Buddhist tourism is largely unheard in academic literature. Large numbers of tourists go for Buddhist tourism in various Buddhist destinations of the world. This study recommends that 8p's of tourism marketing mix suggested by Morrison (2002) could be applied by adopting private public framework for effective marketing of Buddhist tourism.

Stakeholders in Tourism Industry

	Category	Examples
Supply Side	Resource owners	Traditional landholders
	Resource managers	National park managers
	Providers of infrastructure	Construction, design, power, gas, water, waste treatment, roads
	Planners & development controllers	Local govt. Authorities
	Deliverers of product	Enterprise operators-hotels, airlines, hire cars, attractions, tour operators, travel agents, farm stays, convention centres, restaurants, museums, sporting (world cups) and religious events e.g. Hajj, youth catholic congress
	Destination developers and marketers	Tourism commissions; local government
	Employees	Managers, hospitality, planning , communication ICT, Finance, construction
Demand Side	Tourists	Domestic and international- e.g. package holidays, eco-tourist, business travellers, backpackers visiting friends and relatives, conferences, cultural, spiritual and medical tourists

Table -1: Stakeholders in the tourism industry

Source: Adapted from (APEC, 2002, p. 2)

APEC mentioned different stakeholders of the tourism industry. They were divided in two sides- the supply side and the demand side. Resource owners, resource managers, providers of infrastructure, planners and development controllers, delivers of product, destination developers and marketers and employees were put in the supply side while on the demand side tourists were

kept by APEC. The supply side stakeholders are supposed to fulfill their different types of duties and responsibilities in order to complete the system of tourism.

Applying Public-Private Partnership Approach in Marketing Mix of Tourism

8 Ps of Morrison: Tourism marketing mix	Examples of 8 P's	Applying Private-Public Partnership Approach
Product	Tangible and intangibles, Spiritual destinations, souvenirs (pictures, religious beads, statues), multi faith/religious/cultural annual festivals, events, fairs and conventions	PPP is essential (collaboration, coordinated marketing, cooperation & consensus) to develop product, innovate, restore, preserve and market, cultural, historical and spiritual monuments and destinations for tourism. Investment in Infrastructure, human and capital (tangible and intangible). Improve and enhance product quality
Price	Entry ticket, air-road travel cost, accommodation, Price Discrimination, cost-plus pricing, average cost & marginal cost pricing, competitive pricing, bundling pricing.	PPP for determining the price for domestic and international tourists, discriminatory pricing for spiritual tourists and target pricing for specific tourist groups & related affairs. Government and the private tourism product operators and providers to have consensus on pricing – price discrimination for different groups (so everyone can visit)
Place	Distribution of products and services, websites, control reservation office, global distribution systems, travel agents, wholesale and retailers, switch companies, direct sellers and inbound-outbound tourism operators of spiritual tourist destinations	Selection of disintermediation or intermediation for distribution of spiritual tourism product. PPP to develop infrastructure facilities (physical, building transport, roads as well as website, brochures etc.) needed to support the Spiritual tourism business at the point of destination as well as at the source of tourist to provide necessary travel services for planning the trip.

People	Local, national and international tourists. Spiritual tourism operators involved in spiritual tourism processes; travel agents, religious leaders, family and peer groups & tour guides at the source as well as destination.	Govt. to provide infrastructure investment such as road, rail airways (easy access) for the private sector providers of accommodation restaurants, retail business to function well. Training of the tourism operators, guides etc. in HRM.
Promotion	Advertising religious destinations, places of worship, annual religious festivals and conventions, conferences, promotion objectives, message, media and budget. Usages of TV, radio programs, relevant magazines, travel news and internet websites	PPP required at all levels by participating in trades conventions and world tourism fairs and conferences. Marketing strategy off and on-line involving all stake holders involved in spiritual tourism business. Coordinated marketing by web-sites, posters, print, TV& radio-above the line and fair, festivals & conferences below the line.
Packaging	Packaging spiritual destinations along with air fare, overnight in transit stop over visits to spiritual places, accommodation, business travel and conferences, adopting product differentiation (religious and combined with non-religious segments, price discrimination (individual, pensioners, adults, children, families, strangers and groups on a spiritual journey).	PPP for packaging and branding spiritual tourist destinations and tourism. Kerala as destination for medical and spiritual Tourism, Rajasthan as year round tourism destination, state of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh have been developed and marketed as spiritual tourist triangles.
Programming	Information about spiritual programs to attract people to specific destinations and events to understand global spirituality, for global peace and spiritual culture and traditions. Preparing special travel itinerary by travel agents (brochures) similar to other types for skiing, cruising etc available in detail. Program for Hajj, Hindu religious festival in India, carnivals of various catholic saints, world religious conventions etc.	Education and training in spiritual tourism education, religious studies, history and culture for the tourism operators, web site designers and tour guides
Partnership	Government departments & agencies (tourism, religious affairs, cultural heritage, travel and communication, infrastructure rail-road, airways) Private	Enabling partnership with private sector, NGO's and international organisations. PPP between Governments at all levels,

	<p>sector (businesses, wholesale and retailers of tourism service providers, religious organisations, destination managers. Partnership essential for identifying common goals, problems, partnership programs to achieve these goals and evaluation of partnership programs, outcomes and incentives.</p>	<p>Government departments, Government business enterprises, WTO, private sector businesses, NGO, local business communities, local population, police, defence force, Religious organisations and institutions, community organisations, educational institutions, travel agents, key religious leaders, private business philanthropy and support for planning, development, implementation, pricing, maintaining, preserving and marketing cultural heritage and spiritual destinations to the world</p>
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Table-2: Applying PPP to 8P's of Marketing

Applying Public-Private Partnership Approach for Marketing Mix to Buddhist Tourism

On the basis of the above table where we talked about the application of Private-Public Partnership Approach in Tourism, the same is taken as a base to elaborate the application of 8 P's of Marketing Mix in Buddhist tourism.

The **Product** for Buddhist tourism can be any out of temples, stupas, monasteries, viharas, meditation center, birth place of Buddha or Buddhist monks, sermon places of Buddha or Buddhist monks, Relics, scriptures etc. These places may be taken as product by the stakeholders for development and to be developed as Buddhist tourist destination. Partnerships may bring better services, consultancy, equipments, manpower etc. for the products. Buddhist circuits may also be considered as new Buddhist products developed by the governments and private players.

Price for Buddhist products, attractions, destinations should be decided keeping in mind the diverse visitors and their profile. Different types of pricing may be adopted for different visitors who may or may not belong to Buddhism. It plays an important role in choosing the destination to visit and the services to be consumed by the visitors. Some of the burdens may be borne by the private or the public enterprises in order to sustain the destination to be competitive.

Place for Buddhist tourism may be conceived differently by different people. Places or sources through which people come to know about the Buddhist product or from where they buy it may be considered a place from marketing mix point of view. And the place may also be taken as one where these products are actually present or situated. Private and Public sectors may jointly develop them to have good access to the services and amenities to give a sense of satisfaction to the visiting people.

People in the marketing mix of Buddhist tourism through Private-Public partnership may yield good results because of the diverse and varied expertise and experience of both the partners. Public sectors and private sectors possess different qualities in many areas because of their operational

nature. Therefore these people if come and work together it will be beneficial in achieving the desired goal for the development and promotion of Buddhist tourism.

Promotion of Buddhist tourism products or destinations may have far reaching effects by adopting different measures to promote them using different tools which the private and public sectors have good command over. And also their past experiences and available resources for the promotion of the product of destination would help them if they come together for this cause.

Packaging is one of the key elements of marketing mix for tourism because tourism is an amalgamation of different services all together. The concept of inseparability comes here where it is said that the different services of allied sectors cannot be kept separated in order to achieve the tourism activity to take place. Therefore Partnership of private and public sectors may better help in designing and making good packages for Buddhist tourism together. Different services may be clubbed together in order to provide better experience to the visitors. For example, better amenities and services may be provided in the circuits specially designed for Buddhist tourism.

Programming refers to the better implementation of plans by trained staff in professional manner. Different programs may be taken in place by the private and public sectors or may be jointly in order to better understand the concept of Buddhist tourism and better ways to implement strategies to achieve good output and number of visitors with satisfaction.

Partnership results in bringing more resources, information, equipments, knowledge, professionals and other things together. If all these things multiply by having partnerships among different stakeholders together it will benefit all specially the tourism. Private and Public sectors have different things with them and by clubbing all those things it will sure help in the management, development and betterment of Buddhist tourism in country.

Conclusion

Buddhism is world's fourth largest religion. The tourism marketing has been emerged as a potential market. Players in tourism industry must apply different innovative strategy to boost up the growth of Buddhist tourism. It is observed that Buddhist tourism marketing is an area which is often untouched by academicians and researchers. Traditional marketing theories are applied on Buddhist tourism marketing while innovates effective approaches like Public private partnership could be added to marketing mix of Buddhist tourism.

This study suggests that consideration potential exists for Buddhist tourism if marketed effectively. In this study we tried to present the Public private partnership approach framework with marketing mix by *Morrison* for Buddhist tourism. Different elements of marketing mix of tourism were taken from the point of view of Buddhist tourism and were studied elaborately to understand how these elements can better contribute in Buddhist tourism. These elements were specifically were not taken in one perspective or from point of view of one state, rather it was assumed that this study will be conducive for all those who devise to plan Buddhist tourism in anywhere in country. It was a conceptual framework and may be further worked out by researchers to get in depth knowledge in the same or similar regard.

India has been a land of utmost importance for the Buddhist followers around the world because it was spread from India. There are places which were related to the life of Gautam Budha and are considered most sacred in Buddhism. There are many other places which are somewhere or the other related to either Gautam Budha or his great disciples and propagators of Buddhism. India can market these places of religious significance in countries where majority of the citizens follow Buddhism.

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