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MARKET MIX STRATEGIES FOR DESTINATION AS A RURAL TOURISM PRODUCT

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ABSTRACT

"India lives in its villages" this is ever true because according to 2011 census 68.23 percent population still lives in villages termed as rural area. Rural India is diverse in nature enriched with pollution free natural agricultural based environment, rural traditions, customs, culture and valuable heritage assets. This area is a very wide market base for all kinds of products like agriproducts, manufactured goods and even service products. Many multinational players entering to capture this market by introducing their own products as well on the other side this market itself provide a service product i.e. rural tourism to the urban area. Indian economy is showing increasing growth and rise in disposable incomes of Indians, motivation towards travel and tourism is increased. Therefore there is increasing demand for various tourism forms. Rural tourism is one of the alternative forms of tourism which follows the principle of sustainability and responsibility. The rural tourism potential in India has been realized very late when compared to the other part of the world. The government of India has notified rural tourism as one of the major sources for generating employment and promoting sustainable livelihood. This paper is based on secondary data collected from published articles, journals books, government reports, websites and news papers. This study focuses on the conceptual part and market mix strategies to develop and promote rural tourism as a product of rural market.

KEYWORDS

Rural Tourism, Rural Market, Service Product, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

India lives in its villages" this is ever true because according to 2011 census 68.23 percent population still lives in villages termed as rural area. Rural India is diverse in nature enriched with pollution free natural agricultural based environment, rural traditions, customs, culture and valuable heritage assets. This area is a very wide market base for all kinds of products like agriproducts, manufactured goods and even service products. Many multinational players entering to capture this market by introducing their own products as well on the other side this market itself provide a service product i.e. rural tourism to the urban area. Indian economy is showing increasing growth and rise in disposable incomes of Indians, motivation towards travel and tourism is increased. Therefore there is increasing demand for various tourism forms. Rural tourism is one of the alternative forms of tourism which follows the principle of sustainability and responsibility. The rural tourism potential in India has been realized very late when compared to the other part of the world. The government of India has notified rural tourism as one of the major sources for generating employment and promoting sustainable livelihood.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the concept of rural tourism as an alternative tourism form.
2. To discuss the necessity for tourism marketing.
3. To study the market mix strategies of rural tourism.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on secondary data collected from published articles, journals books, government reports, websites and news papers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION**CONCEPT OF RURAL TOURISM**

The term rural tourism has varying connotations across the globe. It is well defined and development concept in European countries such as U.K., Hungary, Finland, Greece and other developed nations. Unfortunately, this concept has not been taken up seriously in the developing nations so far like India. However, rural tourism has a long history. In early age, there was no concept of commercial guest accommodation such as hotels and other types of accommodation, though they were existing in different forms in some important trade routes. In those days, when people were traveling, they were staying in rural areas where the local people were providing food and shelter to those visitors. Moreover, the local people met the demands of travelers and provided them various facilities. However the industrial revolution and World War II have changed the entire scene of the tourism at global level. This has resulted into a concept of second home, and locale found it as an extra source of income and consumption of perishable agricultural product. Thus rural tourism became an alternative to mass tourism. Since 1970 the volume of rural tourism demand in Europe has been growing considerably, apart from two periods of stagnation at the beginning of the 1980s and 1990s. Since the rural attraction supply has increased at an even higher growth rate in different developing as well as developed nations. Rural tourism is a form of alternative tourism. In fact it is relatively a new development against mass tourism (Chand and Kumar 2006).

Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside. It is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like; it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is predominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions (tourism.gov.in).

Rural tourism has been identified as one of the priority areas for development of Indian tourism. Rural tourism experience should be attractive to the tourists and sustainable for the host community. Indian villages have the potential for tourism development. With attractive and unique traditional way of life, rich culture, nature, crafts, folk-lore and livelihood of Indian villages are a promising destination for the tourist. It also provides tourism facilities in terms of accessibility, accommodation, sanitation and security.

NECESSITY FOR RURAL TOURISM MARKETING

Tourism is a very complex industry because of its multi-faceted activities which together produce the tourist product. It is also complex because of various sub sectors that are in themselves complete industries, if considered independently (lodging, transport etc). Its complexity, furthermore, lies in the fact that tourism promotion in its various forms has to be directed at large number of people in various lands of different socio-economic structures having different needs, tastes, attitudes, expectations and behaviour patterns. It is only through the efficient marketing strategy that will help to understand people’s tastes and preferences for travel. Tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world and therefore the need for marketing it becomes imperative. The need arises due to following Characteristics of tourism product

Intangible: Manufactured goods are tangible in the sense that they have physical dimensions and attributes and can be seen, felt, or tasted. The tourism product is an intangible product.

Inseparability: A physical product is produced in the factory, bought in the shop and consumed in the customer’s premises at his convenience. But when the customer buys a service like traveling in an airline, the production and consumption of the services takes place at the same time. The experience of the tourist product exists when it is produced as well as consumed.

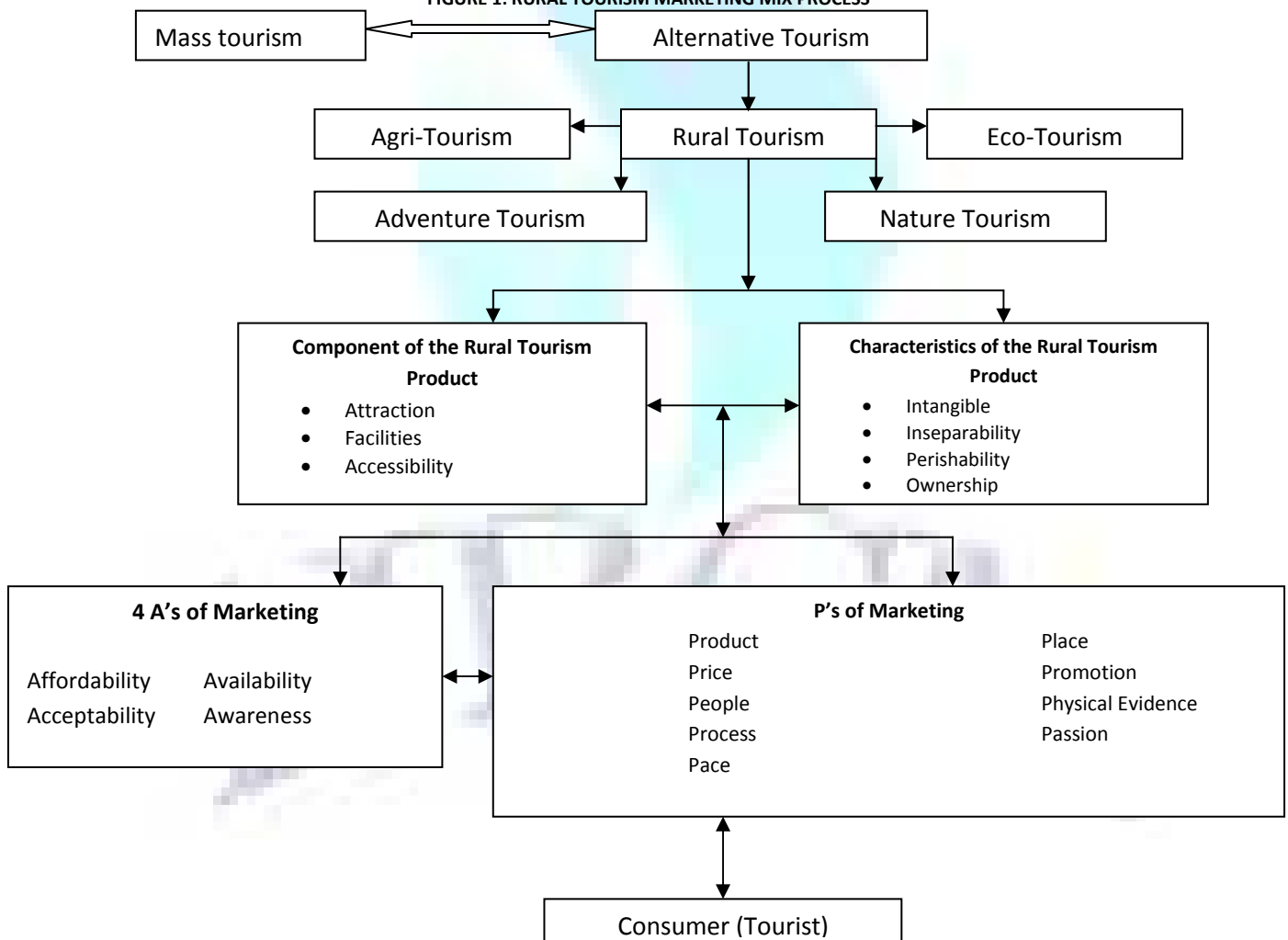
Perishability: A manufacturer of a physical product can anticipate the demand in advance and store the goods in warehouse and deliver them to the customers at the time of need. But the supply of the tourism product cannot be stored because tourism products are highly perishable.

Ownership: No ownership passes from seller to buyer in a service. The buyer only acquires the right to certain benefits of what the seller offers. One may have the right to use a hotel room or a railway berth for a period of time, but the ownership of the room or berth remains with the hotel or the railways.

Tourism needs to be marketed just as any other product, indeed more so, because it is an industry where the customer still has an immense variety of choice. The choice for the holiday maker is wide as more and more countries and resorts throughout the world expand their tourism industries. According to Krippendorf, J., marketing in tourism means “systematic and coordinated execution of business policy by tourist undertakings whether private or state owned at local, regional, national or international level to achieve the optimal satisfaction of the needs of identifiable consumer groups, and in doing so to achieve an appropriate return.”

Specially rural tourism requires special efforts towards marketing as it is emerged from mass tourism and this is the form of alternative tourism where tourist expected to gain new experience. The various products of rural tourism is rural oriented operated mostly by rural people, tourist from urban area are unaware about such kind of rural tourism forms. Marketing techniques provides proper publicity and selling ideas for rural tourism products which is present in the rural market.

FIGURE 1: RURAL TOURISM MARKETING MIX PROCESS



While studying the marketing of rural tourism it is necessary to take into consideration the components of the rural tourism product on which this product is developed. **Attractions** constitute an important feature of the product. Attractions are those elements in the tourist product, which determine the choice of the particular tourist product, to visit one particular destination rather than another. **Facilities** are those elements in the tourist product, which are a necessary aid to the tourist centre. The facilities complement the attractions. These include accommodation, food, communications, guides and so on. **Accessibility** is a means

by which a tourist can reach the areas where attractions are located. Tourists' attractions are of little importance if their locations are inaccessible by the normal means of transport.

9 Ps OF RURAL TOURISM MARKETING

Product: The tourism product is totally different than manufactures products, because the potential tourist can't feel, taste, touch or sample a tourism product. The basic elements of tourism product are Attraction, Recreation, Accommodation, Restaurant, Transportation, and Shopping. While developing the Rural tourism product this points should be take into consideration as product here in rural tourism is the total tourism expenses of the rural place, here marketer can manage in two ways, one by maintaining the riche of services e.g. he may specialize in one of the many areas of rural tourism or he may offer the basket of related product like Agritourism, Eco-tourism, adventure tourism, nature tourism. The rural tourism product should be design in such away that it gives rural life expenses to the urbanites as the decision regarding this kind of product is experience based. As well as the three basic principles should be followed i.e.

- The product should have thing to do – Recreation
- The product should have thing to see – Attraction
- The product should have thing to buy – Shopping

Along with these, the product should posses the basic lodging and boarding facilities. The various product decisions that are to be made are in regard with, Brand name, Functionality, Styling, Quality and Safety and support

Price: The pricing decision in tourism industry are found critical and challenging since it is a multi segment industry when a tourist proposes to visit a rural tourism place, the total cost includes the expenses incurred on transportation, accommodation, communication or so. No marketing without pricing. The whole process of making a sound pricing decision, of course, is a play of manipulation. If we succeed in manipulating the variables influencing the pricing decisions, the success at the market can be denied. The controllable variable like product, distribution and promotion are well within the reach of the marketers but so far as the uncontrollable variables required more care and precaution (Jha 2009). The pricing decision is broadly determined or significantly influenced by the following 4's 1) Customer Value, 2) Competitors prices, 3) Cost to the tourism organization and 4) Strategic and pricing objectives of the company.

The high spending tourists are not sensitive to price but the general tourists are found price sensitive. So while pricing decisions the following steps should be take into consideration

1. Estimate the rural tourism demand.
2. Calculate the product cost
3. Developing an understanding of the environmental factors. Competitors and legar environment
4. Finalize the pricing objective
5. Select the pricing method
6. Develop the price structure
7. Determine the margins
8. Determine the discounts
9. Fixed the product price

Place: Place refers to the point of sale. It is a manifestation of the strategy of any organization about how an in what manner it wants its products and services to be made available to the customers so that a profitable exchange can be instituted with the customer. In every industry catching the eye of the consumer and making it easy for her to buy a product or services is the main aim of a good distribution or place strategy (Dog and Ghuman 2008). The tourism industry is a multi segment industry where accommodation, attraction, transportation, communication are found important. As rural tourism is a alternative form of tourism, most of the tourist unaware about this tourism product, as well they are doubtful regarding visiting to the rural side for tourism as they have the fixed picture of village in their mind which alert them about unhygenicness, poor sanitation, poor accommodation facility and poor quality of food and water. So through the place strategy is foremost important to remove this picture from their mind and set a good image about the rural tourism. Everybody know that success of business is depends upon "Location, Location and location," so the location that marketer select for the rural tourism should be accessible to the tourist and basic infrastructure facilities should be there to serve the tourist. Secondly to reach to the urban tourist through the proper channel is also a biggest task so, here the term distribution denote the method through which the rural tourism product reaches to the proper destination. The middlemen are the link and if the link is strong, the marketing succeed in raising the influx of tourist. The middlemen are the tour operators and the transport operators who by the services and sell the same to the travel agents or directly to the customers.

Promotion: This refers to all the activities undertaken to make the rural tourism services known and preferred amongst the tourists. Creation of awareness has a far reaching impact. The rural tourism marketer has to bear the responsibility of informing, sensing and persuading the potential tourists in a right fashion. It represents the various aspects of the marketing communication that is the communication of the information about the product with the goal of generating the positive consumer response. The tourism promotion is an effort to implement marketing plan formulated by the tourist professional. It helps in choosing their own rural tourism product, maximizing the duration of stay and frequency of visit by offering new tourist product in the same area. The rural tourism promotional activities includes, Advertising, Publicity, Sales promotion, Word of mouth promotion, Personal selling, Tele-marketing, Information brochures, Website development and Sales letter.

People: Besides the above 4 P's i.e. Product, Price, Place and Promotion this 5th P i.e. People is most important in case of rural tourism. The rural tourism product is get developed in the rural area itself, no one can provide the rural life experience through building the artificial rural environment in urban area so each and every component of rural area is equally important for rural tourism. Here this 'People' component includes all the people who are directly or indirectly involved in the rural tourism product. This includes

1. Employees of the rural tourism project
2. Community members of the area of the rural tourism site
3. Tourist

The co-ordination among the above members is very essential to run the project successfully. Tourist people needs rural life expenses, so the conduct, empathy and sympathy of the local people is of vital importance, the employees are the core part of any business, satisfaction of the tourist is directly related to the hospitality and customer service provided by the employees. Also it should not be ignored that, the behaviour of the tourist must be responsible. So, this part is very important.

Physical Evidence: The ability and the environment in which the service is being delivered, both tangible goods that help to communicate and perform the service and intangible experience of the existing customers. In this case it could the cleanliness and hygiene of the area under study (Chand & Mahajan).

Process: The procedure, mechanisms or the flow of activities with which the services are being delivered and consumed. It encompasses the supply chain of the various things like food, information etc. the supply chain has to be very responsive and should aim at deliverance of value for money to the consumer (Chand & Mahajan).

Passion: Primarily, it represents an attitude, commitment and seriousness towards serving the tourist from urban area. It demonstrates the strength of will at all levels of rural tourism project to tap the urban tourism market to its optimum level. The marketer in order to be successful in this area, should blend his personal energy and passion with the traditional marketing mix. The marketer must be passionate about being successful in the rural market.

Pace: Product intended to be sold in the urban tourism market need to be launched into the heart of the customers, at the pace required in this market and not at the pace at which the marketer wants it to be. Travel agents and communication media like internet has the influence over tourist, so marketer first reach to these medias. The rural tourism product can be reached and won only if an organization has the required passion and pace to beat the entrepreneurial energy of small, local and regional players who are already well established in the tourism market.

Besides the 9 Ps of marketing there are 4 As are most important because these factors are based on the consumer's i.e tourists point of view.

Affordability: Affordability factor does not mean cheaper rural tourism product or rural tourism experience, but it means to developing the rural tourism product which match the needs of the tourist, at a price that they feel, is value for money. The price of the rural tourism product should considered the income as well as the pattern in which the income is earned and making the consumer believe that the product is actually affordable and within their buying capacity.

Availability: Ensuring the rich of the information about rural tourism destinations at the travel agents is one of the most critical functions. Once the rural tourism product reaches the travel agents desk, it more or less ensures the sale of the product. This is because travel and tourism decisions are always influenced by travel agents.

Awareness: Rural tourism is a alternative form of tourism therefore to build the awareness of this product in urban and semi urban area the marketer has to use unconventional media and below the line activities, along with the commercials on the traditional media like TV, radio and the outdoor media. While developing the awareness, it is important to develop a message which highlights the importance of rural tourism over the conventional tourism.

Acceptability: It is very important that tourist feel that the rural tourism is as per their needs and gives the exiting rural life experience. The urban tourist now finding ways to get relax in pollution free natural environment, therefore they must feel that the rural tourism product serves its purpose and then they are ready to experience this product.

CONCLUSION

Rural tourism presently faces the challenges of exploitation of rural environment, shortages of trained manpower, inadequate physical amenities, language problems and business planning skills etc. but besides this still India is emerging as best destination for rural tourism because there is very vast scope for such kind of product. With the development of this product the special emphasis should be given to tourism marketing, after thorough study of market mix for rural tourism marketing, we need to adopt the firm strategies for effective marketing of rural tourism. The following are some of the strategies.

- Analyse the customer's decision.
- Look for alternative source markets.
- Analyse the rural tourism business.
- Go for niche marketing.
- Have a realistic approach.
- Bring about innovation.
- Avoid mass marketing.
- Advertise regularly
- Negotiate better.
- Have a interactive websites.
- Focused on the people.
- Promote the business USP (Caprihan and Shivakumar 2006).

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