

Tourism Marketing Communication For Endorsing Green And Sustainable Tourism in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract:

Sustainability concept aids in the image enhancement of the tourism industry besides the commercial profit strategy of the tourism sector(Polonskyet al.1998) .This supports the central business mantra of the 21st century, *doing good while doing well*.Although if this green practices approach is not adopted in practice, it would mar the initial attractions provided by the cultural heritage and the landscape.Sustainability is extremely crucial for addressing the social issues and also for economic benefits.Among the four P's of tourism marketing mix, promotional efforts play a crucial role and thus media have a vital task to perform in promoting and inculcating the green practices in tourism and hospitality sector.Social media, advertising, public relations, publicity, various media outlets, word of mouth, trade shows, fam-tours are among the several promotional efforts that are relentlessly followed.

This concept note will provide an insight into the tourism marketing communication techniques for endorsing sustainable tourism in Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, green tourism and hospitality industry, tourism marketing communication, role of media.

Introduction:

Technological advancements and sophistications have also contributed to mass media sophistications and have widened the horizons of communication.The contribution and role of media is magnificent in almost every stream.Media acts as a mediator in the very basic process of communication to convey the tourism products from the producers to the consumers.The media and tourism industry share quite a crucial and complex

relationship. The mass media also plays the role of a *change agent* and can lead to inculcation of behaviour and attitudes among the potential key actors so as to amend the local/regional, national and global tourism for sustainable development, peace and prosperity. The social responsibility of the media also enforces the enhancement of a socio-cultural blend which involves the harmonious mixture of the local and global cultural heritage. Information revolution has empowered people in all respects.

Innovations in technological sophistications and the development in communication strategies can be creatively designed to mould the opinion of people through mass media, traditional media, interpersonal communication and/or community communication.

Media advocacy has been so designed so as to target all the key stakeholders of the tourism industry. Green tourism is closely interrelated with sustainable development, environmental protection, biological diversity, human health, etc. Green symbolizes life, nature, non-pollution, environmental protection, safety, etc. Green Tourism is usually considered as equivalent to ecotourism or rural tourism, but it is not so and is just a figure of speech. From the perspective of tourists, green tourism refers to those activities based on sustainable development, environmental protection, biological diversity and other principles, even green tourism can be one method to achieve goals such as sustainable development. From the perspective of tourism businesses, green tourism refers to providing services and products by means of advanced technologies and methods such as low carbon, energy saving and circular economy. It is environment-friendly to leave a beautiful world to future generations. It is not limited to the rural and unexploited areas. It can be organized in the city, such as visiting rubbish or wastewater treatment plants.

Significance of Study:

This study provides a conceptual framework which casts light on tourism marketing communication for endorsing sustainable tourism in Himachal Pradesh.

Objectives:

1. To comprehend the tourism marketing communication techniques for promoting sustainable (and green) tourism in Himachal Pradesh.
2. To understand the promotional role of media for green practices in tourism and hospitality industry in Himachal Pradesh.

Research Methodology:

This paper is based on the available literature and focus group discussions. The researcher has made use of a qualitative analytical study. The available literature was selected from various websites and covered the major aspects of role of media in promotion of green practices in tourism and hospitality industry. Besides, three focus groups consisting of five members each were selected and invited to take part in focus group discussion about the promotional prerogative of mass media for the green practices in tourism and hospitality industry. The first focus group consisted of media and journalism students and doctoral fellows, the second group included the tourism administration students and doctoral fellows and the third group consisted of tourists. Each member was required to give her/his comments and additional ideas. The facts and findings were thus summarized on the basis of the literature review and the members' suggestions.

The promotional role of media in the green practices in Tourism and Hospitality Industry:

The role of Social media and the World Wide Web:

Social media is the buzz of the present century. There has been a paradigm shift from individuals meeting face-to-face for sharing or spending quality time together, to meeting online using the sophistications of technology. Though this concept has yet to be fully defined, social media buzz certainly influences the way travellers make their travel decisions. All are connected in the virtual space, for example: eWOM (e-word-of-mouth) provides social presence, and can induce flow. Travellers trust WOM communications; given that eWOM is anonymous (fostering greater self-disclosure than WOM) and global (reaches out to many people at the same time), its influence may well be even greater than that of traditional WOM. Social media is used by travellers to help plan their trips, SNS (Social networking sites) influence travel decisions, blogs are one of the most popular forms of social media both in terms of branding a destination and influencing travellers' decisions to visit a particular place. Mobile technologies are vortices of socialization. Research into 3D virtual technologies has gained attention and this experience may influence the attitudes and perceptions of visitors towards a place. (Wendy Lange-Faria and Statia Elliot, 2012)

Social media also supports sustainability concept, by opening up possibilities for organizations to prove their responsible presence in the community, to adopt transparent policies in relation to their activities, engage local communities and encourage an informed and aware customer demand. Platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* are intensely used for sharing tourism information, while *TripAdvisor* is the single biggest social media platform used in tourism planning. (Conrad Advertising, 2011)

The brief experience with social media shows that fast turns of public attitudes can happen in a matter of hours and can have damaging consequences for organizational reputation (Stine, 2011).

Although the usage and implementation of social media is intensely studied, its implications for green tourism need to be further explored by research. (As opined by media and journalism students and doctoral fellows)

Usually, tourism providers keep most virtual activities on their own websites to which social media platforms are merely additional entrance points. (As per the opinion of the tourism administration students and doctoral fellows)

Tourism authorities and destination management organizations extend their advertising campaigns onto Facebook, TripAdvisor, and YouTube in order to capture the attention of visitors. Taking advantage of the high importance that people give to feedback from peers (third most trusted source after family and friends) destinations stimulate the sharing of such testimonials. (Conrad Advertising, 2011)

Some Green Tourism Websites:

- Green tourism is acclaimed to be the world's leading sustainable tourism programmes. (www.green-tourism.com)
- <http://www.green-tourism.com/business/case-studies/> shows various case studies which show certain hotels making use of green practices.

Website 1: Concern for the study for the present study: <http://www.greentourismindia.com/>

- This website claims to offer nature and off-beat destination tours in India.

- Green Tourism Promotion is a leading Indian tour operator and is based in New Delhi.
- It also claims to support sustainable tourism.
- They have mentioned that their effort is to care for and conserve nature and to provide their guests with an authentic cultural and nature experience.

Website 2: Concern for the study for the present study: <https://himachalecotourism.org>

This is the official website of Eco-tourism Society of Himachal Pradesh, the policy of which is based on the understanding that if the local communities are involved in eco-tourism, then it would support their livelihood needs and subsequently create a stake for them in the conservation of local culture, ecology and environment. Website also states that eco-tourism can be one of the most viable options for the conservation of natural resources and sustainable development in a mountain State like Himachal Pradesh.

Website 3: Concern for the study for the present study: <https://himachaltourism.gov.in>

This website also mentions Himachal Pradesh Sustainable Development Policy 2013, which has five major goals:

- To establish Himachal Pradesh as a global brand and sub brands in the domestic and international markets.
- To ensure sustainable tourism which primarily benefits host communities and supports natural and cultural heritage preservation.
- To ensure visitors' high quality experience and contribution to the safeguarding of the State's destinations.
- To create an enabling environment for investment and private sector development.
- To build capacity and develop quality human resources in sustainable tourism and state-of-the-art hospitality.

Although the content of these green tourism, eco-tourism and sustainable tourism websites somehow tries to cover and promote the concept of sustainability, they have to go a long way

to make it sure that the policies on paper are actually being practiced in reality. (As suggested by the tourists in the focus group)

Though a democratic perspective would consider the customers' presence to be of utmost value, it is a challenging task for tourism authorities to identify the best use and design suitable incentives for capturing the benevolent support of the millions of people for sustainable tourism goals.

The role of advertising:

Advertising is one of the paramount ways to sell a product. Advertising inculcates the need to use a product and the uses and satisfaction sought would suffice the gratifications of the users or consumers. Thus, tourism product also takes advantage of advertising to reach the consumers. Promotion of the green practices in tourism and hospitality sector through advertising has been done quite efficiently in form of advertisements like those for sustainable tourism, ecotourism, nature tourism, online advertising by tourism sector entrepreneurs claiming green practices, etc. (Opinion of the media and tourism students)

As per the opinion of the media and tourism students:

- Advertising to promote green practices in tourism is done at global, national, and regional scales.
- Various media for this include electronic and print media plus the World Wide Web, social media and community media promotional campaigns.
- The green and sustainable practices in tourism need to be advertised at a larger scale with wider reach and frequency.

The role of public relations and publicity:

Public relations in the marketing and promotion of tourist destinations have been increasingly used as part of the promotional and communication mix. Public relations are a specific form of communication with special application in tourism. It is a communication model and one of its main purposes is to create a recognisable public image. This purpose is quite imperative in

tourism, in particular in the creation of a positive image for a certain destination or for a whole country as a tourist destination. (Marinko Jakovljević, 2009)

In the marketing of a tourist destination, public relations are a significant and reliable way of presenting the product and attracting guests in an efficient and cost-effective way.

The media and tourism students also opined that Public relations is a very important part of promotion in tourism and has a direct and comprehensive function in destination marketing.

The most frequent types of public relations in tourism, divided by Black (2003) into basic groups covering the majority of the target public in a tourist destination are:

- Media relations and publicity;
- International public relations and consumer relations;
- Community relations and domestic public relations;
- Relations with the Government and state administration;
- Internal public relations.
- Among public relations techniques, *public relations and publicity* have one of the most important roles in tourism.
- Great attention is given to study tours and meetings with the press, regular press conferences and other types of cooperation.
- *Study tours for media representatives* result in television, radio and newspaper reports whose estimated worth is much higher than the costs of the study tours.
- They ensure coverage in the media which may not be achieved so efficiently by advertising with the same amount of funds.
- *International public relations and consumer relations* require appearances at fairs, providing information and making presentations, designing and publishing brochures and other types of tourist information, creating websites (newsletters) and organising study tours for agents.

- *Fairs, making presentations and providing information* are one of the most undeviating ways of addressing a wider public in tourism engendering countries.
- *Study tours for travel agents* are organised for travel agents selling the tourist product so that they can be informed about particular destinations and attractions.

Role of word-of-mouth:

Word-of-mouth, and the contemporary eWOM, is a concept frequently found at the foundations of social media dialogue. The power of WOM was not only recognized as far back in time as Aristotle, but has been shown to influence consumer behaviour, attitudes, intentions, awareness, expectations and perceptions (Buttle, 1998). Studies have shown WOM to be nine times as effective as advertising in changing consumer perception of a product or service (Buttle, 1998). WOM, as defined by Arndt (1967) who was one of the first to examine consumer behaviour in the context of Word-of-mouth, is “oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or service” (Buttle, 1998: 242). Buttle also refers to Stern (1994), who describes WOM as: “WOM involves the exchange of ephemeral oral or spoken messages between a contiguous source and a recipient who communicate directly in real life” (Buttle, 1998: 242; Stern, 1994: 7).

Tourism students and the tourists said that Word-of-mouth plays a pivotal role in the promotion of green practices and also sustainable tourism practices in Himachal Pradesh.

Summary:

The role of media in the promotion of green and sustainable practices in the hospitality and tourism industry needs to be further researched in-depth. The focus group members opined and suggested many strategies to counter the loopholes in the process. Green tourism as well as the sustainable tourism has to still follow a long way before it becomes dominant over the traditional tourism or takes over the traditional exploitative practices of hospitality and tourism industry. The time till the schemes, plans and strategies will keep lying in papers, nothing can work out as an implementable solution. The strategies and plans need to be stringently executed so as to attain the goals and to go completely green in the tourism practices to head towards sustainable development and live in peace and harmony with the

forces and powers of nature. Otherwise we have witnessed the aftermaths and we are also well aware of the repercussions.

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