

TOURISM MARKETING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

by
Dr. Adarsh Batra*

Abstract

The levels of marketing, quite often blamed for changing consumer attitudes, promote a materialistic society where status is derived more from the number and type of destinations we visit and leisure activities we undertake, rather than how good we are as caring members of society. Tourism organizations have continued to encourage 'anyone and everyone' to visit a particular region, irrespective of how these individuals may behave when they arrive. As we move into the twenty-first century, there is a growing concern for the protection of the environment and the adoption of business policies that will enable the earth's resources to be sustained. The new environmentally aware values now emerging are challenging the underlying concepts of marketing. This paper attempts to put forward measures that can be applied to ensure sustainable tourism through marketing strategies suppress or alter demand once critical limits are approached or have in fact been exceeded.

Introduction

The attitudinal behavior and approaches of tourists and service providers have undergone significant changes during the closing decades of the twentieth century and beginning of the third millennium from the viewpoint of tourism marketing. Earlier only a small segment of the world population was involved in tourism related activities but now tourism has emerged as a globally popular human activity with considerable social, cultural, political and economic consequences. Mass tourism bringing with it

diversity and conflicting perceptions and expectations has dramatically expanded the scope and nature of tourism.

* Dr. Adarsh Batra is currently Full time Lecturer teaching Sustainable Tourism Management course at Graduate school of Tourism Management (MBA-TRM) at Assumption University (ABAC) Bangkok. He holds two Masters Degrees, one in M.Sc. (Master of Science in physics, 1991-1993) and other M.T.A. (Master of tourism Administration, 1993-1995) along with doctorate in Tourism in the year 2001, all from Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra (Haryana) in India.

The phenomenal growth of domestic as well as international tourism has been caused by very specific shifts in social systems and disposable incomes the world over. This has subsequently raised several critical issues related to marketing. These issues invite tourism planners and practitioners as well as academicians and researchers to systematically consider emerging issues and propose a more viable approach to marketing tourism products and services. One such major issue is the need to keep the concept of sustainability in clear focus consideration. A very small section of people involved in tourism is familiar with this concept and realize its importance.

“In marketing terms, sustainability is primarily an issue of product quality. There is no clear evidence in the developed world that more than a small minority of visitors understands concepts of sustainability and environmental good practice and draw on them when choosing products, although travelers from countries such as Germany, Holland and Scandinavia appear to be further ahead in this respect. There is even less evidence that the great majority of visitors are willing to pay premium prices for the products of tourism businesses operating to high environmental standards. But there is convincing evidence that customers turn away from what they consider to be overcrowded, polluted destinations which have allowed their environmental quality to become eroded through over development. This is especially true where health risks, as from air and water pollution, are perceived as problems. There is also convincing evidence that customers generally in the 1990s are more experienced in travel, more demanding, and searching for a combination of quality and good value for money which they are increasingly able to recognize” (Middleton, 1998).

The journal of Sustainable Tourism defines the concept of sustainability in its simplest form as ‘a positive approach intended to reduce the tension and friction created by the complex interactions between the tourism industry, visitors, the environment and the communities

which are host to holiday makers’ (Bramwell and Lane, 1993). Thus a sustainable approach would involve a coordinated attempt to manage the tourism environment in such a way that the long-term integrity of a region’s natural and human resources will be preserved. Those who favor this approach recognize that there are limits, to extend beyond which would result in the ultimate destruction of the resource.

In recent years one of the key problems has been the narrow perspective of marketing adopted by the travel and tourism sector. Many organizations continue to equate marketing with promotion and to concentrate solely on the expansion of overall visitor numbers (Dinan, 2000). As Wheeler (1995) puts it, authorities and companies have had an unbalanced view of marketing, only using promotional techniques and viewing price as supplementary to the target of attracting additional numbers. This in turn has caused visible effects on the environment.

Over zealous marketing by tourism organizations can result in the attraction of potentially harmful numbers of visitors, who by their very presence alone can erode coastal paths, displace local wildlife and generate additional levels of both noise and vehicular pollution (Dinan, 2000). Promoters and developers are less inclined towards promoting tourism as a social activity but tend to consider it as a source of quick financial advantage. Rapid growths in some destinations seem to accelerate the declining stage without holding on to introduction, growth and maturity stages.

In the 1990s Kotler refined and broadened the remit of marketing, especially in terms of sustainability, stating that “the organization’s task is to determine the needs, wants and interests of target markets and to deliver the desired satisfaction more effectively and efficiently than competitors in a way that preserves or enhances the customers’ and the society’s well being” (Kotler, 1994).

Sustainable marketing should contribute to finding feasible trade-offs between business and environmental concerns. Sustainable marketing is, among other things, an appeal to lengthen corporate time horizons and to value continuity over profit (Kleiner, 1991).

Marketing and Tourism Sustainability

Implementation of the marketing concept in tourism can be achieved through the use of a variety of marketing tools and techniques (Popadopolous, 1989; Calantone and Mazanec, 1991). Of these, two merit discussions here: market segmentation and the marketing mix

Successful market segmentation and targeting involve the appropriate matching of tourist needs with the experience being offered, and, in the case of sustainable tourism, the need for this match is particularly important (Tregear et al., 1997). Tourism organizations need to give greater consideration to segmenting their market with a view to concentrating on those categories of visitor that are not only economically attractive, but are also likely to be susceptible to messages aimed at encouraging them to adopt sustainable behaviors (Dinan, 2000). The targeting of inappropriate tourists not only jeopardizes business objectives because the needs of inappropriate tourists will not be met, but also may cause environmental damage or act insensitively towards a local culture (Tregear et al., 1997).

The Republic of Cyprus' demarketing strategy has had remarkable success. The market segment decisions made 25 years ago to concentrate on certain sub-groups (older high and middle income groups) to the exclusion of other groups normally associated with mass tourism. This is how Cyprus intended to position itself in the eyes of the tourist population; this vision was a product of an audit of natural resources, aspects of tourist interest,

the need for minimal disruption to the indigenous population, levels of per capita spending and a recognition of limited finite space for a tourist industry (Clements, 1989).

It is necessary to be aware of the profiles of tourists attracted to a destination. This information is needed so that the marketing strategy can target those groups of tourists most likely to be interested in visiting the destination. Thereafter that profile can be projected into the future (using environmental scanning techniques); and balance the long-run requirements of sustaining the asset base (the quality of the environment at destinations) with short-run needs to satisfy customers (the potential range of products and services available) and generate profits.

Marketing Mix – Product, Price, Place and Promotion

The idea behind the concept of marketing mix is that the market offers itself is just one variable which needs to be considered jointly with several other controllable marketing variables (Kotler, 1994). To increase the likelihood of success, all elements of the marketing mix need to be in harmony. Therefore, marketers need to consider a broad mix of elements associated with a market offering. We start with '4Ps' to Marketing, introduced by McCarthy (1960), product, price, place and promotion.

PRODUCT

The market-based system is guided by self-interest and profit motivation. Therefore, consumer preferences are only accounted for if there is an ability to pay. These values are represented by a lack of concern for those who cannot afford a holiday.

The product dimension to achieve more sustainable tourism involves both:

- * developing products which are more sustainable in nature
- conservation holidays

- vacation packages using public transport rather than private cars
- small-scale rural community-based tourism initiatives
- * moving away from offering products which are intrinsically not sustainable
 - hunting trips
 - Destinations with poor environmental standards where inappropriate development is taking place holidays on which tourists consume too many local resources which may be in short supply, such as water, wood etc (Swarbrooke, 1999).

PRICE

This includes the prices at which visitors are admitted including any promotional and discounted offers. The main emphasis in pricing in tourism has been on low prices to encourage high volumes to ensure high profit levels for enterprises (Swarbrooke, 1999). In general, the public sector has little influence on prices (except in cases of public ownership and through taxes, fees and the like) but is a most influential tool in the hands of the commercial sector to influence demand. Price is inversely related to demand (Beeton & Benefield, 2002).

For sustainable tourism development, the price paid by the tourist should cover the full cost of their holiday. The cost must also be high enough to:

- Ensure a satisfactory experience for the tourist
- Provide a satisfactory level of profit for the tourism industry
- Generate an appropriate level of benefits for the host community
- Cover costs involved in putting right any damage caused by the tourist to the environment
- Pay for the resources consumed by the tourist

- Allow employees to be paid a reasonable salary (Swarbrooke, 1999)
- Automatically discourage large numbers of visitors (Clements, 1989)
- Present an image of exclusivity; a positive factor in image building (Clements, 1989)

The principles of sustainability also mean ensuring that the tourists feel they have received value for money, rather than leaving them with the idea that they have been exploited.

PLACE

Place refers to the location at which any service component the subject of the marketing campaign will be delivered. Place also refer to the channels of information that are used to disseminate the message. If, for example, the decision is taken to issue all visitors with a tourism code of conduct, the co-operation and commitment of intermediaries such as travel agents, tour operators and those responsible for tourism attractions themselves will be required (Dinan, 2000). Therefore,

- Encourage trends towards direct selling, leaving out the marketing intermediaries, as this often results in a better price for the consumer (Swarbrooke, 1999).
- Where an agent is used, action should be taken to ensure that the way they sell a product is ethical and does not raise unrealistic expectations in the minds of tourists (Swarbrooke, 1999).

PROMOTION

One type of marketing 'pollution' is the over abundance of different types of promotional material, at destinations which often makes them less attractive. There are roadside poster sites, advertisements on taxi cabs, messages painted on buildings, and leaflets given away and then discarded, all of which create both visual and

physical pollution. There is a trend to produce advertisements that aim to shock, and there are others that offend. "Marketers have made extensive use of sexual imagery and language to promote tourism products and destinations, as any perusal of a conventional 3S (sun, sand and sea) -resort brochure will confirm. The imagery ranges from overtly sexual displays (e.g. micro-bikini clad female models in provocative poses), to more suggestive and subtle messages (e.g. expressions and poses). So powerful is sexual imagery that many brochures and advertisements deliberately deemphasize the actual destination, preferring to focus all the attention on generic sexual conveyances, usually within an equally stereotyped context of palm trees, white sandy beaches, blue skies and turquoise waters" (Weaver and Oppermann, 2000).

Promoting sustainability through more sensitive promotional and Marketing Practices could utilize all mediums including brochures and websites. Promotional techniques (the specific presentation of objects, stories and themes, and all the forms of display provided for visitors) can be a vital element in creating more sustainable forms of tourism. Sustainable promotion should reflect the manner in which a tourist site is promoted and advertised, and such promotion must accurately reflect the unique characteristics of the area in order not to cause disappointment and frustration among tourists. It is important that the industry, in its brochures and advertisements, does not create expectations that the product cannot live up to. Tourism organizations and destinations can also use literature and advertisements to raise tourist awareness of key issues relating to sustainability. They can undertake 'green marketing' and communication of information explaining and interpreting the nature of the attraction/resource and its significance, for example, by promoting 'soft' tourism that minimizes adverse environmental and cultural

impacts (e.g. nature tourism) as well as informing tourists of the impacts of their presence.

TOURISM INDUSTRY

In the last few years ecotourism has become a buzz word to sell a variety of products. Almost any term prefixed with 'eco' will increase interest and sales. Thus, in the last few years there has been a proliferation of advertisements in the travel field with such references as ecotour, ecotravel, eco-vacation, eco (ad) ventures, eco-cruises, eco-safaris and of course, eco-tourism (Wight, 1994).

James Sanno, Chief Executive officer of Inner Asia Expeditions, points out the danger of misrepresentation: 'Ecotourism is a fashionable marketing ploy right now. It's often misunderstood, but more often it's exploited. Consumers need to be protected from that (Masterton, 1991). Ray Ashton, ecotourism consultant and biologist, feels that the word 'ecotourism' is not understood. People [i.e. operators] have not changed their itineraries; they just use the word for marketing purpose' (Ignacio, 1990).

By promotions, including word of mouth, tourism organizations, especially tour operators have a role in bringing destinations to the notice of prospective tourists. Few tour operators have a financial investment in the host destination. This means that their vested interests in the long-term sustainability of the destination product is low (Ryan, 1991). Yet, Tour operators are powerful players from a marketing perspective. Their marketing decisions, when 'packaging' holidays, strongly influences the potential guests. The destination images and positioning (usually focused directly or indirectly on the environment) as projected in brochures and other promotional materials. Tour operators and wholesalers have continuously developed new areas, expanded successful resorts, and created promotional campaigns without any regard to the

cost of impacts on the area and the local population.

Tourist Organizations (be it a destination marketing agency, local tour operator, agent or hotel) need to scan their business environment for relevant data that might determine the stance taken towards sustainable tourism (Swarbrooke, 1999).

- government legislation on environmental issues
- the economic climate
- the level of public concern over the social & environmental impacts of tourism
- technological innovations such as virtual reality

In their marketing of different destinations they need to be committed to individual destinations. Tour operators should not compete on price only but should market the benefits that underlie most customers' expectations.

GOVERNMENT

Governments at tourist destinations can significantly influence sustainable tourism marketing, in my view ideally, by developing standards and regulations for marketing of tourism products. They should monitor and audit existing and proposed activities of those involved directly in the tourism business. Governments should design and implement educational and awareness programmes which can sensitize tourism promoters to the issue of sustainable tourism development.

COMMUNITY

The host population of a destination can be adversely affected by insensitive tourism marketing policies. In addition, pollution and damage, as by-products of tourism activities are environmental and social costs carried by the whole of society and specially affect the local community.

Human resources, especially local people, are paramount to sustainable tourism and emphasis should be placed on implementing local training programs to address all levels of product knowledge, tourism and environmental awareness. Well trained local residents can always do a better job of providing service and demonstrating the virtues of their home, instead of city guides. Special tours highlighting the local lifestyle, involving local residents, offer excellent opportunities for people to take pride in displaying their home product and this also serves to enhance the general maintenance and appearance of a destination.

CONCLUSION

To visualize any destination in all forms to be a 'model destination' in today's world is difficult to imagine. Even de-marketing efforts cannot prevent people to travel as they need all kinds of assistance from tourism service providers to make their trip not only hassle free, but also a life long experience. The author on one hand would like the existence of opportunities for tourists to continue visiting destinations in future, while on the other hand, service providers may have more urgency than others. Frankly speaking, nobody wants popular destinations to disappear. Therefore this author would like to see continuous education programs, more sensitive environmentally aware attitudes and the adoption of long-term perspectives towards tourism resources exploitation rather than exploitation by service providers.

While some organizations may pay lip service to a societal concept for public relations purposes, in a competitive situation many of the problems related to tourism, and its marketing, will continue. It is also important to recognize that consumers are now better educated and are competent to select products that are not creating undue problems to host communities. Moreover, if

organizations or their products do create problems, there are now articulate pressure groups such as the Eco-tourism Society, Tourism Concern and back-up government legislation available to support consumer and environmental protection.

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