

MANAGING & MARKETING THE TOURISM DESTINATION: A CASE STUDY OF BHITARKANIKA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, ODISHA

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Abstract

Tourism marketing is widely recognized as an essential and inseparable component of the destination management programme. In this paper, the authors endeavoured to find out the relation between destination management and tourism destination marketing of Bhitarkanika, the second largest mangrove forest of Asia. Specifically, the study examines the potentiality of tourism in Bhitarkanika for local development and roles of the stakeholders like local DMMO, Govt. authorities, marketing professionals, tourism planner, travel agents, tour operator responsible for management and marketing of destination.

Keywords: *Tourism Destination, Marketing, Management, Branding, Imaging*

INTRODUCTION

The development of the tourism industry particularly depends on a well-planned destination marketing strategy and management which leads to the healthy economic growth for the society and its people. Universally tourism industry is such an industry which is growing rapidly. A destination could have derived the maximum benefit if there is a proper and solid marketing strategy and management has functioned smoothly and effectively. Again marketing and management are essential for the survival of destinations in this competitive era. Destinations are differentiated and branded by the help of strong marketing process and their management.

The significance of destination marketing and management has been increased, because of the radical changes have been seen in past few years, the traditional or age old process, the pattern of touring and travelling, as well as various tourism activities have been modified, the pattern of living of people have changed, like not only for the sake of pleasure, but also to learn, to derive new experience from the destinations. Again the volume of mass tourism has been reduced to a greater extent. The study of destination marketing and its management is very much essential for the development of the destination, its peripheral areas, even

for the host-guest relationship. Opportunities and scopes lies in various untapped destinations, and even for many obstacles like politics, challenges, issues and constraints comes up on the way. But it is the marketing strategy and management approach that develop mutual relationships between destination marketers, stake holders, tourism planner and host people to create the platform for promotion and branding.

Odisha, an eastern Indian state, lying along with huge coastline of Bay of Bengal, is an enchanting place with natural beauty and greenery. Though tremendous potentialities are hidden, but the tourism industry of this state is developing very slowly. Tourism of Odisha was accorded the industrial status in 1979, but the sector has been lagging behind due to administrative drawbacks and lackadaisical industry approach. At the same time, many neighbouring countries like West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have developed their tourism beyond expectation and marched far head. There exists huge potential for nature-based such as ecotourism and wildlife tourism in Odisha but it has confined to the domestic level, and not yet gained popularity among the international tourists.

To make Odisha as a preferred tourism brand nationally and internationally, focused and responsible marketing strategies

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and management practices are essential. Specific to Bhitarkanika, protection and conservation of the mangrove ecosystem through active community participation and involvement can create win-win situation. It could also eventuate creating local employment and income opportunities, sustainability and environmental awareness. Given this backdrop, this study dwells on following objectives:

- To establish the roles of destination marketing and management organisations (DMMO) and to develop a suitable framework for wildlife tourism destination like *Bhitarkanika*.
- To evolve marketing and management mechanism that incorporates the local communities and sustainability objectives.

Content analysis has been adopted to examine wildlife tourism, destination management, destination marketing at different levels. This technique is arguably the appropriate tool to analyse any kind of text (Esterberg, 2002).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destinations are places with some form of actual or perceived boundary, such as the physical boundary of an island, political boundaries, or even market-created boundaries (Kotler et al., 2006). As the tourism industry continues to grow, the marketing and management of tourism destination is increasingly becoming competitive globally (Buhalis, 2000; Balakrishnan, 2008; Tasci, 2011; UNWTO, 2012, 2013). As a result, there is a need to improve the understanding of destination management in terms of how tourism destinations are built and marketed (Blain, Levy & Ritchie, 2005). Tourism destination marketing is often seen as a competitive and complex issue (Wang, 2011). This is particularly so when the tourism industry is becoming more competitive with destination marketing organisations competing to increase their share of the tourist market by developing different destination marketing strategies (Hosany, Ekinici & Uysal, 2007).

In order to understand this complexity destination management and marketing requires a comprehensive approach (Wang, 2011). Hence, different tourism destinations such as national, regions, states and cities have established destination management and destination marketing organisations to promote manage and market these destinations to the target tourist markets (Pike, 2008). The global tourism industry is changing so rapidly, that destinations are facing cut throat competition with each other in a view to maintain their competitiveness and attractiveness. Even some of the destinations are required proper destination marketing strategy and solid management technique to be highlighted and survived in the future.

Therefore, destination management and marketing is necessary to address the various market segments to promote the image of the destinations to attract more tourists.

These days, many countries are diversifying into the tourism industry by seeing its profitability, hence destinations are becoming more and more competitive and attractive with each other. Therefore, tourism destinations now find themselves in a situation where they have to compete directly with other tourism destinations at the international arena, national, regional, state, cities and local levels through the respective destination marketing organisations for the promotion and marketing of the destinations (Presenza, Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). The formation of destination management organisations and destination marketing organisations in the tourism industry is indispensable, due to its roles and destinations it covers such as town, city, region, state, province and country (Blain et al., 2005; Pike, 2008).

Destination management and destination marketing are two highly interrelated concepts in tourism. In fact, destination marketing is one of the functions within the broader concept of destination management and involves coordinated and integrated management of the destination mix (attractions and events, facilities, transportation, infrastructure and hospitality resources) (Morrison, 2013). For the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) a destination management organization plays four different roles and, marketing management is one of them (UNWTO, 2007). Hence in this paper, a close relationship has been derived in between the destination management and tourism marketing for the success and failure of the destination.

Destination marketing is now acknowledged as a pillar of the future growth and sustainability of tourism destinations in an increasingly globalised and competitive market for tourists (UNWTO, 2011). Destination marketing in the present scenario is an important growth area in the field of tourism has been evolved as a unique paradigm and its uniqueness is reinforced by the four key parameters. First one is, most aspects of tourism take place at destinations (Leiper, 1979); second, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) proposed that destinations were “the fundamental unit of analysis in tourism” (WTO, 2002); third, destinations have emerged as the biggest brands in the travel industry (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2002), and lastly, a large number of nations, states and cities are now funding a Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) as the main vehicle to compete and attract visitors to their distinctive place or visitor space.

Destination marketing and management should be implemented in such a way that it should create imagery and popularity (Buhalis & Michopoulou, 2011). According to Koutoulas and Zoyganeli (2007), Destination Marketing takes place at two levels. At the micro-level, independent

tourist operators, such as hotels and transportation agencies, which promote the products and services they offer in the industry. At the macro-level, governments and other official authorities promote their countries and states as tourist destinations. It should be noted that both destination management organisations and destination marketing organisations complement with each other. There are ample evidences from the literature which indicates these tourism destination organisations have been used interchangeably, separately or combined as one entity in the management and marketing of tourism destinations (Bhat & Gaur, 2012; Wang, 2011).

Hence this paper has attempted for an integrative and collaborative approach by merging the destination marketing and management and has shaped it as DMMO for fulfilling the various objectives of destinations. Destination management and destination marketing organisations are becoming increasingly important in many tourism destinations globally due to growth and reliance by many developing and developed economies on tourism industry (Fyall, 2011; Wang, 2008). Consequently, there is a need for integrative marketing and management strategies based on good understanding of the tourism market for effective destination competitiveness and attractiveness through the activities of destination marketing organisations (Pike, 2008).

Destination marketing organisation can be described as any organisation at any level which is responsible for the marketing of a named or identifiable tourism destination. This excludes the government departments that are responsible for planning and policy issues (Pike & Ryan, 2004). In addition, Wang (2011, p. 2) also follows the destination management association international (DMAI) to suggest that ‘...destination management and marketing can be defined as a proactive, visitor-centred approach to the economic and cultural development of a destination that balances and integrates the interests of visitors, service providers and the community.’

An Overview of Bhitarkanika: Potential & Prospects

One of the bounties of the nature in Odisha is *Bhitarkanika* proud that is panoramic and acclaimed for its rich and unique biodiversity. Geographically, it is in between the 20°4’-20°8’N latitudes and 86°45’-87°50’ longitudes and lies in the lap of three rivers like *Baitarani*, *Brahmani* and *Dhamara*. The rich alluvial deposit of these three rivers forms the deltaic region which is one of the uniqueness of this ecosystem. The ecosystem comprises of delta, the sea, estuarine forests, mangroves, reptiles, flora and fauna, avifauna, amphibians- a fertile ground to nurture

biodiversity. Until 1952, it remained as Zamindari forest but after the abolishment of the zamindari system, *Bhitarkanika* was brought under the control of the state forest department. In India’s ecological map, it assumes the distinction as second largest mangrove ecosystem with distinct ecological, geomorphologic and biological importance.

In 1975, an area of 672 sq. km was declared the *Bhitarkanika* Wildlife Sanctuary. In September 1998, core area of sanctuary covering an area of 145 sq. km was declared as National Park in 1998 and in 2002; it has been designated as Ramsar wetland of international reputation. In 2008, the park was enlisted in the Guinness of World Records for the presence of world’s largest salt-water crocodile admeasuring of 23 feet. Ecologically important areas along the coast of Odisha are at Table 1.

Table 1: Ecologically Important Areas along the Coast of Orissa

Site	Ecological Importance	Area (km ²)
Chilka Lake (Ganjam and Puri districts)	Lagoon	1165
Balukhand (Ganjam and Puri districts)	Reserve forest, Breeding and spawning ground for reptiles and turtles.	9.32
Gahirmatha Marine Wildlife Sanctuary (Dist. Kendrapara)	Estuary, breeding and spawning ground for reptiles and Olive Ridley Turtles.	1435
Bhitarkanika (Dist. Kendrapara)	Mangroves, Breeding and Spawning ground of reptiles.	267.14

Source: iomenvis.nic.in/Bhaitharkanika.html

While the sanctuary is famous for endangered salt-water crocodile (*crocodile porosus*), it also nurture a diverse range of fauna and flora. It entails dense mangroves (63 species), estuarine crocodiles (1130 as per 2001 census), rare white crocodiles (locally called *sankhua*), variety of venomous snakes like king cobra, banded krait, cobra, non-poisonous snakes like python, rat snake etc. A large variety of domestic and migratory birds (217 species), mammalian species like spotted deer, sambhar, wild boar, fishing cat, etc. are also found. Some other endangered species of mammals, reptiles, birds also inhabits in this area.

Gahirmatha is another attractive point consisting of sea beaches, sand dunes and sand bars sustaining rich vegetation in that area. The village of Dangamala in its proximity is very swampy and breeds crocodiles. What really made

Bhitarknaika popular is its Olive Ridley sea-turtle nesting ground spread in an area of 11 km, perhaps largest in the world.

With the bounty of nature, Odisha is ideally suited for eco-tours and its promotion can help the upliftment of socio-economic condition of the communities and conservation and protection of nature and natural resources. The sanctuary offers a perfect setting for ecotourism and it is in great demand in the recent years. The place has been attracting the scientists, tourists, nature lovers and scholars which can be accorded further emphasis. During winter, ornithologist and nature-lovers congregate to spot migratory birds and resident birds in great diversity. Gahirmatha beach surrounding the main sanctuary is also an emerging tourist attraction.

The National Park has been witnessing a steady inflow of tourists. As per the records of Mangrove Forest Division (WL), Rajnagar, Kendrapara, total visitors in 2008-09 were 37,080 and it rose to 46,917 in 2012-13. By 2018, total arrivals recorded were 75096 tourists but it continuous to remain as destination for domestic tourists. Since 2008-09, incidents of foreign tourists remained meagre in 202-300 per annum.

Table 2: Arrival of Tourists in Bhitarkanika 2015-18

Year	Domestic	Foreigner	Total
2015	61813	206	62019
2016	81060	205	81265
2017	71956	202	72158
2018	75095	212	75307

Source: Odisha Statistical Bulletin 2017 & 2018

The community participation and involvement is considered essential to motivate the local people and to create the awareness among them about ecotourism prospects and potentials of Bhitarkanika that leads to the protection and conservation. Forest Department of Odisha along with the local villagers formed many eco-development committees (EDC), Bhitarkanika Ecotourism and Eco-development Society (BEES). These are actively involved in the training and development of the people and place for providing greater experience to the tourists. Over the years, transportation and communication facilities have been improved. Under the Pradhan Mantri Gramya Sadak Yojana, a puccha road has been constructed to connect the sanctuary from main road. Self-help Groups (SHG)

by the local woman have been formed especially for the protection and conservation of wildlife and other natural resources. Indirectly they are also benefitted by running small accommodation, lodging and food facilities for the tourists. With new source of livelihood options from tourism, the locals have also taken action to ban collection of fuel wood and other forest products are a good sign of ecotourism.

Role of Destination Marketing and Management

Harnessing the prospects of ecotourism in Bhitarkanika necessitates sustainable marketing and management practices. ECOTEC (2010) propagates a framework to suffice destination marketing and associated economical impacts around four key elements- activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. Promotion of leisure activities target leisure visitors while events marketing activities target event organizers. At the outcome level, marketing activities may convince leisure visitors to decide visiting the destination or to extent their stay in a destination. Role of DMOs in extending the stay of the visitors as well as to bring more events to a destination is crucial. Major economic impacts of an efficient destination marketing campaign, and more specifically the firm, may help increasing the visitors' spendings. Additional spending leads to additional jobs and to the creation of additional gross value.

According to Pike (2004), among others, the destination management and marketing organisation (DM&MO) functions on human resources development, politics, policy and destination strategy, finance and budgeting, destination branding, tourism assets and attractions, destination communication, promotions and marketing, monitoring and performance. Wang (2008) mentioned that a destination is made up different types of stakeholders who are mainly interested in marketing their products. But, tourism organisations are involved in the marketing of the destinations as a whole at different levels and provide a collective platform to the visitors and tourists. Cooperation and partnership is essential between the host community and destination marketing organisation for a unified vision and delivery of destination experience to the visitors (Bhat & Gaur, 2012). To become effective, DMO must hierarchical from the national tourism organisations or authorities, regional, state, province and local destination marketing organisations (UNWTO, 2004).

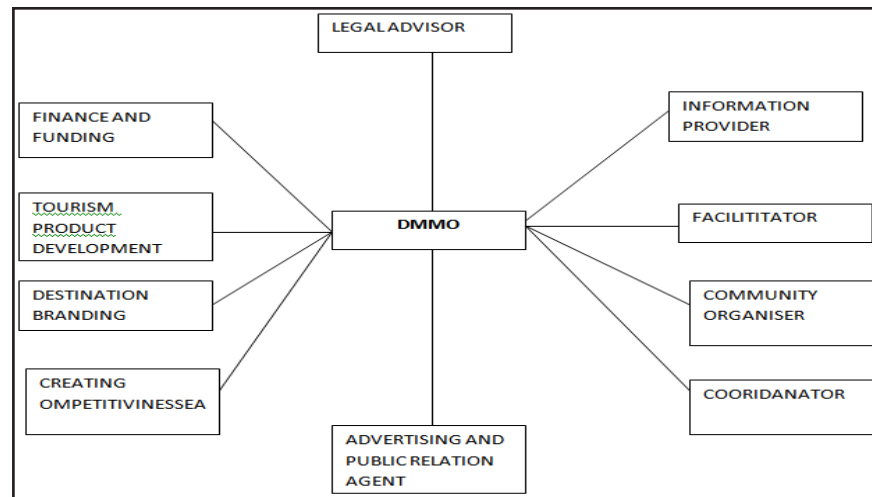


Fig. 1: Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO) Framework (Wang, 2008)

DISCUSSION

The roles and responsibilities played by the DMMO change according to types of tourism activities and destinations. In the context of wildlife tourism, it is important that DMMO is formed at the initial stages and brought to actively involve because ecological and biodiversity destinations are subtle and fragile that needs redefined tasks and strategies performed by the DMMO. Perhaps the local tourism organisations are unable to manage and market the wildlife destination and it also fails in seeking the assistance of state and national tourism organisations to pursue effective promotion. Thus, it is imperative to have framework of destination management and marketing for enhancement of image, positioning, branding and attractiveness and competitiveness.

Such arrangements can also enhance the community and cooperative management, crisis management and negotiate other impediments. Effective DMMO frameworks can facilitative coordination among the industry professionals, stakeholders bringing a healthy relationship management. It is argues that presence of the destination stakeholders in DMMO is necessary and mutually beneficial for the conservation, visitors, host community at large.

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