

Role of ICT in Promoting a Rural Tourism Product

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Abstract

Tourism product consists of a variety of elements which is a package that meets the needs of tourists from leaving his residence to the place of destination and back again to the place of origin. The researcher explains the role of ICT and its applications in promoting a rural tourism product in rural, urban and global market. The researcher collects data from both the primary and secondary sources. The researcher identifies the gaps in implementing ICT in rural market. The research paper mentions the recommendation to the policy makers to develop various ICT connectivity infrastructure facilities in rural market. The research also focuses on issues and challenges of entrepreneurs to market tourism product through ICT in rural, urban and international market. The research paper finds that infrastructure facilities should be improved and ICT education should be imparted in rural customers.

Keywords: ICT; Rural market; Tourism; Issues and Challenges; Infrastructure

Introduction

Thought here are many definitions for tourism. It could be simply defined as a “travel and stay of a non-resident”. In order to travel to a particular area there must be a reason. For example a person may travel for leisure, business; visiting friends and relatives, health, education etc., he or she chooses a destination for one or other reason [1]. Transport is necessary to travel and accommodation to stay at the destination. So tourism as an industry has three components, Attraction, Accommodation and transportation. In the developed world, today, all these components have reached at their zenith in satisfying their customer needs aided by modern technology. These components have also come a long way to offer a range of products which suit the needs of multitude tourists around the world, and are still working hard to cater to an ever changing test of them.

Tourism is ranking the top ahead of all other categories of international trade. This is evident from the statistical information compiled from all over the world by World Tourism Organization (WTO).

Information communication technologies (ICTs) have been transforming tourism globally. The ICT driven re-engineering has gradually generated a new paradigm-shift, altering the industry structure and developing a whole range of opportunities and threats. ICTs empower consumers to identify, customize and purchase tourism products and support the globalization of the industry by providing tools for developing, managing and distributing offerings worldwide. Increasingly ICTs play a critical role for the competitiveness of tourism organizations and destinations [2]. ICTs are becoming a key determinant of organizational competitiveness. The enhancements in ICTs’ capabilities, in combination with the decrease of the size of equipment and ICTs’ costs, improved the reliability, compatibility and inter-connectivity of numerous terminals and applications. ICTs provide a powerful tool that can bring advantages in promoting and strengthening the tourism industry’s strategy and operations.

Businesses in India are more confident than ever about the growth of the country’s rural consumer markets. According to the third annual edition of Accenture Research, “Masters of Rural Markets: From Touch points to Trust points-Winning over India’s Aspiring Rural Consumers,” rural consumers are particularly aspirational, striving to purchase branded, high quality products [3]. The report notes that

rural consumers are better networked and proactively seek information through multiple sources. The expectations of today’s rural Indian consumers differ markedly from those of previous generations. They are moving away from purely economic concepts of value driven by low prices, towards a broader notion of value that combines price with the utility, aesthetics and features of products and services. Significantly, penetration of media and telecom services has changed the way India’s rural consumers buy.

The hinterlands in India generate around half of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) and are home to about 70% of its population. This market is a combination of growing incomes and aspirations of about 850 million consumers who inhabit 650,000 villages across the country. Some of India’s biggest companies generate a third of their consumers from rural India.

Consumption patterns in these areas are also gradually beginning to mirror those of their urban counterparts. Owing to this changing trend as well as the size of the market, rural India provides a tremendous investment opportunity for private companies [4]. The rural regions were home to 75% of all new factories built in India in the last decade and accounted for around 70% of new manufacturing jobs.

The Indian government has earmarked financial inclusion as one of its foremost priorities. There is enough evidence to suggest that financial inclusion is crucial to reducing poverty.

Market size: Per capita GDP in India has grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.2% in its rural regions, since 2000. Rural per capita consumption increased by 19% annually in the period 2009-10 to 2011-12. In the same period, spending in rural India touched US\$ 69 billion.

Significance of the Study

With the above introduction about tourism product, ICT and rural

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market, it is evident that there is a need to unearth the rural product and rural and urban markets and the rural tourism products need to be marketed in both rural market and urban market and International market. An example of marketing of Kondapalli Toys made by bamboos, Kalamkari paintings (Figure 1), Lepakshi handicrafts, Cheriya paintings (Figure 2), Nirmal paintings etc. The above rural products (situated in the states of AndhraPraedsh and Telangana, India) should be marketed to the domestic market and international market; the resources of these craftsmen are very limited. The role of ICT is very significant to show up their products and informing about product information, and sell the products [5].

Objectives of the study

- a) The study explores the role of ICT and its applications to promote rural tourism product to the local and international products.
- b) The study identifies the gaps in implementing ICT rural market.
- c) The study suggests the improvement of ICT infrastructure in rural tourism.

Research Methodology and Data Collection

The researcher conducted a random sample survey and collected data from both the primary and secondary sources. The study conducted through a questionnaire with both structured and unstructured questionnaires. The researchers referred textbooks and Journals and latest national and international reports to collect secondary data.

Profile of the Sample Members

The researcher conducted an online questionnaire by interacting with 117 Industry experts having more than 10 years of experience and working at middle level management level and top management level.

ICT as a business tool

The enhancement in ICT capabilities, in combination with the decrease of size of the equipment and ICTs costs, improved the reliability, compatibility and interconnectivity of numerous terminals and applications. The emergence of the Internet and empowered the



Figure 1: Kalamkari paintings.



Figure 2: Cheriya paintings.



Figure 3: Kondapalli toys.

global networking of computers, enabling individuals and organizations to access a plethora of multimedia information and knowledge sources, regardless of their location or ownership, often free of charge[6]. Hence, The Kalamkari paintings, Cheriya paintings, Konadaplli toys business men, should leverage the internet to reach out the customers across world by showcasing their crafts in digital format and display on the website and description and material used in that painting can be explained. It will enable the users or buyers or middlemen to collect more information about the paintings or toys. The buyers from urban and rural customers can access the information across the internet and evaluate the quality of information and it facilitates them to take a decision to purchase.

Leverage e-business as a promotional tool

ICTs include not only the hardware, software and software required but also the groupware, NetWare and the intellectual capacity to develop, program and maintain equipment. The Integration of information processing, multimedia and communications created the 'world wide web'(www), a multimedia protocol which is using the internet, to enable near instant distribution of media-rich document(such as textual data, graphics, pictures, videos and sounds).

Tourism and information communication technologies

i) Increase their internal efficiency and manage their capacity and yields better. It will enable the craftsmen to manage their inventory management system and craftsmen to adjust their pricing to demand fluctuations in order to maximize their profitability [7,8].

ii) Interact effectively with the consumers and personalize the product. It will enable the craftsmen to identify the needs and taste of the users so that the crafts men of Kalamkari paintings and Cheriya paintings and Kondapalli toys (Figure 3) can be developed according to the needs and tastes of the users and it will improve their sustainability.

iii) Revolutionize tourism intermediation and increase the point's o sale. ICTs will remove the intermediaries so that the craftsmen directly sell the product to the customer and the cost of the product will not be increased so that craftsmen can enjoy the profits and buyers can get the products at slower rate.

iv) Support efficient cooperation between partners in the value system. For example, craftsmen can attach the customers.

iv) Enhance the operational and geographic scope by strategic scope tools for global expansion.

Suggested Strategies

The Craftsmen websites should be upgraded and updated with the latest ICT technologies to increase the business visibility, profitability and potentiality. The Govt and enterprises should encourage and train the industry people on utilizing the social media. The govt should

see that the high speed Internet availability and affordability to reach common man and prices of the computer systems or mobile systems should go down further. The awareness for the stakeholders towards google search and SEO should be provided. Enterprises should integrate all the departments through ICT. Wi-Fi facilities should be provided by the government and power failures should be avoided. The government should encourage the development of mobile commerce (e.g., promotion, payments etc.,) and should be integrated with the craftsmen.

Conclusion

It is essential that the current Information and communications technologies should be updated, upgraded and seamless integration both internally and externally should be done to improve the tourism business operations. The integration of ICT in tourism would benefit both craftsman and customers bringing together and other stakeholders on a common platform. The selection of right information communications technology tool is crucial to match the customer

requirements with service dimensions. The proliferation of technology throughout the tourism distribution channels and professionals use the new tools in order to retrieve information, identify suitable products and perform reservations. ICT's integration provides a power tool that brings advantage in promoting and strengthening the tourism industry.

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