

# A STUDY ON MARKETING COMMUNICATION FOR PILGRIMAGE TOURISM IN UTTARAKHAND

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The land of legends, Dev Bhoomi, Abode of Gods – by whatever name you call it, Uttarakhand lives up to all its sobriquets. Uttarakhand has historically been a pilgrimage destination, it is fast gaining a reputation as a destination for adventure lovers. The paper discusses the pilgrimage tourism as one of the oldest forms of tourism and considered one of the most widespread forms of tourism. There are a large number of pilgrimage destinations and sites which are very popular among the foreign and domestic tourist by their divine nature or historical value. Visitors from all over the world participate in significant pilgrimages bounded to these destinations. However deficiencies like marketing communication, proper infrastructure, services obstruct the development of pilgrimage and religious tourism in Uttarakhand. To understand the current state of marketing communications mix in pilgrimage tourism questionnaire survey method was applied. In attaining the purpose of the objective, two hypotheses were formulated. As the relationship between a dependent variable was examined, and the interval variable is one, Single Factor Analysis of Variance ANOVA was applied. Homogeneity of variance was verified using Bartlett's and Levene's test. Recommendations for the promotion & development of pilgrimage places in Uttarakhand, communications strategy are framed based on the results of the analysis.

*Keywords: Pilgrimage, Communication, Marketing, information, destinations*

## INTRODUCTION

Uttarakhand, the most charming and nature based hill state of India, came into existence on November 09, 2009 as 28th state of India. Since ancient time this region is called as "Adobe of Gods" due to presence of divine places and Gods. State represent some of the world famous peaks, captivating glaciers, and alpine meadows such as the valley of flowers. Geographical area of Uttarakhand is 53,367 sq km, constituting about 1.7 per cent of India's total geographical area. Four most respected pilgrimage places, regarded as 'Chardham' namely Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath are located in this region of Uttarakhand. In addition to these, nearly 30 other destinations in the Uttarakhand are known and regarded as preferred venue for meditation, Yoga, calmness and sensing spirituality. Tourism and pilgrimage in Uttarakhand contribute around 27 % in gross domestic production of state (GSDP). According PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industries (PHDCCI), tourism sector in Uttarakhand alone contributed around 60 % in GDP of state as compared to entire services sector which contributes nearly 49 % in the GDP of the state. Therefore, tourism and pilgrimage in Uttarakhand generates worthy revenues and variety of employment opportunities for the native residents.

Pilgrimage in Uttarakhand is usually open in the summer months May to Oct every year. During winters most of the shrine are closed due to heavy snow fall and severage winter. The most preferred pilgrimages destination are to be Badrinath, Kedarnath Gangotri and Yamnotri. Every year millions of the devotee visit these places for worship. Some of the pilgrimage sites in Uttarakhand like Haridwar and Rishikesh have transnational significance. The estimated number of visitors who came to Uttarakhand in year 2017 was 34723199. Other important pilgrimages sites in Uttarakhand is Hemkund Sahib which is the famous shrine in Sikh religion. Every year during June to August thousands of people visit this religious place.

Table No1: Number of tourist in Popular Pilgrimage places of Uttarakhand 2017

Pilgrimage Places	Indian tourist	Foreign Tourist	Total
Kedarnath	470517	718	471235
Badrinath	920078	388	920466
Gangotri	408275	463	408738
Yamnotri	391732	476	392208
Hemkund sahib	213279	155	213401
Rishikesh	673226	4815	678041
Haridwar	20985975	23123	21009098

Source: Uttarakhand Tourism

Uttarakhand has many interesting pilgrimage destinations but their potential for tourism is not properly utilized. Most of the destinations and sites are not known due inadequate & poor marketing. The lack of infrastructure and poor quality of supplementary services are other reasons of low-visitor numbers and hurdles in growth of tourism. It has been also observed that very less number of tourist use the

services of the travel agency to book their packages/ travel to worshiped destinations. Generally either religious communities or individual mostly organize the visit to pilgrimage places.

## MARKETING COMMUNICATION MIX

"Marketing communications are the fourth essential element of the marketing mix, with which the company aims to serve the target markets. Built through good communications company image and a favorable public attitude facilitate business contacts and raising the necessary investment funds". "Promotional mix (or a marketing communication mix) is the specific combination of instruments to promote that company used to convincingly communicate customer value and build customer relationships". McCarthy (1998) determined the mix of marketing communications as a specific combination of elements: advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing that companies use to implement their targets for advertising and marketing. All communication activities must be well prepared and conducted in good order through comprehensive management. Figure 1 is a simplified diagram showing how marketing communication elements and activities can be integrated. The largest circle shows how the five marketing communication elements are interconnected. Individual elements depicted in different colored circles contain various communication activities, which will be described in the publication.



Figure No 1. Elements of Marketing Communication Mix

Communication is the major marketing tools and use to inform tourist about the destination and product offered. Designing an attractive product, setting up it by reasonable price and entry to the tourism market is not sufficient. Tourist must be well informed and encouraged so that he think about the destination and take serious interest about his visit.. The main purpose of the communication is, therefore, creating a demand and enthusiasm for the destination.

The use of marketing tools is a continuous process in which it is necessary to monitor new trends and be able to respond flexibly to changes (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders & Wong, 2002). Correct and timely response can gain a competitive advantage. Strategically necessary is optimal selection of communication channels (Štefko, 2003).

Marketing communication tools is strategically important especially when you develop and maintain long relationship with target groups. Strategic communication in religious and pilgrimage tourism involves connection and optimally also an interaction between visitors and destinations (Sujova, A. & Rajnoha, R., 2012). It can raise awareness and persuades visitors to purchase and re- purchase the product (Scott 2008; Iyer, Soberman & Villas-Boas 2005; Buhalis 2000).

Imaginative, informal and interactive communication is the demand of tourist establish a relationships with the destination. The perfect tool for such communication is the internet. Application of interactive marketing communications in the destination is particularly evident in relation to the changes in behavior of visitors (Királ'ová & Straka, 2013). Religious tourist demand a personalized one to one approach, intellectual communication and responsiveness. Interactive communication is a prerequisite of developing good relationships with tourist and create satisfaction of both sides. Relationship marketing is effective especially when applied to specific target group (Wang 2008; Fyall, Callod & Edwards, 2003;Buhalis 2000; Oppermann 2000).

The best possible way to deliver the information and message should be the websites, social media and different mobile applications that enable cost-effective communication and can encourage word-of-mouth advertising (Fedorko & Bačík, 2012). Word-of-mouth, most powerful advertising is a verbal communication between service providers, independent experts, family and friends and the visitor (Ennew, Banerjee & Li, 2000). Blog sites with live stories about destination makes a positive image in the mind of the visitors. Blog contents are wrote in such a way that reader visualize the journey and start his preparation. Web site of the religious place can also offer a virtual tour to the worshiped destination and site.

International web for religious people, religious television channels, and radio stations can disseminate messages to visitors. Periodicals are published by church/ temples, brochures and travel guides, as well as public relations, should be used for communication purposes and to foster a desire (Ateljević & Doorne, 2002).

## METHODOLOGY

Uttarakhand is called the Dev Bhumi or abode of God. It has high potential due to its pilgrimage image and Spirituality. But Uttarakhand could not adequately utilize its potential due to the lack of promotion, which implies the subsequent lack of awareness of the destinations. The consequences of this are reflected in the tourist flow. A questionnaire survey was conducted to determine visit rate, level of awareness and interest to visit, cultural, heritage and pilgrimage destinations and sites, covered the period from April to June 2017. Four hundred three respondents participated in the survey.

In order to fulfil the objectives of the research, two-research hypotheses were formulated.

H1: There is significant differences in the level of awareness pilgrimage sites and preferred source for obtaining information.

H2: The overall satisfaction with the level of provided information about pilgrimage destinations and sites significantly correlates with frequency of the visit rate.

For attaining the purpose of the research, two hypotheses were formulated, the relationship between a dependent variable was examined, and the Single Factor Analysis of Variance ANOVA was applied. Homogeneity of variance was verified using Bartlett's and Levene's test.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Marketing communication is generally an important tools for promoting any religious and pilgrimage destination and site. Large numbers of holy destinations in Uttarakhand are not visited till day because promoters are not paying attention to marketing communications. Pilgrimage destinations and sites can use various communications channels when interacted with the target market or visitors. Each segment of the potential market collect information from many sources as the information is one of the basic and important prerequisites for a visit to destination or site.

In this line we examine the differences between the source of information and the level of awareness about pilgrimage destinations .The hypothesis is formulated as follows.

H1: There is significant differences in the level of awareness pilgrimage sites and preferred source for obtaining information.

Independent variable was defined as the most frequent source of obtaining information about the tourist destination (1 – Internet, 2 – Travel Agents, 3 – word of mouth, 4 – television 5 – Print media).

Dependent variable was defined as the level of awareness about religious and pilgrimage sites (on 1 – 5 scales, where 1 = Excellent, 5 = Poor).

The relation between the dependent variable and the nominal interval variable is examined, Single Factor Analysis of Variance ANOVA is applied. In this context the first step, the whole sample was divided into small groups depending on the primary source of collecting information. Observations within those groups were independent, which was a prerequisite for the fulfilment of one of the conditions of use of this analysis. Therefore, homogeneity of variance is tested using Bartlett's and Levene's test.

Test criterion for Levene's and Bartlett's test of homogeneity of variance was calculated at a level which held on p-values greater than the significance level at which the testing was carried out (i.e.  $\alpha = 0.05$ , or 5% respectively).

The highest median was calculated by measuring the information identified in the group of respondents who indicated that their most frequently used and trusted source of information is word of mouth which indicate that people still trust on advice of their friends and relatives. The lowest median is Internet user to gather information. Standard deviation is the highest for the respondents who trust on Print media like were newspapers / magazines as source of information, lowest who obtain information through the Internet and television / radio.

Test criterion for ANOVA was calculated at 10.07. F-criterion is granted under the significance level at which testing was carried out, the p-value of less than 0.05. The "source of information" factor significantly affects the level of awareness of pilgrimage sites and destinations.

Second hypothesis is linked between the overall level of satisfaction with the source of information provided about pilgrimage destinations and sites and the frequency of the visit rate has been tested. The second hypothesis was defined as follows.

H2: The overall satisfaction with the level of provided information about pilgrimage destinations and sites significantly correlates with frequency of the visit rate.

The Independent variable is defined as pilgrimage destinations and sites visit rate (3 – multiple times, 2 – only once, 1 – never).

The dependent variable was defined as the level of awareness of pilgrimage destinations and sites on likert scale (on 1 – 5 scales, where 1 = Excellent, 5 = Poor).

The whole sample was divided into small groups on the basis of the frequency of visit rate of pilgrimage destinations and sites. Observations within groups were independent, which was a prerequisite for the fulfilment of one of the conditions of utilizing the Single Factor Analysis of Variance ANOVA. In the next step, homogeneity of variance was verified by means of two tests, particularly Bartlett's test and Levene's test.

P-values for Bartlett's and Levene's test of homogeneity of variance are calculated as follows:  $PB = 0.608$ ,  $\mu = 0.524$ . P-values are greater than the significance level at which the testing is carried out (i.e.  $\alpha = 0.05$ , respectively 5%). The homogeneity of variance may be, therefore, confirmed and followed by the descriptive statistics for the monitored group.

The highest median was evaluated by measuring the information identified in the group of respondents who visited the pilgrimage destinations and sites more than once. The lowest median was identified those who never visit these sites at all. The variance of all three groups was comparable. The hypothesis verification is executed by using ANOVA. Single Factor Analysis of Variance ANOVA is applied for result calculation of monitored variables.

Test criterion for ANOVA test was calculated at 69.94. F-criterion is granted under the significance level at which the testing is conducted, the p-value of less than 0.05. The "frequency visit rate for pilgrimage destinations and sites" factor significantly affects the level of awareness of pilgrimage destinations and sites.

## CONCLUSION

The level of competition among the various pilgrimage destination make them more competitive and attractive. Now slowly it became an important tourism business. Especially lesser known destinations and sites in Uttarakhand should use all the suitable marketing tools to communicate with visitors so that they can attract large number of tourists.

The most appropriate communication methods is social media like Facebook, YouTube, Whatsapp Orkut etc. In these days visitors are using the most popular social network site whatsapp to opens new possibilities for visiting destinations and sites. Whatsapp is mainly used as an application on mobile phones and is connected with geo location services. It is increasingly used in India to their share location, photos, videos with friends/relative who are also logged in the network. Users who visit these sites and tag themselves automatically notify their friends where they are, and thus the information about the destination and site spreads and motivate even those who, in some circumstances, could not be interested in a destination.

Pilgrimage destinations and sites should make themselves more attractive and vibrant so they can promote themselves in the bigger way so information can reach to the visitors through on line or offline using social media. Innovative practices, creativity, understanding of communication mix are factors which fix the success of destinations and sites and make them famous. Providing reliable and appropriate information on the destination, monitoring and managing conversations within the social network and building relationship with visitors are steps which increase the visitors' loyalty.

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