Impact Of Image Of India As A Tourist Destination For Japanese Tourists

Samarth Sharma, Amity Institute of Competitive Intelligence and Strategic Management,

Dr. Bilal Mustafa Khan, Dept. of Management, Aligarh Muslim University.

Abstract

Tourism is an important socio-economic activity. It provides enormous scope for economic development of a particular area.

According to Ziffer (1989), "Tourism involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both past and present) found in these areas."

In India, temple towns, historical monuments and sea beaches were traditionally sought out as tourist attractions. But now the fabric of tourism is changing rapidly as nature, heritage, and recreational destinations are gaining more importance. In this background, eco-tourism has of late become a top attraction for the tourists. The root of tourism in India can be traced to pilgrimage. In the early stages, pilgrimage-based tourism was only of domestic nature but during recent years, a large number of foreign tourists have also started visiting places of pilgrimage.

In the 21st century, travel between countries has become easier than it ever was before. You come and go from a foreign land very quickly; and you breeze through the sites you wish to see quickly too. Hence the sort of Japanese tourist we Indians see rushing through the Taj Mahal, Ajanta and Ellora, the Victoria Memorial, Humayun's Tomb, and a hundred other places.

Things were once different, as discovered while looking into a fascinating account of Japanese visitors to India in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Notably, these were seekers and pilgrims, rather than pleasure-seekers. Their stories have been rehabilitated in Richard Jaffe's recent book, Seeking Sakyamuni, South Asia in the Formation of Modern Japanese Buddhism.

Background

Tourism is an industry based on imagery (Buck, 1993). Hence a positive image is vital for tourist arrivals to a destination (Alhemoud and Armstrong, 1996; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Choi, Lehto and Oleary, 2007; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989; Yilmaz et al., 2009). Though destination image has attracted keen interest in tourism research (Chen and Usyal, 2002; Jenkins, 1999; Molina, Gomez and Consuegra, 2010; Mossberg and Kleppe, 2005; Morgan and Pritchard, 1998; Morgan, Pritchard and Pike, 2002; Tavares, 2011) no consensus has been reached to adopt a single definition of image. The

most cited definition has been given by Crompton (1979) who explains image as a holistic concept comprising beliefs, ideas and impressions of a destination in the minds of individual. This suggests that an image is an overall perception of a destination through an individual's mental belief and feelings associated with a destination (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993). This image can comprise elements of climate, accessibility, natural attractions, people, culture, language, cuisine, safety, security and economy. The term 'image' is further deconstructed into two types i.e. organic and induced. Organic image is a result of non prejudiced sources as newspapers, periodicals, television and books, or other unbiased sources as such as friends, relatives, etc. (Beerli and Martin, 2004; Choi, Lehto and Oleary, 2007). Organic images are held as more credible by people as they relate to factual and authentically reported information. Induced image, on the other hand, is consciously designed and generated through aggressive marketing activities to develop a carefully structured and desired impression in the minds of a target market segment (Gunn, 1988). Induced images are geared at projecting the positive and alluring aspects of the product to entice the consumers

Methodology

Research indicates that while assessing the image of a destination, very few studies have used consumers as the primary source for generating destination attributes (Selby and Morgan 1996; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003). Adopting a qualitative approach, this study used the existent primary consumer generated data available online on the travel blog Virtualtourist (virtualtouris.com), to allow for free spontaneous emergence of attributes related to the destination. Searching through several top travel blogs, Virtualtourist.com blog was selected as the most appropriate data source as it provided views of tourist clearly classified under head of 'Pros', 'Cons' and 'In a Nutshell' comments/images of the destination country. 100 comment postings under each head were collected in reverse order, saved on independent MS Word files and thereafter analysed on their linguistic component to identify the attributes and themes that emerged from mentioned frequency of words and phrases describing the perceived positive, negative and nutshell image of India. This image as generated through consumer content was later assessed in light of the Ministry of Tourism India's projected image on the Incredible India website (www.incredibleindia.org) to examine if there was congruency between the tourists' perceived image and the destination marketing organization's projected image.

Image of India as a tourist destination

Positive Aspects

The comments stated by tourists after their post visitation to India indicate that history and culture are the most attractive attributes of the country. The country, deep rooted in civilization, history and culture, is said to offer a "wonderful array of culture and antiquity," iconic monuments, and a variety of architectural styles. Tourists are fascinated by the rich history of the country, which shaped through different dynasties,

rulers and religions have left traces of unique heritage in the country. The "Taj Mahal" is reported as the iconic identity of India. It is the main monument identified with the country by both actual and prospective tourists. India, the huge subcontinent is also bestowed with a large variety of topography and landforms, including mountain peaks, deserts, coastal areas, forest cover and vast plains, rich in all kinds of flora and fauna. The country abounds in the most striking variety of natural landscapes. The natural beauty is described by tourists through words as "stunning vistas" that give the feeling of "walking into National Geographic." A population of more than 1.22 billion that comprises people from all religions, diverse communities, races and ethnicity contributes to a rich "multicultural" diversity offered in this "mini world." It is reported that one visit is not enough to see the sub-continent as there are "so many things to see, hear taste and experience" that the country would require a lifetime to explore. To add to her attractions, India has the image of a very hospitable "welcome country" with "kind, friendly, happy, smiling, laughing people" rightly suggesting that locals are guided by the philosophy of Atithi Devo Bhavah i.e. "Guest is God". The tourists express satisfaction that "most people speak English" implying that language/communication for foreigners with locals is not regarded as a problem. The intensity of the country can be well summarized in a comment that states "India shakes your whole entity, your state of mind, all your senses." This is substantiated by another remark that the country is "more mystic than Arabian nights." As a tourist destination, a favorable image of the country is identified in terms of being an inexpensive destination, rightly described as "very cheap to visit once the air fare is taken care of." "The food" holds another major appeal for tourists. Indian pan cakes (chapati) and curries are no doubt world famous and though spicy for the taste buds of many western tourists, they are tempting gastronomical delights. All the diversity, sights, sounds and tastes that make India pulsating, lively and "colorful" in spirit can be summed up in comments that say, there is "never a dull moment" and a "surprise around every corner." What further makes the country unique is described in the words "no other place in the world like this". India is recommended in a comment as a "must visit" destination.

Findings and Discussion

Positive Image of India

The positive image attributes that have emerged from the 'Pro' category of comments on India and the words most frequently used to describe each attribute are highlighted in table 1.

Table 1: Positive Perception of India

'Pro' Attribute	Indicator words explaining attribute
Culture and History	Culture, culturally rich, history, architecture, temples, palaces, Taj Mahal, living history
Diversity and Vastness	Multicultural, mini world, very varied, breathtaking variety
Natural Beauty	Scenery, beaches, mountains, beautiful landscape
People	People, friendly people, warm people, lovely, nice people, good people, great people, charming people, wit, ingenuity, good hearted, helpful
Intense	Experience, romantic, inspiring, spirituality, funny, chaos, fascinating, mystical, magical, unfathomable, exotic, interesting, mentality, philosophy, yoga, meditation
Inexpensive	Cheap cost, cheap, cheap destination, shopping
Cuisine	Food, great food, excellent curries
Alive	Color, pulse, rhythm, sounds, vibrant, Bollywood, entertaining, chaos, festivals, flurry of activity, spirit, and life
Unique	Very different, another planet

Negative aspects

Poverty is found by tourists as deeply infest in the country and it is disturbing for tourists to see "poor people everywhere" along with persistently being "chased by children and beggars." Dirt, filth and pollution of all forms are found equally appalling by tourists. For concerns of hygiene and health, many tourists have apprehensions about visiting India. It is realized by tourists that there is not much civic sense amongst people and the problems are further exacerbated by "overpopulation" and "traffic" in the country. As reported in comments, traveling within the country is found cumbersome and irksome due to "bad roads" with "wild bus rides" coupled with inefficient transport that can necessitate "long stay at train stations." Some places are reported by tourists as "still very backward." In view of several tourists, the infrastructure and hygiene are not up to most "foreigners' standards." Another problem faced and reported in comments is cheating of tourists by touts who in the words of a tourist "wish to rip off every penny" of the unsuspecting and naïve travellers in a foreign land. One comment mentions that there are "100s of

millions of middlemen earning their share of you" and "you are a walking wallet!" A comment goes further to send out a warning signal on the blog saying "watch those touts and your pocket!" What is more angrily voiced in a few remarks is that at certain attractions there is the "Government-sanctioned dual pricing for tourists - theft!" This reflects the disappointment of tourists on differential pricing, especially that is higher price for foreign tourists at every attraction. In terms of food, though Indian Cuisine is otherwise a major appeal to the foreign palates, some comments sound a word of caution to watch out for "hygiene" at eating places and advise consumption of "bottled water" alone, to avoid "health risks." In 'con' remarks, some tourists complain about the heat and extreme weather conditions suggesting that the country is ideally "open May to October only," discouraging prospective tourists to visit in other months. For foreign female tourists especially, there are words of caution, as women may be regarded "easy targets" by anti-social elements and need to be very careful while travelling in the country due to safety concerns. It is remarked in a statement that India is "never safe for a girl/woman on her own." Another strong negative perception is that India can be "intimidating" as the country is described to be full of "chaos" with "no rules" and where "everyone does as they please." A comment that prepares future tourists states that the country is not for the "faint of heart" but for "seasoned travellers only." Hence, regardless of abundant attractions, the negative images that have conjured in the minds of the tourists based on their experiences, send out indications for the tourism authorities and government that there is an imperative need to address the several concerns of providing proper tourism infrastructure, safety, hygienic clean environment and of imparting moral and ethical education, especially to the stakeholders and local people, to work on building a safe, comfortable and friendly tourism destination that can contribute to formation of a strong positive image.

Table 2: Negative Perceptions of India.

'Con' Attribute	Words explaining attribute
Poverty	Beggars, heartbreaking poverty, illness, shocking reality, *baksheesh*
Dirt and Pollution	Serious pollution, dirty, mosquitos, smell, public urination, noisy, overpopulated, crowds, littering, traffic
Cheating	Touts, cons, con artists, conniving people, tips, pick pocketers, high entrance fee, dishonest people
Infrastructure	Dangerous transport, inefficient transport, bad roads
Health Concerns	Hygiene, spicy food, water, Delhi belly
Climate	Heat, extreme climate
Intimidating	Chaos, maddening, hassles, overwhelming, unsafe, unstable surroundings

Overall image of India as a tourist destination

The most striking observation is that India is equated with the synonym, "experience", which is the most frequently used word to describe the country in a nutshell. In the words of one tourist India provides "an

experience that will change you!" Other comments that describe the intensity of the experience are "India gets into your soul" leading to "exploration of personal values." The country is perceived as a "state of the heart, rather than a place." Identified also with the word "fascinating" the country is described as "fantastically amazing and frustrating" and a lot "more than beaches and elephants" or "curry and sacred cows." For travellers who have been to India, "after India, every place else is dull." The country is considered unique "like nowhere you've been before," and an "all in one" entity recommended as "a must visit place." It is strongly remarked in a comment "if one has not been to India, he/she has not travelled at all." The amazing country however, has a "challenging" dimension as well due to several problems of development and infrastructure. One cannot ignore the difficulties and some harsh ground realties present in the country, but as a comment states, "no country is perfect," and this is a comforting message that India certainly is worth the visit for any "traveller with an open mind" who can be tolerant of the drawbacks but still willing to travel for availing an enchanting lifetime experience. The best comment sent out by a tourist which can be motivate prospective travellers is "Real travellers certainly don't skip India!" In essence, the holistic image of destination India is a reflected as a country that offers an "unparalleled travel experience."

A central figure in Seeking Sakyamuni is Kawaguchi Ekai (1866-1945), a Japanese scholar who spent almost two decades in India and Tibet, including a full seven years in Benares. This is how Jaffe describes his daily regimen with his teachers in the holy city of the Hindus: "Rising each day at 5:30 am, Kawaguchi would practice zazen and bathe. Following a thirty-minute teatime, Kawaguchi would then read an English translation of the Dhammasangani until 9:30 am, when he would turn his attention to practicing Sanskrit reading and grammar for two hours. Following another thirty-minute meal and a break, from 2-5:00 pm, he would practice orally translating Sanskrit, then review Sanskrit grammar until 6:30 pm, Kawaguchi would attend class from an hour from 7:30-8:30 pm, then continue practicing oral translation until 10:00 pm, followed by another hour of review!"

Table 3: Overall Image of India

'Nutshell' Attribute	Words explaining attribute
Experience	Experience, enlightening, soul, values, life changing/profoundly rich experience, intense lifetime experience
Fascinating	Magical, fascinating awesome, myths and mysteries, monumental, contrasts, diverse, charming, passionate
Unique	Universe, world, numero uno, truly unique, must see, incredible, character , mini world
Challenging	Difficult, bitter moments, mad, not perfect

Image of India for Japanese Tourists

There is a stock, stereotypical, image of the Japanese tourist, who rushes to and through a monument or shrine in a foreign country, clicking away. As one website has it, "The Japanese tourist has become a ubiquitous figure throughout the world. Typically, he or she is part of a travel group with a guide waving a small flag, moving the group at a rapid pace through the day's schedule. The tourist is heavily slung with cameras, video recorders, and perhaps a tape recorder to catch a bird call. The clothes appear to be nearly a uniform with small variations between members of the group. Tour groups follow the same itinerary and the same tour buses follow each other in the same lock-step that the members of each group follow."

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Among the first Japanese travellers to India was a certain Nanjo Bun'yu (1849-1927) who had studied Sanskrit with Max Müller at Oxford, sparking his curiosity in the land of the Buddha. Nanjo came to India in 1887. He was followed soon after by a slew of Japanese scholars, who came to India, or Ceylon, or both, visiting Buddhist sites. As Jaffe writes, "These ventures into South Asian hinterlands by early Japanese Buddhist travellers were not just opportunistic tourist junkets undertaken at convenient entrepots en route to Japan from Europe. … That the Japanese would bother with these perilous South Asian pilgrimages to Buddhist sites — a number of Japanese Buddhists subsequently died making the journey — underscores the importance that South Asia would play in Japanese Buddhist sites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."

Some visitors made a tour of the sites and returned. Others came to learn languages and study ancient texts with pandits, hoping thereby to arrive at a better understanding of "the true practices and precept lineage of the Buddha". These scholars took back books, relics, and artefacts associated with Buddhism in South Asia, furthering the connection between their land and ours. They helped reshape Japanese Buddhist religious practices and architectural styles on the basis of what they had seen and studied in India and Sri Lanka.

As Jaffe demonstrates, travels back and forth between Japan and India were enabled by two of the great new technologies of the 19th century — the steamship and the railway. The first aided movement between Japan and South Asia; the latter, movement within South Asia itself. By the early 20th century, there was

also a thriving trade between India and Japan, particularly in cotton and cotton products, furthering closer interactions between these two great and ancient cultures that had hitherto been largely unconnected from one another.

also facilitating this process of cultural exchange was the phenomenon known as "pan-Asianism", whereby activists and ideologues sought to build a network of trans-continental solidarity aimed at ending the European domination of Asia. Pan-Asianism came in two forms; one which "emphasized the importance of spiritual values among all Asians, counterposing them to the materially oriented Europeans and Americans", and a second, more politically charged variety, "in which Japan was seen as the rightful, indispensable leader of an alliance of Asian nations in a struggle against European and American colonial powers". In this latter type of pan-Asianism, writes Jaffe, "Japan, because of her successful modernization, military might, and cultural sophistication, was the only nation capable of leading other Asians in their struggle with Europe and the United States".

Here was a Japanese "tourist" altogether different from the Japanese tourists we know of today.

In the political imagination of modern India, Japan is the land that gave succour to Subhas Chandra Bose and his Indian National Army (INA). In the technological imagination of modern India, Japan is the land that will quickly and efficiently connect the trading centres of Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Seeking Sakyamuni takes us back to a time before the INA and the bullet train, when the two countries were brought together by the interest of spiritually inclined Japanese in the greatest of all Indians.

Conclusion

India is in the throes of promoting Buddhist tourism in a bid to attract more tourists from countries with sizable Buddhist populations, including Japan, as part of a strategy to boost foreign tourist arrivals.

India is not only organizing an international Buddhist conclave every alternate year but is also aggressively developing a Buddhist Circuit which connects key places associated with the Buddhist heritage to attract more Buddhist tourists We are receiving a minuscule number of Buddhist tourists...just 0.005 percent of the total Buddhist population in the world despite being a key pilgrimage destination for millions of practicing Buddhists around the world.

The idea is, even if we are able to remove one zero and make it 0.05 percent, that'll still bring in billions of dollars into our tourism economy.

As part of its plan to promote India's Buddhism tourism among Japanese travelers, the South Asian nation's tourism office in Tokyo sponsored visits of 10 Japanese tour operators, opinion leaders and journalists for

the biennial International Buddhist Conclave in 2014 and invited six Japanese travel industry people again in 2016 to attend the conclave.

The first Indo-Japan Tourism Council and Indo-Japan Tourism Summit were also held in New Delhi in 2016 to explore opportunities to expand travel and tourism between the two countries.

According to the latest tourism ministry report, the number of Japanese tourist arrivals in India in 2016 totaled 208,847, compared with only 29,032 in 1981, reflecting growing business and cultural ties between the two countries.

"The majority of these Japanese visiting India are business tourists accounting over 60 percent, while the rest accounts for leisure tourism" such as trips to Buddhist sites in India, a senior tourism ministry official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

According to the govt officials, popular Buddhist sites among Japanese and other foreign tourists include Bodhgaya, Nalanda, Rajgir, Kushinagar, Sarnath, Sanchi, Ajanta Caves, Dhauli and Dharamshala.

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