

# The role of Creative Stories in rejuvenating tourist destinations

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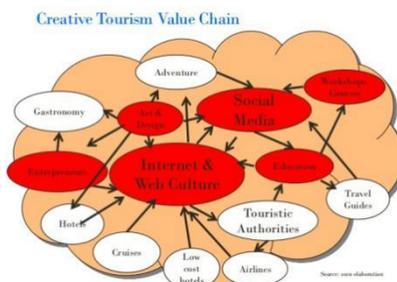
## ABSTRACT

With globalisation at its helm has led to a fierce competitions in marketing destinations. It has left the world competing to find means of attracting tourist flow to their country. The intangible characteristics of tourism destination and services makes it impossible for travellers to try it before consumption. The image of a destination or a travellers perception of the place, influences their decision to visit them. In order to meet this challenge destination branding has surfaced and is now an activity undertaken by many marketing organisations. Story telling exceeds writing, and in modern times has wider perspective. It has stretched itself to enlivening history. Digital platforms have propagated an opportunity for interactive story telling. Self – revealing stories are created for their invigorating and remedial effect. Stories are a means for sharing experiences that can bridge cultural, linguistic and political divides and is adaptive for all ages.

Creative Story telling has emerged as one of the successful strategy offering multiple benefits such as improving the image, counterfeiting competition, contributing to the sustainability and towards overall development of the destination. Stories are innovative strategies and tool contributing in engaging visitors and stakeholders. Story telling helps marketers develop deeper connections with the audience. This study investigates the effect of stories on decisions to choose destination for visit. Since long tourists have always been curious to know the history of the place of visit and stories have been able to revive the past. Therefore it is necessary to have a portfolio of interesting, positive stories and equally effective channels of communication to reach out to the prospective visitor. Story telling has been proved as an impetuous means to bring about psychological and social change in the practice of transformative arts. Stories unravel beyond the mindset and mechanics of simply selling a product or service. And when consumers connect with the stories, it leads to a prominent buy-in metaphorically.

## 1. Introduction

Creative tourism is often bemused with cultural tourism. Cultural tourism deals with viewing, pondering, touring physical places of historic importance, museums, and cultural performances etc., whereas creative tourism involves experiencing, learning and actual participating in events. It involves satisfaction of the consumers self esteem. The value creation for creative tourism requires many contributors who create a value chain. These stakeholders get involved in creating a narrative for the story.



Modern travellers look for more than just site visit. They expect a meaningful and memorable experience that can bring about a transformation in them. They want to carry back a story to tell others, these are nothing but the creativity they experienced, new learning's, networking with global co-travellers. Visual oriented social media platform such as Facebook, Instagram, and you Tube.

## 2. Developing tourism audience by Creative Story Telling

The basic fundamentals of Creative story telling demands unique narratives which have the ability to create

A sense of belonging amongst the community

A counter active interaction and engagement with the audience

Ability to convert followers into the role of promoters

To inspire prospective consumers by involving them into the process, implementing their ideas and inviting the response from the audience.

There has to be a holistic collaboration amongst all the stakeholders at the destination which includes destination management organizations, public administration, public and private service providers and actual story tellers. This can be achieved through workshops, focus groups, expert meetings, sensitizing local community, engagement with visitors, travelers and destination followers.

### 3. Destination Storytelling Process

1. SWOT analysis – Analysis of the destination becomes the starting point of the story
2. Audience Scrutiny – One has to identify the target audience, study their aspirations, cultural background, travel pattern, global awareness, demographic characteristics, relation with the destination, competing destination, and social media habits.
3. Conceptualization, authentication, Commercialization – Novel ideas could be formulated by brain storming, lateral thinking, through workshops, online contests and surveys, social media campaigns, and active participation of stakeholders. The outcomes will help explore various themes to develop and compose the storytelling narrative. There could be multiple themes for every destination. Once a destination has its brand identity, then story telling provides visibility and sense of ownership.
4. Once the ideas are conceptualized the storyline has to be validated i.e translated into actual events through programs that can be commercialized e.g festivals, exhibitions, lectures, guided tours, role play safaris, food festivals etc.
5. Engagement with the audience through the transmedia for delivery of the scripted story – Once the story line has been confirmed, the storytellers have to work on the dissemination process.

Rejuvenating a brand is required to revive or revamp a brand that is naturally going through a stage of decline in its life cycle. This is obvious when the products or services are not selling well enough. The reason for this change could be – consumers have found a replacement, the brand is unable to fulfill its promise, the product has become obsolete due to new entrants of competition, or perhaps the reason for which the brand was designed has no relevance, and the market is being capsized by the competitors.

Buying behavior are effected by change in demographics, social trends, culture which eventually results in customers rejecting or avoiding the product or services. At this stage we need to retrospect whether the producer needs to transform or it is only the product that needs to be overhauled to make it more appealing. What ever may be makeover the end experience should be rejuvenating.

There are three levels of rejuvenation - make the brand trendy, watch your competitors, repositioning and finding better USPs for the destination. A holistic re-branding includes restoring logos, trade marks and giving a face-lift to the brand image. It also involves renewing existing product line or simply re-packaging for a fresh, modern-day look which would be appealing to re users as well as prospective new generation of consumers.

### 4. Story of Incredible India : A Case Study

It was in November 1982, the Indian government announced its first Tourism Policy which did not sound like a development plan but more of a competitive marketing statement. The idea centered around the thought of propelling India as a global destination. With this in mind the strategy adopted was to take full advantage of our national heritage and design a story and design a popular campaign for attracting tourists. The new policy was built around the 7-S Mantra of Swaagat (welcome), Soochanaa (information), Suvidhaa (facilitation), Surakshaa (security), Sahyog (cooperation), Sanrachnaa (infrastructure) and Safaai (cleanliness).

Further in 2002 the tourism ministry engaged the services of Ogilvy & Mather (India) to create a new campaign to increase tourist inflows into the country. The "Incredible India" campaign was launched with a series of television commercials and print advertisements. The campaign was based on striking pictures and themes related to India's cultural legacy. The aim of the campaign was "project India as a unique opportunity for physical invigoration, mental rejuvenation, cultural enrichment and spiritual elevation". In the first phase, the campaign was rolled out on major television channels (Discovery, Travel, BBC, CNN) between January and March 2002 to cover the regions like Europe, Asia, Middle East and Africa, Australia and New Zeland. The campaign also made an extensive use of the Internet. In March 2002, the official website of the tourism ministry ([www.tourismofindia.com](http://www.tourismofindia.com)) was revamped to make it more attractive and functional. Travellers could even use the website to plan their trip to India.

In the second phase of the online campaign, from December 2002 to March 2003, about 100 unique creative stories on themes like spirituality, yoga etc. were put-upon. To increase the revisits, several online contests were also held during the period. During 2003, the print campaign focused mainly on spirituality. The aim of the spirituality campaign was to attract the elite, wealthy and busy people from the western countries who were finding ways to recharge themselves. Renuka Chaudhry, the then tourism minister said. "We want to push wellness and spiritual tourism in a big way. We want visitors to spend a few days at an Ayurveda spa and go back rejuvenated in mind and spirit." In 2004, in addition to launching a centralized electronic media campaign under "Incredible India", the Government of India announced its intention to make efforts to improve tourist information facilities at important tourist destinations and circuits, upgrade hotel infrastructure improve approach roads to important tourist sites and enhance air connectivity as well as air seat capacity. The tourism ministry also organized road shows in Europe. From August 2004 to March 2005, digital brochures were placed on major websites like Yahoo!, Rediff, etc., and ads for promotional DVDs were carried in major business and special interest magazines. Incredible India postcard inserts were also placed along with all railway tickets bought online. In view of the immense popularity that the game of cricket enjoyed in India, "Incredible India" polls based on cricket were placed on major Indian portals and websites to promote domestic tourism. In the same period, the ministry of tourism held a photography contest, which was advertised on major Indian websites, the contest required participants to send photos depicting unique aspects of India and explain why they felt their entry, was "uniquely Indian". The participants stood to win an all expense paid 4-day/5-night trip to a destination within India.

As part of the "Incredible India" campaign, live online chats with "Incredible Indians" were arranged in February 2005 on [Indiachats.com](http://Indiachats.com). Some of the celebrities who participated in the chats were Rohit Bal (fashion designer), Amman and Ayaan Ali (Indian classical musicians), Sanjeev Kapoor (chef and host of popular culinary shows on TV), Shankar Mahadevan (music

composer and singer), Kiran Bedi (police officer). In March 2005, ministry of tourism announced its proposal to form a panel of ad agencies that would be responsible for the literature, brochures, website and other works related to the "Incredible India" campaign. The ministry selected 15 agencies including O & M, the agency, which had handled the account until then out of forty-eight agencies expressed their interest in participating. The other agencies, which were selected, were Grey, Leo Burnett, Lintas IMAG, RK Swamy BBDO, Indian Tourism Development Corporation, Vivid India Advertising, Crayons Advertising, BAG Films, Opal Advertising, Span Communications and Pamm Advertising.

In March 2005, a TV campaign "Let us go to India" was launched in Japan and a campaign "Walk with Buddha" in Thailand and China. Several road shows were also organized as part of the "Incredible India" campaign in Milan, Paris, and cities in Serbia and other East European countries. A tram in Berlin, Germany was painted with the "Incredible India" colours and it reportedly became the talk of the town for the top ten countries for tourists to India. In 2005, the tourism ministry launched several innovative schemes such as "Athithi devo bhava", "rural tourism", and "Priyadarshini" under the "Incredible India" umbrella. The Athithi devo bhava (the guest is God) programme was a social awareness initiative of the ministry to sensitize the general Indian public to the importance of treating foreign tourists with respect and courtesy. As part of the programme, taxi drivers, guides, immigration officers, tourist police and other people in select cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Agra, and Aurangabad, who interacted directly with tourists, were trained on personal hygiene, etiquette.

The "rural tourism" scheme had the twin objectives of showcasing the uniqueness of the arts, crafts, and heritage of rural India and helping the rural folk benefit from tourism. In the first phase, 63 rural areas were identified and Rs. 5 mn. was allotted to each area for upgrading approach roads, landscaping, cleaning water bodies, maintaining monuments, etc. The ministry joined hands with NGOs to provide a unique experience of rural India to discerning tourists. An exclusive website - [www.explorerruralindia.org](http://www.explorerruralindia.org) - was also launched. Similarly, under the "Priyadarshini" scheme, the ministry made efforts to bring more women into tourism-related areas. For example, women were trained to drive vehicles so that they could become tourist taxi drivers. The ministry reportedly spent Rs. 1 bn on the "Incredible India" campaign in 2005. In early 2006, the tourism ministry organized an online contest called "Come to Paradise". The contest co-sponsored by the domestic airline, Indian, required participants to answer questions on the airline and on the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir. The prize was a 4-day/5-night vacation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Impact of the "Incredible India" Campaign the Government of India formulated policies and prepared pamphlets and brochures for the promotion of tourism even before 2002 also; however, it did not support tourism in a concerted fashion. As a result, the country attracted very few tourists. A country like France, six times smaller than India, attracted around 20 times the number of tourists that India managed to draw. This was the case in spite of the fact that the France not being able to offer the sheer variety in terms of geography, culture and experiences that India could. It is an indication of the extent to which the efforts of the previous governments to promote tourism had been unsuccessful. However, the tourism ministry made a conscious effort in 2002 to bring in more professionalism in its attempts to promote tourism. It formulated an integrated communication strategy with the aim of promoting India as a destination of choice for the discerning traveller.

Although the Incredible India campaign was well received, industry observers differed in their opinions on the positioning of India in the campaign. As India is not a one-dimensional country like Singapore or the Maldives, therefore, using a word like incredible to describe India as a whole seemed inappropriate. The best way to present this complex nation was to ask the people to Discover India. It was argued that the content of the ads seem to focus on rural women spinning around with pots on their heads. There is nothing wrong with pushing our history, but by dropping some stuff from modern India we cannot change people's perceptions. India must be marketed as a nation where futurism runs alongside traditions. Some others felt that no doubt, the heritage should be used extensively in the communication campaign. But the heritage aspect alone would not help in the long run and therefore, the country should diversify its tourism products. India needs to be positioned on multiple platforms in multiple markets. There had been over use of images of the Taj Mahal in the "Incredible India" campaign. The ad campaigns depict the Taj with a clean blue Yamuna river flowing nearby, but that was not the reality. Hence the theme was changed.

## 5. Conclusion.

Stories related to a destination can be effectively used in theme development and promotion campaign. A storytelling approach can be used for strategic destination identity development, branding and marketing in long term, multi-actor and multi-level process. In order to have impact on destination branding by storytelling, the destination management organisation must establish active multidisciplinary group efforts in tourism industry. In order to realize successful communication between visitors and destination, the stories must be transmitted by verbs, objects, experiences, places and characters. Storytelling efforts may rise local community awareness and thus be important for strategic destination identity development, branding and marketing. Stories can be used as a framework for organizing destination components like transport, hotel and restaurant if they convey the core values of a destination. Using "locality" or a theme reflecting local original/unique/genuine/distinctive qualities in destination brand communication becomes more acceptable. Our research contributes to the literature in which it analyzes the phenomenon of destination brand communication by storytelling.

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