PERSPECTIVES OF INDIAN TOURISM IN PANDEMIC PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

Recently, nations are struggling to mitigate the impact of the unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak on their economy. Many countries have imposed traveling restrictions to reduce people's movement in order to avoid infection transmission but it has jeopardized the tourism industry around the globe. If the situation persists, it will become challenging for the nations to open tourism. For this reason, the digitalization of tourism is a viable solution. However, it is essential to map whether digital technologies can provide alternative solutions to this situation and can replace conventional tourism? With that backdrop, in the context of Indian tourism, this study has focused on two objectives: firstly to analysis critically, the role of digital technologies in the context of economic growth and secondly to predict the perspectives of domestic tourism in the post pandemic scenario. The study is based on secondary data. The findings of the study reveal that stakeholders of Indian tourism and hospitality sectors should reinforce and stimulate the process and systems, to perform in a better way, with more of technology-based innovative ideas at low cost and to push domestic tourism for the revival of tourism industry.

Key words: Indian tourism, future perspectives, pandemic period, digital technology

INTRODUCTION

The tourism & hospitality sector has been universally recognized as the growth of expansion and an engine for socio- economic growth all over the world. Tourism and hospitality sectors bring wealth and fortunes to generate employment to the local residents. India has still untapped potential in this sector. This sector is one of the biggest

and fastest-growing sectors. It has been considered as a vulnerable industry. The hospitality and tourism industry gets more contrived due to any external or internal blow or distress. Viewed this way, the latest outbreak of the Corona (covid-19)virus has caused havoc across the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has compact and prostrate storm to the tourism and hospitality sectors. This is catastrophe and worst disaster ever to hit hard to Indian hospitality and tourism sector collision with all the world and compass-Inbound, outbound, state and national almost all the levels of the tourism and hospitality verticals – free time-leisure, entertainment, experience-adventure, legacy, meetings, incentives and conference, cruise ship, corporate, and niche products. The entire world- class chains hotel, travel booking agents, tour operators/ operations, high-end restaurants, entertainment venues, and air, land, and seas have completed hit with biggest disaster pandemic of the last year 2020.

Tourism is currently one of the most affected sectors. During the coronavirus pandemic lockdown in India and worldwide, this sector has come to a standstill. The shutting down of the iconic places in India which includes Taj Mahal, QutubMinar, Red Fort entertainment industries, events, temples, mosques and church which attracted over seven million tourist and visitors. the lockdown has also led to the closure of pilgrimage sites and affecting local small businesses and employment thriving around them and the slowdown is expected to last for a period stretching from March to till July 2020, its state that toughest part of the state's coincides with off seasons, moreover the tourism and hospitality sectors and will see the cash flows only beginning to improve in September 2020 and will get standard level by end of 2020. But unfortunately, due to the second wave of coronavirus starting from March 2021 in India, this sector is again facing problems which are witnessed through lockdown in second time and to maintain social distance and maintaining distance and other protocol announced by Government of India. According to medical teams and experts the coronavirus pandemic will be there for minimum 02 years moreover, the fear of travelling and maintaining social distance and taking the precautions is very essential by wearing face masks, hotels also have to start with operational business by looking at the safest zone and other states. Hotels and restaurants must also take come up with the survival strategies and plans and look into cut down the cost, virtualization, orderliness, integration which we can able to tap domestic market with proper standards and looking the cleanliness and hygiene in monitoring the guest by checking and offering quarantine facilities in coordination with medical officers.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Recently, nations are struggling to mitigate the impact of the unprecedented COVID-19

outbreak on their economy. Many countries have imposed traveling restrictions to reduce people's movement in order to avoid infection transmission but it has jeopardized the tourism industry around the globe. Just when the tourism industry had seen 'a ray of hope' in the beginning of the New Year 2021, the pandemic has come back with greater fury. Things are, so to say, back to square one. If the situation persists, it will become challenging for the nations to open tourism.However even in this unfolding gloom there is optimism—that with the coverage of most of the population with vaccination and with higher herd immunity the pandemic will settle down in a few months and tourism can be revived.For this reason, the digitalization of tourism is a viable solution. But it is very crucial for tourism and hospitality sector to investigate how innovative techniques use in service delivery will impact operations, employees, and customers i.e. tourists. Furthermore, it is critical to identify the factors, both physical and psychological, that can influence tourists and employees' acceptance of digital techniques use in service delivery. Hence, it is essential to map in the context of Indian tourism whether digital technologies can provide alternative solutions to this situation and can replace conventional tourism? As we all know that India is a developing country and is trying to adopt and use digital technologies in the field of tourism with latest techniques but due to various drawbacks in the practical ground, Indian tourism is still struggling for revival. With that backdrop, in the context of Indian tourism, this study has focused on the perspectives of Indian tourism in the pandemic period.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

There are two objectives of our study-

(i) To analysis critically, the role of digital technologies in the context of economic growth.

(ii) To predict the perspectives of domestic tourism in the post pandemic scenario.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary data. Many research papers, articles, survey reports and newspapers and magazine articles are studied to explore the topic. Only Corona time period i.e. from 2020 to 2021 is considered for the study. Besides it, few papers and articles beyond this period are also reviewed for this study. The Annual reports of Ministry of tourism, Govt. of India, Market research and statistics records of MOI, GOI, Annual reports of World Tourism Organisation and many more have been reviewed to analyse the status of Indian tourism in this pandemic period.

IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON INDIAN TOURISM

Digitalization is changing the traditional way of tourism in recent times. The digital

preview provokes elaboration towards the imagery and robust sense of presence. The virtual reality is significant in triggering tourists to "daydream" about staying offers before experiencing themat the destination's premises. Virtual reality in tourism offers more meaningful content for tourism. It is also opening new understandings and intentions for destination tourism.The virtual environment increases tourists' enjoyment through the VR experience. It indicates that positive attitude change leads to a higher level of visitation intention to a tourist destination. In this way, the digital technologies are shaping consumer attitudes and behaviour towardsvirtualreality. Virtual reality is avital key component in the situated experiential education environment and influences the tourists to participate in the virtual spaces.

In fact, Real-world experiences are a costly andtime-consuming process. For that need, very long visa processing and permissionsfor thecountries' tourism destinations and during this pandemic period people are refused entry in the host country.Then the plan to visit places significantly increases by virtualreality attachment. Thetourists visiting destinations aremore likely attached to virtual reality.However, cultural tourism is also very much beneficialthrough virtual reality applications. The virtualreality is mediating the relationship betweenexperience and emotional feelings. However it is true that virtual reality perceptions and attitudes also largely depend on the underdevelopedanddeveloped nations' education toward tourism and technology. India is also trying to adopt and adjust with the virtualreality as a developing nation.The low GDP and economically positioned India lacks theinfrastructure to support the virtual reality tour andcannot promote thematter. Although various high-tech devices and techniques such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, robotics adaptation are some new emerging tools in the experience and design enhancement todevelop the tourism andhospitality industry, Indian tourism will have to work hard on adapting technological development and transformational technology to the event industry's vital users. In thispandemic period, the use of transformational or digital technology in the tourism sector definitely will be suitable for the future visitors as well as the prosperous growth of tourism and hospitality industry.

But as they say nothing is perfect and very good thing has a down side, but in context of Domestic tourism and in today's India the cons or limitations outweighs the pros. One basic requirement of VR is high speed internet access across anywhere in India and this is something still desirable as far as India is concerned. Also Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) for imbibing these technological tools and Hardware is immense which can hardly be borne by many, especially considering today's scenario where COVID Lockdown has made many organisations bankrupt or are on verge of it. Maximum are struggling to

survive. One more factor that Indians' expect more than any other nations is emotional and personal connect along with the sense of touch i.e. actually having a feel of it and this is a big hindrance with regard to Virtual tourism.Virtual reality events are innovative and an extension of the entertainment industry, but the replacement of live events and tours is not yet here. What remains evident is that the current form of virtual reality does not provide the social and sensory gratifications of live events. Hence, we can state that though these technological tools are the way ahead but in present scenario these are still in nascent stage especially with regard to domestic tourism in India.

PERSPECTIVES OF DOMESTIC TOURISM IN THIS PANDEMIC PERIOD

In India, there is no doubt that the first push for revival of tourism will come from domestic tourism. Even during the brief lull in the pandemic when travel and movement restrictions were eased, the pent-up demand had filled up resorts and destinations near metropolitan cities. India has huge tourism attractions of very wide variety—nature, wildlife, mythology, history, culture, heritage. Even when tourism has been absent, Ministry of Tourism has kept the campaign for domestic tourism – 'DekhoApnaDesh' - in full swing. To make domestic tourism an engine of inclusive growth lot of efforts have to go into creating suitable infrastructure like communication facilities to make travel easy and affordable, accommodation that caters to health and hygiene standards, imaginative wayside facilities and sustainable destination development. If the local community has to benefit economically, local craft, cuisine, culture have to be integrated to destination development. To create a good experience, authentic and effective story telling is also essential. Trained local guides can fill up this gap. It is heartening to note that the draft Tourism Policy of the government has put professional destination management with the involvement of the local community as a priority area.

The details of domestic and foreign tourist's visits in pre and during pandemic period as per Indian tourism statistics are as under-

Years	2018		2019		2020	
Indian tourism statistics	**Number**	**Annual Growth Rate**	**Number**	**Annual Growth Rate**	**Number**	**Annual Growth Rate**
Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India	10.56 Million	5.20%	10.93 Million	3.50%	7.17 Million	-77.20%
Domestic Tourist Visits to all States/UTs	1854.9 Million	11.90%	2321.98 Million	25.30%	610.22 Million	-73.70%

Foreign Tourist Inflow to India April 2021

The following are the important highlights regarding FTAs and FTAs on e-Tourist Visa during the month of April, 2021.

l   **FTAs in April, 2021 were 69442 as compared to 470 in April, 2020 registering a growth of 14674.9%. Since the year 2020 and 21 is not a normal year due to Covid Pandemic, therefore data for the month of April Shows an abnormal growth.**

l   **FTAs during the period January- April, 2021 were 376083 as compared to 23, 57,877 in January- April, 2020 registering a negative growth of -84.0%.**

As per above data, it is quite evident that foreign tourist inflow is very minimal and is not enough to even sustain the infrastructure. Hence, in this pandemic major thrust should be on Domestic Tourism in order to maintain the tourism related infrastructure and logistics as well as the sustainability in this sector. That's why we have to give priority to local than global to revive this industry. We need to focus on "region" basis for the coming few months to restore the tourism sectorand the local economy. Every state has certain regions which are completely dependent on tourism economy. Every individual, business house, administrators, local tourist bodies who are the stakeholders of this region have certain responsibility towards the region as the economy of this region is dependent on the tourism activity. If the tourism activity reduces, it will have a cascading impact on all the people who are dependent on this sector directly or indirectly. Local tourist bodies need to take this opportunity to improve the cleanliness and hygiene of these areas with the help of local administrators and the State Government. The State govt. has a very important role along with local tourism bodies to promote local tourist attractions to the people of this region with a view to make local or regional people as stakeholder of the industry. State Govt. needs to spend on public utilities and more amenities which would promote the new social distancing norms. The localtourist bodies along with the local administration (or State Tourism Department) is required to come out with guidelines(SOP) on how to sanitize rooms, camps and running restaurants, how to run taxis with maximum number of passengers, trekking lodges and such related issues which will also give confidence among the local residents.

Hotels and restaurants must also take come up with the survival strategies and plans and look into cut down the cost, virtualization, orderliness, integration which we can able to tap domestic market with proper standards and looking the cleanliness and hygiene in monitoring the guest by checking and offering quarantine facilities in coordination with

medicalofficers. Despite all the challenges it is important to create positivecommunication in news and social media platformslikeWhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter for the awareness of potentialtourists and guests by maintaining international advertising through the campaign which is a crucial point in promotingIndian tourism and hospitality industry by making them alert,making them understand of good practices, using sanitizers,washing hands for 30 seconds and maintain socialdistanceetc.. Allowing guests to book hotels in modified dates withflexibility and flexible-rates can change dates withkeystrategy to get hotel bookings and even allow modification ofcancellation in emergencies.It is always useful to endorse theword Flexibility as the bestpromotions for tourism and hospitality in this pandemic period which will able to pullup a lot of guests and help in increasingroom revenue byensuring strict hygiene policy and making ease availability ofhand sanitizers for guest who checks in hotels andrestaurants or take away. Due to the present situation of Covid-19, it shows fear oftraveling in city limits needs to attractpeople with remoteplaces and accommodation centres which will be a goodstrategy to attract tourists like resorts or eco-hotels.

CONCLUSION

The only thing that can be said with certainty about the future is that nothing can be said with certainty. Recovery outlook, according to UNWTO remains cautious. Its panel of experts expects revival to happen only in 2022 at the earliest. 43% of experts expect return to the level of 2019 by 2023 while 41 % believe it will be only in 2024 or later. Responsible tourism that caters to creating a sustainable experience and safe hygienic destinations is possible when the responsibility is shared by all the stakeholders—government, local community, tourists and service providers in the private sector --- in partnership. Such responsibility brings in some elements of accountability.

Hence, Central government authorities and state and local authorities have to forecast the significance and grow initially the domestic or local tourism homebound of the community as an immediate effect, mostly the tourism products related to health, healing, well-being, ayurvedic and cultural and medicine with the market segments to the travellers, however, domestic tourism bound towards attractions, events and festivals will be stable after the Covid-19 pandemic. Digital media have to play a major role in terms of promoting domestic tourism incollaboration with the local hotels, restaurants and tour operators to support the local business and help in increasingthe Indian economy. Tourism and hospitality sectors stakeholders should reinforced and stimulated to rethink the process and systems to perform in a better way with innovative ideas and cutting down unnecessary cost, skill training and should lift the new start-ups with doing right

things at right time and more oftechnology-based innovationswith low-cost production anddelivery and making the process convenient to the people bypromoting and offering discounts onentry fees orvisa entry permits fees.Financial implications can be in the form of allocating extrabudget to foster tie-ups for mutual publicity with domestic and foreign tourist associations, airlines and hotels. Forinvolvement of state tourismdepartments in the hospitalityscheme, a list of destinations with status reports ondestination development as per parametersof destination development scheme of the ministry; should be invited anddestinations should be selected for international exposure.Indianchambers committee of representatives has proposed acomplete GST holiday or offering destination vouchers fortourism,travel, and hospitality industry for the next 12months till the time of the recovery healing happens and urgeto ministry toprovide funds from the MGNREGA scheme tosupport the salaries of employees and other workers. Hashtag #India welcomesyou back-Develop suitablemessaging and advertising campaigns for tourism andhospitality during the crisis. Once the crisisweakens, promoteIndia aggressively. The Incredible India and make in Indiacampaign henceforth must be driven withplanning assistancefrom industry associations, as they will be able to give real-timepulse and need of the market and ready tosupport recovery. Learning for hospitality industry (issues of sick leaves/higher wages cost/business continuity) is that we must continue with ourwork life balance approach post normalcy. Hotels to continue sending people on leaves (PLs) etc. so that we must not come backto the old mindframe (sic) of long work hours and related issues of working in hotels. Employees also need to learn to support theorganisations in turbulent times by being flexible in consumption of leaves and not just saving it for monetary gains.

Therefore, tourism recovery typically begins locally. Tourists prefer short-distance traveling, and their priority normally goes to easier way of experiencing travel; however, providing comfort zone can encourage the tourists to go beyond traveling domestic. People intrinsically are curious to experience, and the conditions can motivate them to go beyond. According to a report by Kiesnoski (2020), there are more future reservations for the holidays now, compared to the same period last year, which indicates that many people who are unable to travel at present are planning for later in the year?

The technology integration and adoption into tourism and hospitality operations will likely be integral in the near future. Recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI) and social service robot technologies have enabled the use of AI technologies in service delivery and the Covid-19 pandemic may precipitate the popularity of such technology for public safety reasons. Therefore, it is crucial for Indiantourism and hospitality sector

to go with digital technology or artificial intelligence, virtual reality and digital technology along with promotion of domestic tourism. The stakeholders of Indian tourism and hospitality sectors should reinforce and stimulate the process and systems, to perform in a better way, with more of technology-based innovative ideas at low cost and to push domestic tourism for the revival of tourism.

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