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## Leveraging the Power of the Media for Tourism Promotion in India

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### **Abstract:**

*The thrust of this paper is to highlight the multidimensional issues of modern tourism and present the role of the media in the development and growth of the industry. The paper acknowledges the fact that India has recorded some remarkable milestones in the tourism sector. It further postulates that the industry is currently underperforming as it holds huge untapped potential. To remedy the situation, the author argues that media convergence is a vital player in catalyzing local, national and international tourism business development and inter-cultural dependency between India and the world. The presentation of the paper is informed by the relevant literatures in the subject area (Okaka, 2007).*

*India's rich history, heritage sites, unique cultural diversity and geopolitical position within the broader Asian continent makes its tourism industry viable and vibrant to boost the larger economy in both financial and non-financial terms; if well managed in association with better media relations. Thus this paper focuses on the need for a deliberate and purpose-driven synergy between the media industry and the tourism industry for a more robust development and promotion of the tourism industry.*

**Keywords:** Tourism in India, Media industry, synergy, internet users

### **1. Introduction**

Tourism has taken a center stage in the world and many more countries are competing to become top tourism destinations and subsequently increase their earnings from the industry as shares of their GDP. India is not left out in this global quest. The World Travel and Tourism Council (2015) stated that \$120 billion USD (8.31 Lakh Crore) was generated by the Indian government from tourism activities in 2015.

Besides the direct benefits, within the same year under review, tourism supported 37.315 million jobs, accounting for 8.7% of total employment in the country.

The official campaign to promote India as a popular tourist destination was launched in 2012 by the India's ministry of tourism. The phrase "Incredible India" was adopted as a slogan by the ministry (TNN, 2005).

In view of the above stated facts coupled with the vast human and natural resources of the nation, it will be right to argue in favour of the assertion that the various stakeholders of tourism and media industries are yet to strategically unbound the immense unexploited benefits that a dynamic synergy between tourism and media can provide to any nation.

Radio broadcasting and television programming in India started in 1927 and 1959 respectively. Almost 150 years early, 1780 to be specific, the first major newspaper in India- The Bengal Gazette was started under the British Raj by James Augustus Hickey (Burrax and Rao, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Desai, 2006).

From such humble beginning, Indian media has grown to its present enviable status as it can currently boast of more "than 70,000 newspapers and over 690 satellite channels (more than 80 are news channels) and is the biggest newspaper market in the world - over 100 million copies sold each day" (Biswas, 2012).

Despite the aforementioned strength and reach of the Indian media industry it has lagged beyond in promoting tourism. The present state of the media was clearly captured by the renowned professor, Sen (2012) when he said:

- We have every reason to applaud our free media, including our largely unfettered press, as a hugely important asset for democratic India. And yet the celebration of the Indian media can go only so far – and no further. There are at least two huge barriers to quality that are very worth discussing: one is concerned with the internal discipline of the media and the other relates to the relation between the media and society.

Evidently, not till the issues of "internal discipline of the media and the other relates to the relation between the media and society" are properly dealt with will the media be able to participate meaningfully in the national tourism promotion discourse.

### 1.1. Need for the Study

India in recent time through the “incredible India” campaign to position India as a top-class tourist destination has witnessed commendable success. This success cuts across returns on investment, tourist inflow into India, job creation in the tourism industry – development of cultural and heritage sites among other success stories.

The study sets out to explore this success stories and examine the place of the media industry in enhancing the campaign and further promoting the tourism sector.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The following are the major objectives of the paper

1. To study the current state of the tourism industry in India
2. To understand the need for media participation in the development and promotion of tourism in India

## 3. Review of Literature

A broad definition of tourism was put forward by the World Tourism Organization (1995) as an activity which goes “beyond the common perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only,” but inclusively as people “travelling to and staying in places out their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes.” This definition expands the scope and breath of the concept of tourism. It also calls for the review of our national tourism policy as many categories of persons and activities are not adequately catered for by our present understanding of tourism and its practices.

### 3.1. Forms of Tourism

Similarly, tourism has been identified by United Nations (1994) to be in three forms:

1. Domestic Tourism- This involves residents of the given country travelling only within the country. Example is a resident of New Delhi travelling to Rajasthan. Both places are within India
2. Inbound Tourism - This has to do with non-residents travelling in the given country. Example is a resident of Kenya travelling to Pune, India for leisure or business, etc.
3. Outbound Tourism - Involving residents travelling in another country. Example will include an Indian travelling to Rio, Brazil for holiday

In India, the Ministry of Tourism is nodal agency for the formulation of national policies and programmes and for the coordination of activities of various governments and the private sector for the development and promotion of tourism in the country. The ministry is headed by the Secretary who doubles as the Director General of Tourism.

### 3.2. Definition of Media

Media is categorized into traditional media and social media

1. Traditional media-refers to television, radio, newspaper, magazines, newsletter and other print publications. Examples are Times of India, The Economist, and Wall Street Journal.
2. Social Media- refers to the new generation of digital, computerized or networked information and communication technologies. Examples of social media are Twitter, Google, MySpace, YouTube and Facebook.

### 3.3. Milestones of Indian Tourism Industry

Statista (2016), WTTC (2015) and Economic Times (2015) provide data that show that India has recorded some verifiable milestones in the tourism industry in recent time.

1. Indian medical tourism sector was estimated to be worth \$3 billion USD and to grow to \$7-8 billion USD in 2020.
2. 8.02 million tourists arrived in India 2015.
3. Domestic tourist visits to all states and Union Territories numbered 1.03 billion in 2012.
4. Worldwide, Chennai is ranked 38 by the number of foreign tourists, while Mumbai is ranked at 50, Delhi at 52 and Agra at 66 and Kolkata at 99.
5. In terms of competitiveness, India ranks 52nd out of 141 countries overall according to the Travel and Tourism. Competitiveness Report 2015.
6. In terms of price competitiveness, India stands at 8th out 141.
7. 35(27 cultural, 7 natural and 1 mixed) World Heritage Sites in India recognized by UNESCO as on July 2016.
8. Tourism is the largest service industry in India.

It's not only the number of inbound tourists that is growing in India; Indian nationals are travelling more too. Departure of nationals grew from just 4.42 million in 2000 to more than 18 million in 2014. However, far fewer Indian nationals travel internationally than domestically-domestic tourist visits exceeded one billion for the first time in 2012(Statista, 2016).

India is going through an important phase of tourism development and the media industry has a key role to play in this transition. Development of communication is one of the best ways to go in developing eco-tourism in India.

3.4. Potential of the Global Media



Figure 1: Sourced from Statista (2016)



Figure 2: Sourced from Statista (2016)

The data in Figures 1 and 2 show the most recent development in internet usage worldwide. It unveils a world of opportunity for any country genuinely willing to walk its talk as far as tourism promotion is concern. In Asia-Pacific alone, from January 2015 to January 2016, there has been +12% (+199 Million) growth in the number of active internet, number of active social media users grew by +14% (145.8 Million) while there was a recorded increase of 4% (+155.6 Million) in the number of mobile connections and +21% (+187.3 Million) growth in the number of active mobile social users. Asia-Pacific performed above the global average in all areas except for number of mobile users. The India’s Ministry of Tourism can leverage on this.

On a global scale there are 7.3 billion humans on earth, 3.4 billion internet users, and 2.3 billion active social media users. So imagine the effect of employing a robust marketing communication strategy that engages both traditional media and the new media platforms with the aim of effectively reaching the 2.3 billion active social media users worldwide.

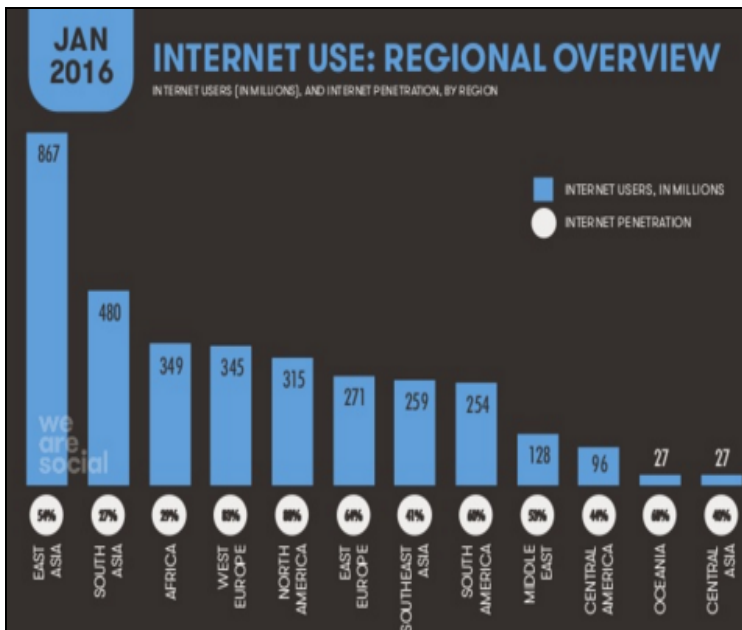


Figure 3: Sourced from Statista (2016)

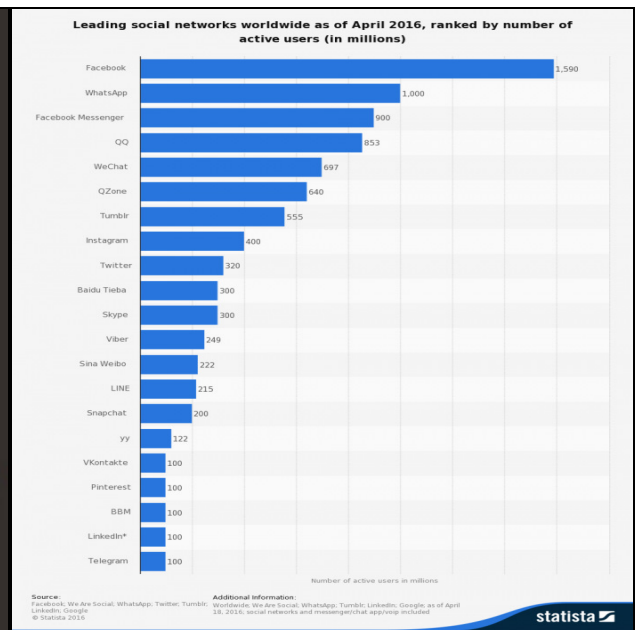


Figure 4: Sourced from Statista (2016)

The data in the Figures 3 and 4 show the regional overview of internet use and internet penetration. This data will enable the tourism industry to tailor its use of social media in its drive towards tourism promotion both within and beyond the shores of India. The data equally show the leading social networks worldwide as of April 2016, ranked by number of active users. Facebook and Whatsapp are the market leaders.

Chaffey (2016) added that “Asian-pacific is driving much of this growth, which internet usage rates high and of active social media users increasing 14% on the year before.” He subsequently noted that annual growth continues apace, particularly in the number of mobile social users which hit 17% in 2015.

### 3.5. Media and Tourism: A Synergy

It is acknowledged that the media both traditional and new media has made a tremendous impact on the tourism industry within its few years of existence. The relationship between tourism and media is dynamic, evolving and inclusive. The media serves as a mediator between tourism and society (Praveen Kumar, 2014).

A media that solely trade on the concept that bad news is good news will scare tourists away

Godaheva (2011) quoted the former UNWTO Secretary-General as once expressing the view that:

- Modern day tourism is highly dependent on media reporting. The world is now a global village and most tourists make their travel decisions based on information from multiple sources of media which include television, radio, newspapers, books, magazines, movies, and the internet (pg. 29).

The media is now a multi-faceted force in the lives of citizens of every nation. Media has broken every form of information barrier.

In exploring the role of media in tourism we must expand our imagination beyond the traditional media of television, radio, newspaper, etc. to the convergence of multi-media and news media including social media such as Facebook, mobile blogs, RSS feeders, Flickr, Twitter, and others. Each of these has a role in the future development and growth of tourism.

### 3.6. Stakeholders Engaging the Media

Some of the ways in which the government and tourism industry can engage the media industry are:

1. Government and policy-makers can directly use the various media platforms to promote environmental values and awareness.
2. Developing public campaigns in partnership with the media within and outside India for sustainable tourism in India.
3. Creation of a competitive tourism industry by encouraging to develop and implement a strategy to: recruit, retain, and promote qualified personnel.
4. Generate greater economic benefits for local people and enhance the well-being of host communities
5. Show commitment to minimizing the negative environmental and social impact of tourism

The stakeholders in the tourism industry must understand the primary role of the media and work in partnership with the industry to project and promote tourism in a win-win approach that avoids conflict with the core objectives of the media. Media when mishandled can have a disastrous effect on tourism.

To be able to efficiently and profitably utilize the media, tourism service providers and government must focus products improvements and satisfactory service delivery. When these two are lacking, it will become difficult to have a positive media representation or promotion of the destination.

### 3.7. Crises Reporting and Tourism

Cavicchi, Santini & Beccalele (2010), and Godaheva (2011) observed that there are many reported cases of where the media oversensationalized negative events and caused a widespread negative publicity thereby affecting the tourism industry. Instances include:

1. 1991 – Indian Economic crisis
2. 2001- the 9/11 attack on the world trade centre in USA
3. 2003- SAES outbreak in China
4. 2004- Indian ocean tsunami
5. 2011-japanese tsunami and nuclear crisis
6. 2008- Mumbai terrorist attack
7. 2008- Brunello wine crisis in Montalcino(Tuscany, Italy)
8. 2015-Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria
9. 2015 – Mali hotel hostage
10. 2016 – Venezuela economic crisis

Therefore, in responding to crises and public concerns on issues such as inadequate infrastructures, accessibility to tourist destination, insufficient trained manpower and poor visitor experiences, the media must balance 'the need to tell' with a sense of objectivity, national interest and social good.

### 3.8. Areas of Media Participation

In driving forward the tourism industry, the media is to play the following roles:

1. Reporting positive development in the country
2. Encouraging domestic tourism
3. Purposefully using priming theory as a means to create, raise, and sustain public awareness for a sustainable tourism and "eco-guard" behavior change (Baran and Davis, 2012).  
Priming provides the media the power by which certain portions of media content are brought to the forefront while other portions are relegated to the background
4. Making positive contribution to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and promoting the world's diversity.
5. Bringing the attention of the various stakeholders especially government and tourism product providers to cutting-edge development and other salient issues in the tourism world.

6. Creating a form or platform for the interaction of the service providers, policy-makers and tourism product-users in other to build a better understanding amongst them.

#### 4. Conclusion

A well-coordinated relationship between players in the media industry and tourism service providers can spur new prospect for the Indian tourism sector and the nation at large. Media have a social responsibility to enhance the blending of local, national and international cultural values for enriched politics, society and economy. While the government must plug the current leakages in the industry by reviewing its policies and seeking for new mutually beneficial ways to partner with the media industry locally and internationally to sell the brand “incredible India” to both domestic and foreign tourists. In a final word, if there is a time for a concrete collaboration between the two industries, it is now as the opportunities and gains are endless.

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