

TOURISM PRODUCT - A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Like the manufactured product, the potential tourists can't feel, touch, taste or sample a package tour. The tourism product is a non-material intangible thing. Every product is aimed at some market and its marketing success depends essentially on its 'fit' with the market. This makes it essential that the tourist professionals must continually strive for improving the effectiveness and increasing the profitability. More so when it is noticed as a multi-segment industry, the task of formulating a sound product mix for the tourist organisations is found a bit difficult and challenging. The challenge for the marketers is to transfer the dreams into the realities. It is the accepted fact that selling holiday is selling dreams. It is essential that the product offered to a target market must satisfy the users. Thus the formulation of a sound product mix includes a wide range of activities like designing a package tour, credit delivery services, branding etc. Thus the formulation of a sound product strategy focuses on the formulation of a sound product mix that makes possible designing of a profitable product portfolio by including and eliminating the core and peripheral services in the face of results received from the product portfolio. An optimal product strategy necessitates an in-depth study of the product life cycle. An amalgam of core and peripheral services needs a microscopic study of different services in order that the decisions related to inclusion, elimination are found productive. An expert rightly remarks, 'Strategically the core service is the primary benefit that consumers as a service industry matures. Consumers expect the organisation to be competent in offering the core service. The result is that peripheral services often become the way in which the customers' heart is won.

Keywords - Brand, Package Tour, Product/Market Matrix & Tourism Product Mix.

Introduction

The formulation of a product mix thus becomes an important task for marketing the tourism service profitably. The development of accommodation facilities by operating new classified and unclassified hotels, the channelization of safe, comfortable and fast

transportation facilities, availability of sophisticated communication facilities at tourist sites or hither and thither the sites and hotels, the taste-oriented restaurants are some of the important components of a package that the tourism product is a quite complex one, since it comprises a place (the holiday destination), service (a tour operator's package incorporating the temporary use of airline seat, hotel room and sometimes other facilities and on occasion certain tangible products such as free flight bags or a complementary bottle of duty free whisky to encourage booking. This makes it clear that the tourist organisations and to be more specific the professionals working there need world class excellence so that both the services are synchronised optimally and in the process, the peripheral services are innovated frequently to add additional attractions to the product. More attractions in the product, more positive results are expected from the tourism industry.

In view of the above, it is right to mention that the tourist professionals need excellence and there is no need for fixing any limit for the same. Sky is the limit for quality upgradation. A number of decisions are needed to be made to make the product mix sound enough to stimulate the demand and increase the market share. It is against this background that necessitates the need for going through a number of issues, such as salient features of services, the product mix, the formulation of an ideal tour packages or so.

Tourism Product Mix

The framing of product mix, no doubt, a challenging task since the marketing professionals are supposed to blend the core and peripheral services optimally. In the tourism industry, a deeper product line is found a must. This is due to the fact that needs, expectations, preferences of different categories of users can't be identical. The tourism marketers are required to be captive to deepen the product line so that the products match to the expectations. The extent to which the marketers are found successful in deepening and innovating the product line have a telling impact on the net gain or satisfaction.

Innovation in the tourism product assists raising the sensitivity. There is nothing fixed and fundamental about the tourism product. The users of the services look forward to quality product. This increases the functional responsibilities of a marketing professional. Modifying the product without touching their physical properties and offering the management with more profitable opportunities to capitalise on are found significant in the very context. The marketing professional while designing the product mix are to be careful that features like physical, psychological and peripheral are included in the mix. The context factors are within the jurisdiction of the government who bears the responsibility of developing, maintaining and conserving tourist attractions

like museums, parks, beaches, historical and archaeological treasures or so. Unless these factors are developed in a right fashion the marketing professional would hardly be successful in making the marketing resources productive. The context factors are, of late, found managed by both the public as well as private tourist organisations. Earlier, this responsibility was on the shoulders of private sector tourist organisations.

The designing of an ideal product mix is significant but it is not possible unless governmental organisation extending the best possible cooperation to the tourist organisation. The direct or indirect patronage of government is found essential to get a positive response. The development of infrastructural facilities is found an important dimension of tourism product. Unless hotels, apartments, cottages, lodges, old palaces available in a good number, the task of promoting the world tourism would hardly be fulfilled. To make it essential that for promoting tourism as an industry, the government extends to the different organisations the infrastructural facilities like transportation, road, electricity, medical facilities, water, banking, insurance and so on. The tourist organisations are also supposed to design a sound package so that the motivation to the tourists is found more creative. The synchronisation of different services requires utmost care to the quality of services.

The product mix for the tourism industry is given as below:

1. Accommodation - Five star, Three star, Two star, one star, cottages, havelis
2. Recreation - Theatre, Night life, Pubs, Music meeting, get together
3. Restaurant - Western, Chinese, Indian, Italian, Others
4. Attraction - Natural scenes, Historic, artificial, beauties, socio-cultural, heritage, lake, parks.
5. Transportation - Airways, Railways, Roadways, Sea-ways, Sub-way.
6. Shopping - Handicrafts, Handloom, Artistic, Selected plants, seed of flowers, garments, jewellery.

The tourists belong to varied cultural patterns, divergent desires, needs and requirements, different socio-economic strata or so. This makes it essential that the tourist organisations while managing the different services are careful to be emerging trends. Since all the tourists need the same core services, the width of the product is almost fixed. It is essential that the tourism marketers are captive to deepen the product line. The success of tourism business depends considerably upon the extent to which the marketers develop and make available the services. It is significant that the marketers are well aware of the quality promised and are particular that the gap between the quality-promised and quality offered is bridged over. This in a natural way needs innovative efforts. The marketers here are not free to deepen the product line. They at

best can catch up their cluster patterns and can forge their actions to serve one or more cluster, group of segments or so.

While formulating the product mix for the tourist organisations, it is pertinent that the tourist organisations are familiar with the strategies of leading tourist organisations and promote innovation to the extent it is possible. Of late, it is seen a craze for village tourism, medical tourism, rural tourism, adventure tourism and so on. It is also noticed that the high spending tourists prefer to stay in havelis, cottages, and old palaces converted into hotels having five star amenities and facilities. They want peace and therefore prefer the outskirts or the villages. Cottage culture establishes an edge over the multi-storeyed apartment culture. It is also evident that aesthetic sense playing an incremental role in adding additional attractions to the services. These aspects are found important while formulating the product mix.

Salient features of Tourism Product

Highly perishable - Perishability is an important factor that influences the decision making behaviour of the tourist professionals. The product is used just when it is offered and therefore, if it remains unused, the chance is lost, the business is lost. If the tourists don't visit a particular place, if the seats in hotels, aircrafts remain vacant, the business is lost. This makes the product highly perishable and makes it essential that the tourist professionals make the best possible efforts to promote the services in such a fashion that opportunities never remain untapped.

Tourism product is a service product - Services are the only products used and sold in the tourism industry. This makes it important that the tourist professionals assign due weightage to creative marketing strategies which are found proactive. The levels of judgement and knowledge possessed by the individuals and related to tourism reflect on the satisfaction derived by the tourists after visiting a place. In this context, the marketers need to be high performers, personally-committed, imaginative and so. This helps them in capitalising on the opportunities optimally.

Intangibility complicated the task of marketers - Tourism is a multi-segment industry in which the transportation and accommodation services constitute a place of outstanding significance. The tourist professionals find it difficult to persuade the users by displaying the seats in the aircraft and the bedrooms in the hotels. The users first use and then come to know about the quality.

Tourism services are for pleasure - Tourism services are used by the tourists to enjoy. By visiting tourist resorts, sites, spots, beaches, they get pleasure. Tourism services are instrumental in enriching the knowledge bank of tourists or the crazy persons use the

services to taste the flavour of adventure. This makes it important that the tourist organisations make the centres attractive by adding additional attractions.

Users are supposed to visit the centre - For availing the services of tourism sector, it is pertinent that the users visit the place physically. The users are supposed to come all the way to the spot. This necessitates setting of product features in a right way.

Adequate infrastructural facilities for the tourism product - No doubt that almost all the industries need infrastructural support, but the tourism industry can't exist if hotels, transportation services are found non-existent. Thus it is found out that infrastructural facilities are essential to improve the quality of services. Efficient transportation facilities, hygienic hotel accommodation, sophisticated communication services are some of the key infrastructural facilities, adding attractions to the tourism services.

Users are a heterogeneous group of people - It is important to mention that the tourism users come from different regions, income groups, age groups, sections, genders, professions and so on. This makes it important that the marketers are familiar with the different types of people using the tourism services.

Designing a Package Tour

Destination - The development of destination or tourist sites has a far reaching impact on attracting the tourists. It is important that destination or the tourist sites are easily accessible. This necessitates safe, fast and reliable transportation facilities hither and thither the tourist sites. To be more specific for promoting world tourism or attracting the foreign tourists, it is important that the flying time is made proportionate. The site should be clean, the beaches should be sandy, the entertainment facilities at the site should be of quality, the site should be safe to walk about, sun-shine should be certain, the local people should be friendly, the tour operators, the travel guides and others should have competence of speaking English and other regional / foreign languages. These facilities at the destination would add attractions.

Management of Airport - While managing the tourism product, the airports are required to be managed carefully. The airport should be local and convenient. The arrangement of car parking should be safe and adequate. It should not be congested but should be spacious. In addition, the shopping facilities should be duty free. The airport should be clean and vehicles should be available so that tourists don't face any trouble. Besides, the security arrangement should be tight to protect the passengers and their valuables. The aesthetic management occupies a place of significance in the very context.

Airlines - The flights should maintain the time schedule otherwise a dislocation may invite multi-faceted problems, not only to the tourists but even to the airport authorities. The services should be reliable, good and polite. The sophisticated modern aircrafts of new generation should be included in the fleet to attract the tourists. The safety record should also be up to mark to remove the fear.

Road and Rail Transportation - Tourists prefer to travel by buses of railways, it is significant that the stations are well managed. The booking and reservation counters should be managed scientifically. The enquiry window should be controlled by efficient and well behaved staff. The safety and security arrangements should be adequate to counter the law and order problems. The signposts should be positioned at right places to help the travelling passengers.

Hotels - For managing the hotel services, it is vital to take careful steps in offering hotel accomodation facilities. It is pertinent that hotels are easily accessible to the tourist sites or beaches or shops. The hotel personnel should be trustworthy and competent enough to speak English and other foreign or regional languages. They are supported to be friendly. The management of facilities at hotels need due care. Though the standard of services, amenities and facilities depend upon the grade of hotels still it is important that hotels offer the promised services to the users. The gap between the services-promised and services-offered should be bridged over. The hotels should be well maintained, the décor should be attractive; possibly a fair mix of eastern and western culture, the atmosphere should be calm and quiet; specially at the night time, public rooms should be adequate in number, the swimming pool should be clean and neat where inflow and outflow of water should be scientific to protect the danger of water contamination or pollution. There should be bar with good range of drinks. The bedrooms should be spacious in which balcony facilities should be made available. The child care services should also be made available. Particularly at the beach resorts, the sea view should be possible with all rooms, in-room telephonic services and in-room Television should be available. There should be adequate cupboard space. The hangers should be artistic and attractive, toilets should be clean and neat and well equipped with east and west provisions. The lighting and ventilation arrangements should be adequate. The intensity of light at different points should be given due weightage. While managing hotels, the restaurants and cafeterias also need due care. The restaurants and cafeterias should be well managed. The food and drinks should have taste-orientation. The varieties of meals and drinks should be provided. The seating arrangements should be comfortable, the meal hours should be flexible and the hotel personnel should be polite and friendly.

Resort Representatives - Regarding representatives of resort, they should be knowledgeable, friendly, accessible and competent.

Tour Operators - The tour operators should be reliable where the guaranteed services are made available to the guests without making any distortion. The price should reflect good value for money.

Tour Agents - The tour agents should be competent, friendly and conveniently available. They should also provide extra services to the tourists. The incentives need due weightage. Free transfer to airport and free insurance facilities induce tourists.

Miscellaneous - In addition, the fellow travellers should be like-minded. The main thing is to make the tour pleasant and memorable. If the tourists have companionable fellow travellers, the journey would of course remain memorable.

The aforesaid facts make it clear that being an amalgam of a number of industries and services, the tourism industry is known as a multi-segment industry in which the designing of a package which proves its instrumentality as a motivational force is found a bit difficult and challenging. It offers professional excellence so that to assess the changing levels of expectations of the guests/ tourists and all the required amenities and facilities are made available to support tourists to go to the destination, to enjoy and to come back safely. The tour operators and transport operators bear the responsibility of formulating a package tour and therefore they should have world class professional excellence to know and understand their changing needs and requirements. The services are related to a number of industries managed by others and therefore, the tour operators and transport operators managing the affairs should make it sure that whatever the promises they have made on behalf of hotels, airways, railways, roadways are not to be distorted. This is likely to project the image of tour operators and therefore a gap between the services-promised and services-offered would make the task difficult. It is against this background that designing of a package tour occupies a place of outstanding significance and all the allied industries making the package are needed to be careful that they are not inviting degeneration.

Making the brand decisions

Brand helps a tourist organisation in distinguishing the product and thus helping an organisation to establish a brand loyalty. It must act as a cue to the product characteristics including the product's quality. Brand offers the opportunities for a company to increase its corporate image. How the consumers feel about a brand reflects their feeling about the company.

How to make a good brand name?

- Name and symbol should convey attributes with appropriate imagery.

- Easy to pronounce and remember the name.
- Name should communicate benefits of the product.
- Symbol should be distinctive and its design and colour should support the product concept.
- Words conveying the nature of product of having pleasant associations should assist to reinforce the benefits in the customer's mind.

The brand name, if catchy, retains the present organisation's name but reduce it to a more easily memorised logo. The simplicity of a word or illustration enhances recall and recognition. In the travel industry, this aspect is found important where the brand may have to be displayed on a fast moving object such as an aircraft or coach. A brand enhances the corporate identity of an organisation so that the products and company become inseparable in the minds of consumers. To make it more impact generating, it is essential to use it in all areas of the company's marketing, such as on stationery, brochures, representatives' uniform, shop front, literature racks and in promotional measures such as flight bags, carrier bags or other give-away materials.

While making the brand decisions, it is vital that all the four demands are given due attention. The existing demand which is the result of the adequate supply of product, the consumers want; the displacement demand which is the result of dissatisfaction experienced by the consumers; the created demand which is the result of demography or other changes in population are found significant, specially with the viewpoint of identifying the reason for the failure of products in the markets. It is important that the products are well supported by the travel agents who bear the responsibility of racking the brochure and selling the product. It is also meant effective briefing of agents since a number of travel sales have been lost through inadequate briefing of retailers on new products and their benefits. In the formation of product strategy, the making of brand decisions is thus found impact generating.

Launching a new product

Launching of a new product is found important while formulating a sound product strategy. In the tourism industry, be it ferry route, aircraft, hotel or tour packages, there are risk elements and uncertainties of high magnitude. Of course, it is difficult to quantify the failure rate of new products, still a careful screening of the product remains an important tool in the hands of marketers.

According to an expert, a new product means an improvement to an existing product, can render that product so new as to make it be seen by prospective purchasers as genuinely new product. Similarly if an existing product is launched to a new market

unfamiliar with it, the product is also in all intents and purpose, a new product. Consider the following product / market matrix:

Product \ Market	Existing Market	New Market
New Product	Introducing new products to present market	Launching of new product to a new market
Existing Product	Modifying the existing product for present market	Repositioning present product to attract new market

A company wants to modify the existing product to the current market and makes the product attractive to face the least possible risk. Some additional benefits are included in this case. Suppose if the product is losing its response in the existing market, then the repositioning may be preferred. This is meant to direct its appeal to the different market segment or to prefer overseas market. To make the product more appealing to a new type of customer, it is also suggested to change the product concept. Another alternative is to develop genuinely new product or new brand to be sold to the existing users. In that case if a company succeeds in projecting a positive image, there are possibilities of getting a trial even by the existing users. Finally, a company can choose to introduce a genuinely new product to a new market segment. Often, the new products are the extensions of the present product line. In this context, it is difficult to decide exactly when a product can genuinely be new, since most of the products the buyers buy are simply advances or modifications of existing products. The main object in the launching of a new product is to find the market gap which is a product opportunity with a ready market which has not yet been tapped. The market-oriented approach line is found suitable for the development of a new product.

Conclusion

The tourist attraction which is an experience for the customer must be tangibilised with the help of tangible items like, comfortable seats while travelling, ambience, layout, and design of the resort, natural service-scape and so on. The sign posts that indicate directions, route maps, information regarding rules and regulations of the tourist spot and the sign regarding the public utilities like toilets, telephone booth also form a part of the physical evidence.

Printed matter such as brochures also plays an important role in the development of tourism. As the product in tourism is intangible, there is a need to describe fully the product, which is done by offering an elaborate brochure which shows how different elements of the programme are carefully planned to include all necessary information to make a holiday comfortable. The brochure is the product at the point of purchase, it

establishes expectation of quality value for money, product image and status, which must be matched when the product is delivered.

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