

Marketing Strategy of Pilgrimage Tourism of Shri Mata Vishnu Devi Shrine By

Irshad Ahmad Mantoo
Research Scholar in History

Abstract

Tourism marketing is a systematic, interconnected and coordinated execution of efforts by different independent business organisations like tour operators, transporters, hotel companies retailing institutions and related service organisations, at and en-route, to the destination. Modern pilgrims' social background, the specific time for pilgrimage and their economic constraints determine the need for transport, accommodation, food, catering, shopping etc. during their journey to the pilgrimage destination. Thus a pilgrimage destination and religious centre ought to have all such facilities and religious requirements which not only meet the pilgrims religious and spiritual needs but keep generating a desire in them to visit the destinations time and again with an increase in the average length of their stay. The marketing strategy for pilgrimage tourism is a continuous process of planned action for the development, improvement, maintenance diversification, monitoring and promotion of the business in such goods and services as are required by the pilgrims during the whole of their pilgrimage.

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Modern pilgrims' social background, the specific time for pilgrimage and their economic constraints determine the need for transport, accommodation, food, catering, shopping etc. during their journey to the pilgrimage destination. Thus a pilgrimage destination and religious centre ought to have all such facilities and religious requirements which not only meet the pilgrims' religious and spiritual needs but keep generating a desire in them to visit the destinations time and again with an increase in the average length of their stay. Such a pilgrimage destination generates immense market potential for the aforesaid tourism service related businesses. The marketing strategy for pilgrimage tourism is a continuous process of planned action for the development, improvement, maintenance diversification, monitoring and promotion of the business in such goods and services as are required by the pilgrims during the whole of their pilgrimage so that the pilgrims word of mouth prove to be a sound channel of marketing communication and feedback for ensuring further time and cost effective tourism services to them. Such a marketing strategy has become very challenging, competitive and forward looking due to fast improvement in the services by the industry in the light of fast changes in the nature and extent of pilgrim requirements backed up by ongoing substantial increase in their purchasing power and conceptual reinterpretation of the pilgrimage tourism. A correct strategy well in time and adjustable to the aforesaid turbulent and changing external and internal environment is essential for excelling in this pilgrimage tourism market and ideal for staying ahead of the game.

The marketing of goods and services in and around the pilgrimage destination focuses on the customer, environmental sensitivity and relative competition in the pilgrimage tourism market. Therefore every pilgrim being different in socio-cultural background needs to be served with tailor made services, which ought to be regularly evaluated and improved upon in terms of customer feed-back relating to the internal and external environment of the tourism market are carefully addressed and present marketing tools are adjusted according to the new concepts of marketing for having management of such market. Adopting to competition in the market, the strategy aims at image evolution of markets, their product, positioning, presentation and adaptation. These are central issues for a greater market share, customer satisfaction and overall marketing effectiveness, which for a greater share, customer satisfaction and overall marketing effectiveness, which for a greater become vital for the success and survival of the pilgrimage tourism industry. The marketers of such tourism industry need to pay more attention to understand and satisfy consumer because today's consumer has more information about products and services, more alternatives to choose from than ever before.

In the light of the aforesaid discussion, the major focus in pilgrimage tourism marketing strategy is on customer satisfaction with respect to pilgrimage related products and services like accommodations, food services, transportation, recreation and the delivery of resident oriented products and services like infrastructure facilities. A great deal of tourists' influx is affected by provision of accommodation and hospitality to the visitors. In order to retain the present customers and attract potential visitors, the marketers at such destination work upon the objectives like-how important a pilgrim is. What are the main services regarding the pilgrimage, what are the changing expectations in the pilgrimage tourism market. And thereby, assessing and developing the required strategy of customers' relationship. Therefore pilgrim and pilgrim services like accommodation, transportation, retailing, etc. are the major aspects for developing the pilgrimage tourism market.

Shri Mata Vishnu Devi Shrine is a prominent pilgrimage destination in northern India attracting approximately 50 lakh pilgrims/visitors every year at an average of 10000 to 13000 visitors every day. These visitors like other tourists require the basic tourist services like transport, accommodation, food and catering, retail services and other basic infrastructural services during their pilgrimage to the shrine. For understanding the requirement of these pilgrims/visitors to the shrine, the profile of the destination, the nature of the pilgrimage traffic and various available are summarised as under. Situated at distance of approximately 39 miles to the north of Jammu city and at an altitude of 5200 feet on Trikuta hills, this shrine is of immense religious sanctity. The pilgrims reach the worship spot inside the shrine through a 30 metre long narrow tunnel, wading knee deep through the shallow stream. Inside the cave of Trikuta Bhagwati are the images of Mata Vishnu Devi, Mata Saraswati, Mahakali and Maha Lakshmi. Katra,

the base camp of the shrine is the only bus terminus for the visitors. From Katra onwards, one has to pass through Darshani Darwaza for starting the actual pilgrimage. About one mile ahead is the Ban Ganga a stream believed to be associated with the Goddess. A mile ahead is Charan Paduka where there is an image of the footprints of the Goddess. Two miles above is the most important spot of Adhkumari. It is a beautiful plateau on the hills having a small tunnel shaped temple in which pilgrims pass through and it is considered that those who cannot pass through are labelled sinners. This tunnel begins horizontally and ends vertically. At this spot most of the pilgrims prefer to break the journey for a night. A few yards from Adhikumari is the most difficult part of the ascent called Hathi Matha, i.e. elephant's forehead and then one reaches Sanjichatt. Afterwards visitors have to climb down passing through a dense forest named Mata ka Bagh. After about a mile and half distance visitors reach the cave site or Bhavan. Returning from the cave, visitors have to climb up a steep hillside to Bhairongahati and then these hills join at Sanjichatt and back downwards along the same path to Katra.

The pilgrim traffic to the destination belongs to a varied demographic background. About 87 percent visitors come from outside Jammu And Kashmir State and most of them come from Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra. Though the shrine has become a place of importance for both pilgrimage and non-pilgrimage, yet nearly 75 percent of the visitors go to the shrine exclusively for pilgrimage purposes. The months of May, June, and October show a higher pilgrim influx as compared to rest of the year, due to holidays in educational institutions and Navratras during these months respectively. Among week days it is Saturday being a holiday most of the visitors reach the destination due to weekend and Sunday being a holiday instead of Tuesday which is considered the Goddess's worship day earlier. Here pilgrim traffic trend shows an inclination towards vacations and weekend holidays for visiting pilgrimage destination leaving behind religious motives. Besides the religious requirements, the visitors to such destinations need many other services. En-route to the Shrine different services like those of hostels, guests houses, Lodges, food and catering in restaurants, dhabas, etc., transportation facilities, and general retailing are available. Shri Mata Vishnu Devi Shrine Board an autonomous body incorporated in 1986 governs different operations en-route to the Shrine like provisions of sanitation and hygiene, medical facility, telecom facility, shelter sheds, dharmashalas, viewpoints, retailing outlets, guest houses, restaurants, dhabas, cafeterias, etc. It also provides other non-payment facilities like maintenance of temple, roads stairs, lighting arrangements, Provisions of clean drinking water, cloak rooms, blankets, etc. besides the various facilities extended by the Shrine Board, a large number of hoteliers and retailers are doing their business between Katra and Bhavan. The transportation services between Jammu and Katra had been made available both by the State Road Transport Corporation and Transporters.

The nature of pilgrims and their pilgrimage to Shri Mata Vishnu Devi Shrine reveals that this destination not only attracts purely pilgrim visitors but also non-pilgrim visitors who have different requirements, tastes and preferences with respect to different services provided en-route to the pilgrimage. The marketing of such services and the related customers' satisfaction plays a very important role in the development of business en-route to the pilgrimage destination. No doubt, these pilgrim and non-pilgrim visitors have different expectations while visiting the destination and in return they interpret their experience and satisfaction as per their own considerations and visualisations. If they are satisfied, their positive word of mouth generates more potential visitors; if not, they will speak negatively and shatter the image of services at the destination thereby affecting its business. Very recently, pilgrimage destinations are being considered an important part of the tourism market and thus they are in the process of development for the generation of more income and employment in the area. The aforesaid service providers at the shrine also have to take into consideration the religious and non-religious requirements of the visitors while marketing their products and services. Developing a marketing strategy for pilgrimage tourism requires consolidation of research findings, summarizing them in the direction of existing research literature viz-a-viz the research in question. Such strategic guidance is required for travel tourism and leisure services because of the positive relationship aforesaid services. Thus, continuous exercise of a facility's regular and effective delivery of these services along with a monitoring mechanism which ensures parity between the level of satisfaction of the tourists and their expectations. The level of customer satisfaction measured in the selected services of the pilgrimage tourism provided by the different suppliers such as pilgrimage destinations of Shri Mata Vishnu Devi Shrine indicates the quality of service and accordingly efforts have been made to formulate marketing strategies for the pilgrimage tourism. The marketing strategic actions required in the present case have come up from the level of pilgrim satisfaction in the various selected services examined separately in the preceding chapters on the basis of first-hand information/data gathered personally through a pre-tested questionnaire primarily structured on the first-hand information/data gathered personally through a pre-tested questionnaire primarily structured on the five-point scale from the randomly selected 500 respondents of different backgrounds. The original questionnaire consisted of 50 statements within the jurisdiction of marketing orientation selected from the detailed literature survey and after a series of discussions with the experts and other researchers in the field. These statements after purification through factor analysis and several iterations finally resulted in 13 items under eight factors, like food services at destination, en-route supportive services, additional supportive services, transport services, food services en-route to destination, shopping services, accommodation en-route to destination, and accommodation at destination. Marketing Strategy for pilgrimage Tourism. These factors have been identified and named on the

grouping pattern of various dimensions covered under these statements. The nature and extent of customer satisfaction regarding the different services availed by the pilgrim and non-pilgrim visitors classified under different demographic groups and needed marketing stemming up from the study has been given under.

Food Services at the Destination:

Food services at the pilgrimage destination have an important status in the pilgrimage itself as during this kind of visit customers require special food to eat, not always in various variety but it needs to be cooked and served in the way prescribed under religious norms. At Bhavan the destination of the Shrine both pilgrim and non-pilgrim visitors expect and eat vegetarian food which is provided by the bhojanalyas managed by the supervisory staff of the shrine board on a no profit no loss basis and private dhabas/hotels working as per norms specified by the board itself. Besides two bhojanalyas there are 10 to 12 dhabas/hotels, catering to the overall food needed at the destination. After a long journey of thirteen kilometres mostly on foot, the visitors have meal/tea/coffee/other soft drinks etc. at Bhavan and their satisfaction regarding the pilgrimage mostly centres on the satisfaction they obtain while availing such services. The satisfaction from this service depends upon how food was served, how much variety was available, the taste and delight and its practice etc. The providers of such services enjoy full market potential here and make their customers satisfied due to which their words of mouth work in their favour. The study provides a below average satisfaction regarding the service. The lowest satisfaction of one point has been observed by three groups viz. 1. highly educated middle aged local non pilgrim males with an above average income, 2. highly educated old aged non local female pilgrims with a below average income and 3. low educated old aged non local female pilgrims with an above average income. The highest satisfaction has been reflected by highly educated old aged non local pilgrim males with an average income. The study reveals that most of the groups under study observe a below average satisfaction. The lowest satisfaction is shown by local non pilgrim males regarding the hygienic condition of the food served at cheap rates paid for the food at Bhavan by non-local female pilgrims. The highest satisfaction has been shown by the local female pilgrim group for taste and delight of the food served and variety in food served respectively. The food service at destination bhavan has the highest impact on the overall satisfaction among the extracted both positive and negative association of this service with overall customer/pilgrim satisfaction. It shows that all the three groups except the non-local non pilgrims show a positive but low association with the overall satisfaction thereby confirming the below average satisfaction. The level of customer satisfaction expressed by the proportion of respondents obtaining satisfaction score between a minimum of one point and a maximum of five points on the used to indicates the weak areas which need to be targeted for formulating an appropriate marketing strategy. The various dimensions

covered under are as food services at destination responsible for an overall lower satisfaction are given below along with the proportion of sample pilgrims and non-pilgrims obtaining below average satisfaction.

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|-------------------------------|---------------|
| I. Rates of food services | 46.2 percent |
| II. Variety in food | 41 percent. |
| III. Tasty and delicious food | 34.8 percent. |
| IV. Hygienic food | 29.2 percent. |

All this indicates the necessity of a well-planned marketing strategy for providing and maintaining better variety, fair rates, tasty and hygienic food at the pilgrimage destination.

En-route Supportive Services.

The factor analysis through varimax rotation has produced the various en route supportive services as the second important consideration at a pilgrimage destination by explaining 9.6 percent of variance after 20.7 percent in case of food services at the destination. The services are provided both by private agencies and Shrine Board on a commercial as well as no profit no loss basis respectively. These services between Katra and Bhavan have to be provided keeping in consideration the hard journey on hilly track of about 13 kms. The degree of customer satisfaction worked out within the framework of expectations v/s performance reveals the score varying between a maximum for safety measures by the Shrine Board and the maximum for transport service between both Katra-Banganga and Banganga-Bhavan primarily provided by private agencies. Among all the visitors groups under study the lowest satisfaction has been reflected by low educated non-local old aged male pilgrims with an average of income level followed by highly educated local non pilgrim old aged males with an above average income, which draws immediate attention of all the concerned to the proper and effective service as per the pilgrim requirements.

The study shows that the positive association of these services with the overall satisfaction especially for the non-local non pilgrim visitor who indicate the highest positive association. The proportion of sample pilgrims under below average, average and above region of customer satisfaction explains that more than 77 percent and 65 visitors express an above average satisfaction regarding transport and shopping services respectively indicating thereby the necessity of maintaining the present quality of services.

Additional Infrastructural Services:

The visitors to the Shrine whether they visit for pilgrim or non-pilgrim purposes, feel more satisfied if they are provided some additional supportive services during their journey. These services differ from destination to destination. At the Vishnu Devi Shrine the pilgrimage destination with about 13 kms hard some attack usually covered on foot, the visitors require drinking water, clock rooms, adequate bedding shelter sheds and

better roads with proper sanitation and hygiene en route primarily provided by the board. These dimension are covered under additional services. These services obtained an above average score of overall satisfaction from all the groups of respondents taken together but the lowest satisfaction has been expressed by the highly educated middle aged local non pilgrim males with an above average income observed by the highly educated young local male pilgrims with a below average income. The study further shows the positive association of these services confirm the overall above average satisfaction in the maintenance of sanitation and hygienic has been identified again after proportioning the respondents between one to five, thereby showing a requirement for a properly planned and regularly monitored strategy leading to well-maintained frequently cleaned and hygienic bathrooms, toilets and roads en route in addition to maintaining the satisfaction explained regarding other additional infrastructural services.

Transport Services:

The satisfaction evaluation process of a pilgrimage trip start minute a visitor board any mode of transport and ends as the visitor board offer returning from the journey. The transportation services available en route to the Vishnu Devi pilgrimage not only make the trip easy but also save time attract more and more of visitors every year. As much difference in the overall customer satisfaction has been explained by this service where all the respondents taken together express a below average satisfaction. Study shows that all non-pilgrim visitors, whether they are local or non-local are not satisfied with this service. The proportion of respondents obtaining below average satisfaction shows the weak area of transport service are as:

I. Ordinary bus service	38.2 percent
II. Pony service	26.0 percent.
III. Luxury bus service	16.2 percent.
IV. Taxi service	15.4 percent.

All this suggest a well-balanced strategy for the transportation en route to the destination with the main focus on the service of ordinary bus which are required by most of the most of the visitors and pony service which is required for. Carrying luggage and children and is the only mode of hill transport available on the track.

Food Service En route to Destination:

Most of the visitors reaching Katra-the base camp and continuing their journey to Bhavan halt at many places to have some light refreshment and other eatables route to the track. This food service en route necessary for different segments of the visitors is required to be tasty and serviced hygienically. After varimax rotation the factor covered only two dimensions viz. (i) tasty and delicious food and (ii) hygienic food, as important explaining 6 percent of variance with the overall satisfaction. Only an average satisfaction score has been observed by all the respondent groups taken together. The

lowest score of one point has been observed by two groups, viz. (i) the highly educated young local male pilgrims with a below average income and (ii) the highly educated middle aged non pilgrim local males with an above average income showing dissatisfaction regarding the service. The association of this service with overall satisfaction of the visitors given in under four linear equations that local pilgrimage show a negative association and other three groups under study show a positive but low level of association. Further reflects that 31.8 percent visitors and 30.8 percent visitors express a below average satisfaction regarding tasty delicious food and hygienic food services en route to the destination primarily of better taste and hygiene would bring up the level of pilgrim satisfaction.

Retail Services: En route to the journey to the shrine, a visitor needs to purchase various articles of daily requirement and of special importance of the pilgrimage from shop in and around Katra and also from the shops en route to Bhavan. This service has been extracted to be the sixth factor with an explanation of 5.3 percent and negative association of non-local non pilgrim visitors with the overall satisfaction. Mean score of different pilgrim and non-pilgrim groups extracted a below average of satisfaction from all the respondents taken together. The lowest score has been observed by the low educated middle aged and non-local non pilgrim males with a below average income followed by satisfaction observed by four groups like as under.

- (I) Low educated old aged local female pilgrims with an average income.
- (II) Highly educated old aged male non pilgrims with an above average income.
- (III) Highly educated non local female pilgrims with an above average income and
- (IV) Low educated middle aged non local non pilgrim male with an average income.

Which identify the segments which are least satisfied with this service and are enquired to be targeted while formulating the required marketing strategy. The proportion of respondents falling within the five points on the scale indicate the weak areas with below average scores as under

(I) Cooperative shopkeepers at Katra	37.4 percent
(II) Cooperative shopkeepers at Bhavan	29.0 percent
(III) Adequate shopkeepers at Katra	24.6 percent
(IV) Adequate shopping at Bhavan	19.6 percent

The concerned agencies including general shopkeepers and the Shrine Board should worked out the needed changes in the light of the aforesaid finding of the study.

Accommodation at Katra and En-Route to the Destination:

En route to the track towards Bhavan the accommodation required by the visitors as per their requirements is provided both by private agencies and the Shrine Board variance is explained by this service in the overall satisfaction and this factor covers three dimensions among which the charges for the accommodation make fifty persons satisfied at an average level and thirty three percent visitors are satisfied with the

maintenance of accommodation and thirty percent experience non availability during peak season. It is because of such of a high proportion of dissatisfied pilgrims about the accommodation provided by both the foreside agencies that the overall value score of pilgrim satisfaction has come down to two percent.

Further the degree of pilgrim satisfaction has significantly declined to point one in case of two groups, viz. (i) low young female non local pilgrims with an average income and (ii) highly educated young non-local non pilgrim male with an average income. The study shows a very low positive accommodation service at Katra and en route to the destination need to be adequately developed and properly maintained as per the pilgrim traffic.

Accommodation at Destination:

The proportion of the pilgrims who have experienced below average satisfaction with respect to the various aspects of accommodation at Bhavan provided by the Shrine Board. Satisfaction score has been given by as many as four segments like

- (I) Low educated young local male pilgrims with an average income.
- (II) Highly educated middle aged local non-pilgrim males with an above average income
- (III) Highly educated young local non pilgrim males with an above average income
- (IV) Low educated young non local female pilgrims with an average income.

Whereas a high satisfaction score has been shown only by the highly educated middle aged non-pilgrim males with a below average income.

Similarly, a low positive association of this service with the overall satisfaction has been explained by various research scholars. This service is needed the most at the destination mostly by non-local visitors who want to halt there and needed a satisfactory place to stay but this service has provided more accommodation keeping in view the increasing number of pilgrims.

Conclusion:

The various pilgrimage tourism services studied through the customer satisfaction approach indicate a wide range of miss-management, lack of quality services and overall supervisory effectiveness. This weak area identified under each of these services need to be designed of food, transport, accommodation and retailing services need to understand pilgrim requirement in terms of pilgrim profile and pilgrimage significance rather than just their market potential. In fact, the market potential of these services also increase if the providers continue to maintain the quality and relevance of the services to the pilgrimage purposes, nature of journey and pilgrimage destination.

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