Factors Affecting Tourist Destination Loyalty A Case Study of Munnar, India as a Tourism Destination

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Abstract—This study aims to investigate the factors influencing tourist destination loyalty towards Munnar, India as a tourism destination. The factors taken into account for the study were the perception of the tourists, image of the destination, attributes of the destination and experience of the tourists at the destination. The study applied the descriptive research method, which uses a self-administered questionnaire to collect the information from the tourists at the destination. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed among various tourists at Eravikulam national park in Munnar. The results from Pearson correlation show a moderate positive significant relationship between the independent variables perception, Image and experience towards satisfaction and a low positive significance between the independent variable attribute and mediating variable satisfaction. The mediating variable satisfaction shows a moderate positive significance towards the dependent variable Loyalty. The findings of this study conducted at Munnar among the tourists visiting Eravikulam National Park shows that there exists loyalty among the tourists visiting Munnar and the Perception of tourists, Image of destination, attributes of destination and experience of tourists are factors that influences the satisfaction level of tourists at Munnar and the satisfaction of tourists has a high level of influence on tourists' loyalty towards the destination of Munnar. The study also shows that all these factors must be taken into consideration to understand the loyalty of tourists towards the destination Munnar.

Keywords— Destination Image, Tourist Perception, Destination Attribute, Tourist Experience, Destination Loyalty, Tourist Satisfaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

TOURISM as a universal picture has an outstanding upswing throughout the past decades. A steady growth in the universal tourist influx of one billion has been realized by 2012 and a global GDP upsurge of close to 10% has been accomplished. The Incredible India! Campaign launched by the Indian government in 2002 imparted an extra mileage to the so paralyzed Indian tourism industry. Kerala, one of the Southern States in India, popularly known as "God's Own Country", is blessed with abundant natural sight views. The campaign was definitely a launch pad for Kerala to transcend the boundaries of economic stability. The State has always been much reluctant to industrialization owing to the concerns about the nature and natural resources it possess. Due to this retrograde mentality, the economy of Kerala was almost stagnant and trying to augment its revenue from the nature. Hence, the Kerala government also rolled out a tourism campaign simultaneously with the Indian government, viz., God's Own Country campaign. There are numerous tourist destinations in Kerala across 14 districts. But projecting a most appealing destination brought Munnar into the limelight due to its natural peculiarities. The influx of tourists visiting Munnar increased gradually owing to the effectiveness of the campaign. But the real challenge before the administrators was to bring those tourists again and again to the spot. A tourist place sans repeated tourists is akin to a dessert. Upon understanding this reality, the State, local people and vendors from different streams joined their hands together to bring tourists to Munnar again. This indirectly creates a destination loyalty in the minds of tourists. From the viewpoint of a tourist, repeated visit means satisfaction. In a layman's parlance, a tourist is said to have loyalty to the destination only if his expectation matches or goes below the reality, which is simply called as satisfaction. If this is to be true, what are the factors determine the satisfaction of tourist? How satisfaction is related to loyalty? In this sense, Munnar is still in the growing trajectory, which has lots of potential to augment the influx of tourists. So as to create a destination loyalty in the minds of tourists, all the relevant and related stakeholders need to understand and inculcate factors determining destination satisfaction. In this study the researcher tries to demystify the relationship between destination loyalty and destination satisfaction.

The purpose of this study is to understand the factors determining the destination satisfaction in the minds of tourists, which in turn creates destination loyalty among them.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Tourist Perception

"Perception can be generated without information and knowledge of the object/person. This is often the case when tourists grow insights of a destination previous to visitation." (Reisinger & Turner 2003). There are marketing practices that make it conceivable to change negative understandings of a

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destination. However, the best way to modify people's insights of a destination is when people get an actual understanding from this destination. According to Reisinger & Turner (2003): "perceptions of tourists who had never practiced with the product before (or had very limited experience of it), and whose perceptions are mostly formed on a basis of the information gained from promotion in its place of first-hand experience, which may vary from the perceptions of tourists who had experienced the product (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2000).

B. Destination Image

Destination image is one of the most investigated and examined concepts in the analysis of modern tourism (Pan & Xiang, 2011). Image has been described in a number of methods: as a person's set of principles, opinions and impressions concerning an object, a consideration of all knowledge gained from diverse channels or an intellectual implication the person has about something outside material perception (Aksoy & Kiyci, 2011).

C. Destination Experience

The experiences that consumers confront happen inside the person, and the consequences or consumption experiences differ on how the consumer, based on a particular situation or state of intellect, responds to the staged or non-staged encounter (Mossberg, 2007). Significantly, customers are co-producers, who enthusiastically build their own utilization experiences through the interface amongst the environment, establishments, workforces, locals and other clients (Andersson, 2007).

D. Attributes of Destination

There are numerous attributes linked among a specific destination, therefore it is unfeasible that all attributes are vital in travelers' preference for a place to visit. Certain characteristics are appealing to the travelers; however the rest may not be that much appealing; identification of the appealing characteristics of various places is to be found.

E. Destination Loyalty

Loyalty means committed behavior that is established by the tendency to take part in a particular leisure facility (Backman & Crompton, 1991). The interpersonal tactics on marketing sets client loyalty as a strategic objective assumed that various organizations have come to recognize the monetary significance of a loyal customer database; Reichheld & Sasser (1990) are regularly cited to emphasize this significance. In connection with this claim two issues are existing; the requirement to analyze those influences that encourage loyalty on destinations or tourism conglomerates and the significance of operationalizing the concept of loyalty as the concluding and vital component of preceding models of analysis and hence, try to expose the dimensions it really owns in a sector with such unique features as in tourism.

Previous Study and Conceptual Framework

In the study," The effect of marketing constructs and tourists'

satisfaction on loyalty to a sport destination A structural equation model and analysis Mohammad Reza Jalilvand, 2014. " The perception of tourists on The purpose of the current study is to explore complicated structural relationships among the variables of tourists' perceptions of quality and the value of a sport tourist destination and their satisfaction level and loyalty that are vital for successful destination marketing and management. A survey was used to collect data from a sample of 570 sport tourists who traveled to Nowshahr and Chalous cities in Iran during September 2012. These data were gathered by convenience sampling method and analyzed using a structural equation model (SEM). The results of the SEM revealed that tourists' perceived quality and perceived value have a significant impact on their satisfaction. Further, tourists' satisfaction had a positive and significant effect on the level of their loyalty. Findings of the current study contribute to a better perception of behavioral mechanisms and incentives and provide an acceptable basis to improve tourism industry in both regional and national levels. From this theoretical framework this study adopts the relation between perceived quality and satisfaction.

H2: There is a significant relationship between Perception of tourist and the satisfaction

In the study, "Conceptual Model for Developing Destination Loyalty Model, Gengqing Chi, 2005." the researcher has developed a theoretical model of destination loyalty by examining the interrelationships among destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. The systematic examination of causal relationships among the constructs could facilitate a clearer understanding of the concept of destination loyalty. A self-administered questionnaire was developed including both structured and open-ended questions. The target population of this study was all the visitors who stopped by Eureka Springs' Welcome Center, stayed at hotels, motels, and B&B, and visited souvenir shops/art galleries during a 20-day survey period. A two-stage sampling approach including stratified proportionate sampling, and systematic random sampling (SRS) was applied. The main purpose of the study was to present an integrated approach to understanding destination loyalty model and investigate the theoretical and empirical evidence on the causal relationships among destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. The study also examined whether the destination loyalty model was similar across different tourist segments based on tourists' previous traveling experience(s) and demographic background. The relationship between Destination Image and overall satisfaction and Attribute satisfaction and overall satisfaction are adopted for the current study. The relationship between the overall satisfaction and loyalty of destination is also adopted for the study on Munnar.

H1: There is a significant relationship between image of the tourist destination and the satisfaction of the tourist
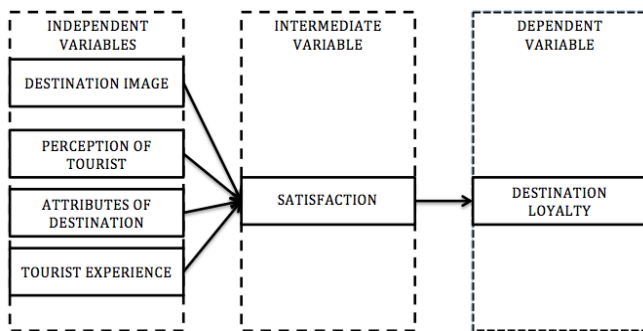
H3: There is a significant relationship between the attributes of the tourist destination and the satisfaction of the tourist

H5: There exists a positive relationship between the

satisfaction of the tourist and loyalty towards the tourist destination

"Service Design in Tourism: Customer Experience Driven Destination Management, Marc Stickdorn, Anita Zehrer (2009)"from this study the competitiveness of any service product ultimately depends on customer satisfaction, which is determined by the consumer's assessment of expectations towards a certain product and the actual experiences with the product delivery process. In tourism destinations, products are service products generally consisting of multiple service touch points which customers perceive prior, during and after their holidays. The matching or even exceeding of customers" expectations are crucial for generating customer satisfaction and needs to be constantly designed and measured. The relationship between the experience of the tourists and the satisfaction are adopted from this study for the study on Munnar.

H4: There is a significant relationship between tourist's experience of a destination and the satisfaction of a destination.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Study site

The study is conducted to determine the destination loyalty of tourists visiting Munnar, Kerala, India. The research approach used is descriptive to describe the whole phenomenon in a quantitative aspect. Survey method is found to be the most common research tool as it allows the researchers to study and describe on a fairly large population quickly and at relatively lower cost (Davis& Cosenza, 1993). The total number of tourist arrivals in Munnar was 486,931 from April 2012-March 2013 as per the data collected form the Office of the wildlife warden, Eravikulam national park, Munnar (Document attached in the appendix). The researcher has considered this as the population for this study.

B. Sampling

The estimated number of tourists visiting Munnar as a tourist destination is over 486,000. The researcher has considered this number as the population. And by using Slovin's formula the research has obtained 400 as the appropriate sample size. Non-probability sampling method is used for the study. It is a technique in which units of the sample are selected on the basis of personal judgment or convenience (Zikmund, 2000). Since the researcher does not

have any prior knowledge about the background of the potential respondents, convenience sampling was adopted. It refers to the selection of their closeness to the investigator and the ease with which the researcher can access the participants (Jennings, 2001). Convenience sampling is appealing as it meets the necessities of non-probability samples; this approach is less time consuming and is possible to complete with a limited budget (Zikmund, 2000). Besides, the questionnaires were distributed to the tourists on the basis of their convenient accessibility.

C. Survey design

In this study the research instruments used to collect the data was a self-administered questionnaire, the questionnaire was designed to analyze the level of importance of the factors contributing destination loyalty of tourists visiting Munnar, Kerala, India. The questionnaire was divided into four sessions out of which the first part is to screen whether the tourist is visiting Munnar for the first time, travel characteristics, and the purpose of visit and questions on demography. The second part is to analyze tourists' perception on Munnar from the research he has done on various sources of information and prior travel. The respondent's level of agreement was surveyed using a five point Likert scale ranging from five-Strongly agrees, four-agree, three-neutral, two-disagree, one-strongly disagree. The last two questions will be asking them for their likelihood to revisit and if they would positively recommend the destination to their dear and near.

D. Results

The data thus collected from the respondents were statistically tested using SPSS. 400 valid responses were obtained and were subjected to various analyses and the hypothesis was tested using Pearson's correlation.

No	Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Correlation coefficient	sig	Result
H1	There is a moderate positive relationship between image of the tourist destination and the satisfaction of the tourist.	Correlation	.463	.000	Rejected the Null hypothesis
H2	There is a moderate positive relationship between Perception of tourist and the satisfaction.	Correlation	.433	.000	Rejected the Null hypothesis
H3	There is a low positive relationship between the attributes of the tourist destination and the satisfaction of the tourist.	Correlation	.399	.000	Rejected the Null hypothesis
H4	There is a moderate positive relationship between tourist's experience of a destination and the satisfaction of a destination.	Correlation	.422	.000	Rejected the Null hypothesis
H5	There exists a moderate positive relationship between the satisfaction of the tourist and loyalty towards the tourist destination.	Correlation	.598	.000	Rejected the Null hypothesis

IV. CONCLUSION

This study proves that there is a concrete relationship between the factors "Image, perception, Attribute and experience " of a destination on "Satisfaction" of the tourists and is favoring "Loyalty". From this study done on 400 respondents several managerial implications have been drawn to increase the potential of Munnar as a tourist destination and to draw more tourist arrivals year after year by generating loyalty.

➢ The hills of Munnar, its geography and its climate are well suited for adventure sports and adventure tourism. Promoting Munnar as an adventure tourism destination is advisable.

➢An awareness campaign along with workshops for the local community to improve their soft skills and improve the health and hygiene must be initiated. Health, safety and quality standards of food outlets, kiosks, must be standardized and improved so as to cope up with the real world scenarios. (Munnar is clean and hygienic)

➢Munnar as a destination is found to be more attractive towards an age group of 20-35 and an income level of above 500,000 per annum. More initiatives can be taken to attract other age groups so as to increase the tourist visits and hold the loyal customers even as they grow older.(Age and Income levels of loyal customers)

➢New first class accommodations can be built so as to increase the carrying capacity of the destination and to satisfy more tourists.(there are a few first class hotels in Munnar)

➢More public transportation facilities have to be employed along with high quality public road systems and enhanced parking facilities.(Moving around in Munnar is easy)

APPENDIX

Appendixes, if needed, appear before the acknowledgment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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