



How Spiritual Places Market Themselves: A Conceptual Model

Aditya Roushan¹, Nihal Singh²

^{1,2} PGDM (2023-2025), Institute for Technology and Management, Kharghar

Introduction:

According to the EMR Business Solution Report, the Spiritual tourism market is about 45 billion USD and is growing at an average rate of 10-15% per year. There have been many research papers done about the market of spiritual places, but all are quantitative research papers, and this paper is a qualitative research paper. How exactly marketing is done of spiritual places, what are the factors that play the key role in marketing of spiritual places?

Marketing of spiritual places is going on, on a very high scale but on this topic, no analysis has been done people are doing such marketing knowingly or unknowingly, but they are also following the principles of marketing, and with the help of such marketing it directly/ indirectly helps the visitors to get better experience at spiritual places.

Marketing of spiritual places not only helps visitors but also helps spiritual places upgrade themselves and eventually helps them generate revenue from it. The Marketing of spiritual tourism or spiritual places is an in-depth study about what are the principles of marketing that have been used and what helps Spiritual places to get more footfall to promote spiritual tourism in specific and the tourism industry in general. This prompted the researcher to choose this topic for his study.

This Paper proposes a conceptual model for how Spiritual Places Market themselves. The tourism industry plays an important role in any economy, it is the fastest-growing sector nowadays and is expected to grow over the next 5 years. The tourism sector can be broadly elaborated from many areas and spiritual tourism is also one of them. Spiritual tourism is an important component of the Indian tourism industry as India is a land of spirituality endowed with many places of worship, pilgrim centers religious monuments, etc. Because of the tourism industry not only do tourist spots get into the limelight they also help in developing the nearby surroundings which eventually helps to generate employment. Spiritual places have different definitions at different places. What is common between all the definitions is a [place](#) where you [feel](#) you [belong](#), [although](#) you were not [born](#) there, because you have a lot in [common](#) with the [people](#), the [culture](#), and the way of [life](#). People have faith and they believe visiting such places can heal all problems, they have an inner belief that there is an energy that controls the entire universe. Be it any religion Hindu, Muslim, Jain, and many more one has an inner belief about their respective spiritual places.

Method:

This paper follows a qualitative approach. This study seeks an in-depth understanding of spiritual places. The authors have used observational and field data and have interviewed people from and around the urban spiritual spots, particularly in Mumbai for the collection of primary data. Due to the complexity of the research topic, participant selection was criterion-based: having adequate knowledge of spirituality (if possible), as

well as good verbal skills. In addition, potential interviewees were checked for appropriateness, wherein three candidates were excluded due to their ineligibility or low willingness to cooperate. The author interviewed people and collected qualitative data from that and then analyzed the data with qualitative software, Taguette uses the Narrative Analysis Approach as interviewing people gives a different perspective to see things and know things.

Followed by, for the secondary data author visited many spiritual places and observed the local surroundings, and also as previously there was no research qualitatively done on this topic, The authors have also read many blog posts and social media pages of spiritual places and many news articles about the place through that observation and the data that the authors got from the analysis of the interviews, the authors conclude how marketing of spiritual place is taking place and what are the factors which affect the marketing.

Literature Review:

Spiritual places are being visited because of the geo-psychological separation from the everyday that is embedded in spiritual travel practices, can be seen as a laboratory in which individuals can examine, consider, and practice spirituality in a way that is not always available in daily life (Cheer et al., 2017). Now considering the soul objective of visiting spiritual places to be getting into spirituality the current scenario at the temples, mosques and other religious

places seems to be diverging, the reason behind it is difficult to ascertain but the reason that comes from the data collected from the visitors and people interested in these religious places claims that the commercialization of these places led to a divergence of the objectives of these places.

Religious visitors experience a “feeling of God’s presence” and a respect for the site’s spiritual values. At the same time, non-religious tourists find sacred sites to be spiritually vibrant places of peace, tranquillity, and inspiration (Sharpley & Sundaram, Citation2005) and to convert these non-religious tourists into potential visitors rampant marketing is going on but this stealth marketing never causes a loss to these religious places in terms of lowering the spiritual vibes of these places instead it is found that Religious sites associated with nature, cultures, and architecture may also help visitors realize the interconnection of humans and the environment (Verschuren, Citation2007), and remains unnoticed.

Findings:

India is so rich and diverse in culture that we have a lot of spiritual places of various religions. Religion takes an important place in our culture. Almost 90% of our population is associated with a religion in one or other way. Religion plays an important role in spiritual tourism. People from different diversity of Indian cultures invest in their spiritual sites to make them more attractive and create a landmark in their respective spiritual places.

Spiritual places help people to get inner energy and help them to enlighten their spirituality. Not from India people come from different parts of the world to explore the heritage site and that makes the spiritual market a very big market.

Spiritual places turn out to be the centre of gravity for associating oneself with a religion. The core activity of a spiritual place is to Spread their ideology. The ideology can be spread only if you pull enough people to the site.

The first step to spread is to acquaint people with ideology and to make people aware the only way that we find is through “Marketing”. the basic need of marketing of such places is to increase footfall at such places. Generally, we can find that there are four sections in our society 1) people who are very much towards spiritual things, they have given their life towards spirituality, and their basic job role is to visit such places and do worship. 2) people who have personal profit towards visiting such places but such people don’t go regularly rather they visit such places whenever something good or something bad is happening in their life and 3) people who do not have that much belief towards spiritual places, but they slightly believe that some energy controls the universe and last 4) people who don’t believe towards any religion.

Here marketing plays an important role for the 2nd,3rd,4th parts of society, or we can say these parts of our society are the target market for them, the marketing process for each of them can be different, for some marketing of ideology is done and for some marketing of place is done.

Marketing is the only way through which they can spread their word and get people attracted to them. We believe spiritual places prominently have been using many types of marketing.

1) Indirect marketing –

Nowadays it is commonly seen how members of different spiritual places market their products or sell their products which creates a buzz in the market that this product is something that is not an optional product rather it’s a necessity, you must have this product at your place. What the authors have noticed is nowadays member of such spiritual place stops you at any place when you are traveling or walking and they use to inform you about their respective spiritual place and then they inform you about the integrity of that spiritual place which comes under creating a repo with you which is very important to sell your product as per marketing principle and after they successfully create a repo with you they ask you to take their respective product, initially they don’t even ask anything in return or anything in Favor for that product but the moment when you take that product they ask you for some charity for the spiritual society they belong to. Here they are selling their product but instead of direct selling they are cross-selling their product to you and in the end, the consumer feels that they got that Product for free but actually, they have paid for that product.

There are many such incidents in which members of such spiritual places sold their products inside the premises as they have launched all the agarbatti, ghee, and many more things that are used at spiritual places of their brand name, and what generally people do is to buy that product from spiritual premises and that is another source of income for them.

2) Influencer marketing

The increased reach of the internet gave rise to increased access to content and content creators, the content creators are the people who influence the decision-making of many of his audience and the influence of these creators is being precisely used by spiritual places to tap into different demographics of the society. Different influencers are promoting, some directly and some indirectly, the spiritual places according to their belief and their audience and are supporting these spiritual places in marketing.

3) Digital marketing

If talking about marketing digital marketing cannot be avoided, In the age of information digital India has made every corner of our country come under the digital ambit. We see spiritual places actively using social media handles to spread the word.

We can easily see influencer marketing being stealthily used they announce special occasions and special events that are being organized. They often get high-profile people or celebrities to such occasions which again is a strong case of marketing they use videos, and photos of such events to pull crowds for other forthcoming events. There were 692.0 million internet users in India at the start of 2023 when internet penetration stood at 48.7 percent.(

<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-india#>) a large number of the Indian population is available on the internet and digital marketing is the only platform to access this large population. The digital media is not only easily accessible but also economical to reach a large audience.

4) Event marketing

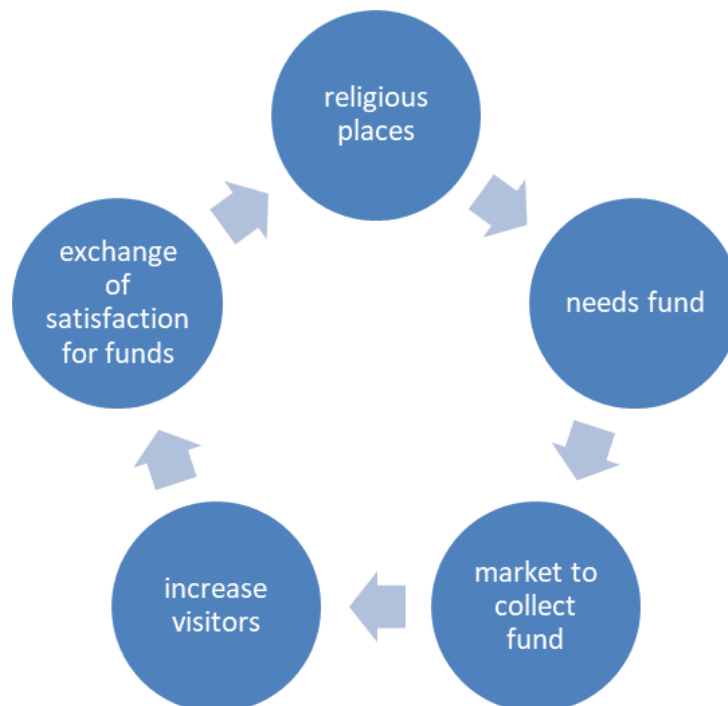
Event marketing is a traditional marketing strategy, every spiritual place has its ideology which it promotes. Events are organized by spiritual places and people are made aware of the ideologies of these places. But these events are not just to promote the ideologies the marketing of these events is done on a large scale to promote the events themselves, spiritual places, events are organized in physical form but that limits the number of viewers to a very small number in comparison to digital means and to utilize this potential spiritual places are also promoting their events through traditional as well as digital platform. It is believed that people who have belief in the ideologies of these spiritual places often find themselves more connected to the place when they physically attend these events which makes them contribute to their ideology and get more satisfaction which is the objective of their visit.

5) Lucrative Infrastructure

India has a very rich heritage from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. That can be seen obviously from the Spiritual places, monuments, caves, tombs, etc. When we speak about spiritual places, they are tall-standing wonders of our glorious heritage.

Ideology alone can't pull a huge crowd to spiritual places. Infrastructure comes in handy to pull people who are not really into ideologies when we speak about architecture. The spread of spiritual places, intricate carvings, huge state towering. Infrastructure attracts people from other regions and other countries as well. It has been noticed and been in the limelight that management trust of some famous spiritual places started investing in their infrastructure as there is a famous quote in marketing "jo dikhta hain wahi bikta hain ". There are many spiritual places where footfall was very low but in 2016 after the investment in their infrastructure, the footfall at that spiritual place increased diagonally. Nowadays people are more towards architecture because they are more towards social media. People in Generation Z are more intended towards social media and posting pictures and if the spiritual places invest in their infrastructure, then it can also attract the new generation people and the old generation too, here investing in infrastructure is a win-win situation for them. Many spiritual places that are on hills invest in their road so that they can manage accommodation so people can come and enjoy the track.

The Ecosystem:



This paper proposes an ecosystem that is followed by spiritual places, that is happening at spiritual places. Every spiritual place needs monetary to run there day to day expenses and some of the spiritual places market their spiritual places to get footfall so that there will be more people through that, they can share their spiritual beliefs with them and they can increase the spirituality among them and if that happens then they get monetary in return as a donation and that monetary again still require spiritual places. This is an ecosystem proposed by authors and is followed by spiritual places.

Conclusion:

In this conceptual model of how spiritual places market themselves, authors have delved into the intriguing world of spiritual tourism and the various strategies employed by these places to attract visitors. While the spiritual tourism market is substantial and growing rapidly, there has been a lack of qualitative research into the marketing practices of spiritual places. This paper aims to bridge that gap and provide insights into the principles and strategies that underlie the marketing efforts of these places.

Authors found that marketing spiritual places is not only about increasing footfall but also about spreading the ideology and spirituality associated with these places.

Spiritual places play a crucial role in connecting individuals with their faith, culture, and inner selves, making marketing an essential tool for achieving these objectives.

Authors research uncovered several key marketing strategies employed by spiritual places:

Indirect Marketing: Many spiritual places utilize indirect marketing by selling products associated with spirituality. These products are often cross-sold to visitors, creating a sense of reciprocity and contributing to the financial sustainability of the place.

Influencer Marketing: With the rise of content creators and influencers, spiritual places tap into different demographics by enlisting influencers to promote their beliefs and practices. These influencers help reach a broader audience and increase the visibility of these places.

Digital Marketing: In an increasingly digital world, spiritual places actively use social media platforms to reach a wide audience. They announce special events, showcase high-profile attendees, and share videos and photos to attract followers and participants.

Event Marketing: Spiritual places organize events to promote their ideologies and engage with visitors. These events are marketed both through traditional means and digital platforms, aiming to connect visitors with the place's core beliefs.

Lucrative Infrastructure: Investment in infrastructure, including architectural improvements and access enhancements, can significantly boost footfall. Modern tourists, including the younger generation, are drawn to visually appealing and Instagram-worthy locations.

The ecosystem of spiritual places revolves around the continuous cycle of marketing and spirituality. These places require monetary support for their daily operations, and marketing efforts help attract visitors who, in turn, contribute through donations. This financial support allows spiritual places to continue their mission of spreading spirituality and maintaining their infrastructure.

In conclusion, marketing plays a pivotal role in the world of spiritual places, helping them connect with a diverse audience and share their ideologies. As spiritual tourism continues to grow, understanding these marketing strategies and their impact on both visitors and spiritual places is essential for further research and development in this unique sector of the tourism industry.

Reference

- <https://www.expertmarketresearch.com/reports/indian-religious-and-spiritual-market>
- <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-india#>