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ATTRACTIONS WITH RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE AND COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

Azizul Hassan

34.1 Introduction

Travelling is a traditional phenomenon of the human civilisation that dates back thousands of years. It has positioned itself as a basic activity for different purposes, mainly recreation. Conceptually, tourism denotes the travelling and staying of individuals or groups of people in a place or places that is not their normal place of living. Roving to places for religious purposes is not uncommon in Asian countries. This is indeed a general form of tourism. Travelling for religious purposes covers a sort of willingness to visit specific places that are the subject of both religious and spiritual reasons. Tourists tend to visit and stay in such places mainly as a religious obligation. Thus, it is quite clear that travelling for religious purposes embraces certain sort of motivations. This type of travelling also relies on diverse factors or issues, ranging from very common visitations to highly spiritual reasons. Tourism that is based on religious purposes in an attraction cannot only have features of spirituality and religious sentiments. This tourism type also becomes responsible for creating employment, generating livelihood supplies and the common socio-economic development of local communities. An interrelationship exists between community-based tourism (CBT) and tourism in religiously important attractions in terms of marketing and promotional activities. From such a perspective, this research is designed with the aim of examining both theoretical and practical aspects of CBT with special reference to tourist attractions having religious importance. This research mainly analyses the balance of benefits and conflicts between different stakeholders, devotee followers and the local communities while promoting tourism. The concept of macromarketing can possibly be related to CBT and tourism in attractions with religious importance. This research analyses micromarketing approaches in relation to promotion and marketing of this tourism type. In reality, research studies of macromarketing in CBT are rather uncommon and a research gap exits in this particular area. This study is thus a positive contribution to bridging this gap. This research is conceptual as it reviews existing literature studies to present logical arguments to reach the defined aim.

34.2 Community-based tourism

CBT is a unique and participatory model of tourism that offers the potential for creating real and long-lasting advantages for a wide range of stakeholders, both outside and inside...
the community (Lee and Jan, 2019). By definition, a community is identified as individuals having some kind of collective responsibility and the ability for representative bodies to make decisions (Imbaya et al., 2019). CBT is thus a tourism type where local residents that are mostly poor, rural and economically marginalised welcome tourists to visit their communities with the offer of overnight accommodation (Rocharungsat, 2005). Community residents have incomes as entrepreneurs, land managers, employees or even product and service providers in relation to CBT. In theory, at least a part of the tourism-generated income is placed aside for projects that provide benefits towards the community and general well-being (Lee and Jan, 2019). CBT allows tourists to discover local wildlife and habitats when they celebrate and respect conventional rituals, cultures and wisdom. The community remains aware of social and commercial values as placed on their cultural and natural heritage through tourism and tourism-centred activities. This, in general, supports and fosters conservation of these resources with the local community’s intervention. Tourist facilities and accommodation mostly follows a set standard mainly for international tourists, unless they expect a very simple rural accommodation (Imbaya et al., 2019). For CBT activities in these technology-influenced years, communities need to have continuous access to a telephone for emergencies or medical assistance and there is a requirement for internet access also, for online communication (Responsible Travel, 2019).

Branding of a community-based tourist attraction needs to involve both the locals and all relevant stakeholders (Lee and Jan, 2019). The branding of CBT very often becomes useful and rewarding, covering numerous viewpoints and relevant projections (Sheldrake, 2001). There can be complexities in outlining the exact meaning of CBT in terms of branding. This very often involves the features of promoting a specific site or a place. CBT can be useful in promoting the image of a region, place or attraction that is relatively unknown. CBT can be relevant to branding and can influence strategy formulation (Rocharungsat, 2005). The branding of a tourist attraction in a community is rather critical in tourism because of the involvement of many different factors. The involvement of communities is a matter of clear understanding and opinion of basic marketing and promotional terminologies, where CBT with mass tourism can create disturbances in the settings and aesthetics of attractions in communities.

34.3 Macromarketing for promotion and marketing

According to Dixon (2002), macromarketing (also spelled macro-marketing) is a type of study of the effect that marketing strategies and policies can have on the economy and society as a whole. Macromarketing is focused on the majority of consumers rather than individuals. The goal of this type of marketing is to determine how to reach a mass market. Macromarketing concentrates on how goods and services are distributed in a society, followed by the global impact of marketing strategies.

In line with the involvement of multiple stakeholders, marketers or beneficiaries, there are also demands to address and capitalise opportunities that a marketplace can offer for the well-being of a community. Macromarketing, in the long run, can benefit the entire the market structure of a community. With the attachment of CBT initiatives to an attraction, macromarketing can be operationalised. The value of tourism in a community has to follow both the theoretical and practical soundness of macromarketing, which can lead to successful marketing and promotion. This is where effective macromarketing approaches need to be applied. Macromarketing can support CBT. Religious establishments in CBT are typically fragile. It becomes necessary to respect their originality or religious values. Again, effective
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Application of macromarketing approaches can ensure harmony between CBT and tourism attractions with religious importance. This can also create interest among the masses for tourism by raising their awareness.

CBT can move forward with implementing macromarketing approaches for marketing and promotion. Macromarketing helps make tourist attractions familiar and acceptable to a global tourist base (Shultz, 2012). This is mainly because CBT and macromarketing can move forward effectively with the help of each other. A fair and considerable balance between CBT and macromarketing can lead to the success of a tourist attraction. Macromarketing can outline and generate reasons for the effective marketing of CBT. However, some complexities in selecting and applying a valid approach of macromarketing can arise in promoting and marketing CBT. Macromarketing should become capable of producing desired outcomes. It is essential to realise that CBT benefit from applying macromarketing approaches (Kilbourne, 2004). These also help reduce policy issues and thus to make a tourist attraction more popular and well branded. Tourism in a community’s religious attractions is attached with the promotion and marketing of these attractions. Thus, the application of macromarketing approaches can have relevance. There is a constant demand for effective macromarketing approaches that can be applied in tourism and, in particular, in CBT. Several approaches are covered by macromarketing (Mittelstaedt et al., 2015). However, the basic challenge remains as to select the most suitable and effective approach of macromarketing that can be performed well in tourism attractions with religious importance (Shultz, 2012).

For the particular case of this research, the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur, a macromarketing approach can be effective and can support the CBT initiatives. There are some specific ways that can support the application of macromarketing approaches in this tourist attraction (Kale, 2004). The status of Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur as a UNESCO World Heritage Site not only resembles branding or place reputation but also secures financial or legal support from international agencies that help support the site’s maintenance. This status can have immense impact on CBT interests, macromarketing approaches and branding. Macromarketing approaches can make this tourist attraction more approachable to tourists (Mittelstaedt et al., 2015). This attraction can possibly manage attention from larger tourist bases. It is true that this attraction needs a lot more to be recognised as a proper religious tourism attraction, mainly because of several limitations. Financial restrictions are one of those and the negative impacts of tourism, like vandalism, are also an issue. Macromarketing approaches can benefit the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur World Heritage Site (WHS) in a great way, to offer a form of memorable experiences for tourists.

34.4 Community-based tourism as the facilitator of community development

Research studies suggest that CBT appeals to identified and particular groups of tourists (Beeton, 2006). Attractions having religious values can attract more tourists than a general tourist attraction. CBT, religiously important sites and marketing have interrelationships that most likely lead to community development. CBT is sensitive and remains a subject matter of critical analysis for both academics and researchers. There is a requirement for understanding the features of CBT while explaining macromarketing approaches and religiously important attractions (Rinschede, 1992). Public sentiments are related to these. CBT can help forward messages to wider audiences and thus involve them in tourism activities that lead to community development. Attractions that are significant due to religious value can accelerate the process of branding both the attraction and the community itself. Thus, the perspectives of CBT are diverse and concentrate on numerous aspects (Beeton,
2006). These also can have a sharp impact on the attraction’s touristic and authentic image for marketing. A positive image with religion-influenced characteristics has the capacity to immensely support branding of an attraction to global audiences.

The literature emphasises religious activities in communities surrounding the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur of Bangladesh (Hassan and Rahman, 2015). It also identifies that CBT can have positive effects on community development through activities and initiatives. These all can influence a tourist attraction. Emotions for religion can influence to attract specific tourist types to an attraction (Vukonic, 1996). This helps establish the belief that the Buddhist Vihara is an important tool for local community development.

34.5 Buddhist theology and the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur of Bangladesh

Buddhism as a religion has hundreds of thousands of followers. Traditionally, this religion dates back several hundreds of years and has had clear influences on mankind (Bhandari, 2019). Buddhism as a religion has its own tradition and history that are highly enriched in terms of theological aspects and followers’ beliefs. This is a religion that offers lessons to ensure peace and prosperity in every aspect of human lives. Within all of these facts and perspectives, Buddhism as a religion offers exceptional lessons to the world. Siddhartha Gautama, commonly known as the Buddha, had aspirations to teach peace to the entire world (Wong et al., 2013).

As observed in case of the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur of Bangladesh, religiously important attractions typically have better image and reputation than general tourism attractions (Nevins and Whyte, 2018). Three religions are related to this specific attraction: Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism (Nevins and Whyte, 2018). The number of followers of these three religions are huge and are spread across the world. There is scope to attach the CBT activities or initiatives to these three identified religions (Stausberg, 2010). Such a scope can be enough to help CBT and macromarketing contribute to community development. This signifies that CBT can be benefitted from both branding and macromarketing.

The presence of stakeholders is obvious in places that have religious values and that possess the capacity to attract numerous groups of people. Such situations can be congenial but sometimes can be troubled in the same manner. The possibility of internal conflict generation is apparent in such circumstances (Bhandari, 2019). CBT activities in a religiously important attraction can produce unexpected results that can be associated with harmful or conflicted relationships within the local communities. However, as argued by the literature, Buddhism as a religion does not permit any conflicting relationship, as this is typically forbidden.

As a relevant example, the Mekong experience managed to get attention from certain communities. A high risk of conflict exists when multiple stakeholders have the same interests (Millar, 2006). The Mekong experience is able to provide ways and guidelines to minimise the chances of possible conflicts between stakeholders, beneficiaries and multiple parties involved. It is also able to provide guidelines and frameworks to show ways to reduce the chances of conflicts between stakeholders, at the same time (Theerappapisit, 2003).

Irresponsible initiatives or activities in CBT give rise to numerous disadvantages. In the particular case of the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur, CBT activities and macromarketing approaches can raise conflicts between the stakeholders, the tourists and local communities, with their mutual and interests. Lessons from the Mekong experience, as suggested by Theerappapisit (2003), show that a positive attitude can put forward and show ways to overcome concerned environmental or related conflicting issues. The attitudes of visiting tourists need to be maintained in line with religious beliefs. A congenial balance needs to
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be maintained with the environment and characteristics of the attraction, to respect interests of at least three religions, Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism (Karpati, 2008). All of these comprehensively ensure community development.

34.6 The Buddhist Vihara at Paharpur world heritage site and the Mekong experience

Stakeholders claim that this attraction has a centuries-old legacy that symbolises Buddhist theology and reputation. This attraction thus involves multiple stakeholders such as the government, UNESCO, policy planners and beneficiaries. This attraction has received sufficient attention from global audiences through its interaction with UNESCO and after being enlisted in UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites list (Hassan and Rahman, 2015).

The Buddhist Vihara at Paharpur is important for the local communities. These communities live near this attraction. CBT related activities mainly support their living. CBT can become the source of economic benefits for the local communities. These communities have a dependency on tourism promotion of this attraction. Like many other places in the world, this attraction can have positive impacts on the livelihood of the local communities. It is common that local communities can benefit from positive outcomes of CBT and that this can also offer them more scope for livelihood generation and earnings. The followers of the three identified religions are also involved (Vukonić, 1996). The criticality and facts of addressing the interests of these devotees are important. It is certain that these followers can bring enormous changes to this attraction.

However, the involvement of multiple stakeholders can create grounds for conflict, in many cases. Such conflicts result in negative effects on aesthetics or the setting of the entire area that has religious importance (Brown, 2004). In reality, due to the geographical setting and location of the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur, there is very little chance of potential conflicts between the local communities, stakeholders, devotee followers and tourists. Relevant studies evidence that there have been no known conflicts between general tourists, local communities, government officials and stakeholders in the recent past (Nevins and Whyte, 2018).

The application of any possible theoretical approach of conflict resolution between tourism, religious sentiments and the interests of multiple stakeholders can be enormous (Bhandari, 2019). Thus, there is very little chance that can create a sort of distance and conflict between local communities and remaining stakeholders. Devotees as well as general tourists visit the attraction with respect and submission. The religious followers do not necessarily have intentions other than offering devotion and respect for religious integration (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005). Thus, the chance of a possible conflict by these followers and general tourists becomes negative.

The Mekong experience can have wider validity in a possible conflict situation. The development of tourism in the Mekong region in Thailand ensured an effective balance between stakeholders and beneficiaries in terms of benefit sharing and conflict resolution. Approaches and understanding from the Mekong region offer knowledge about conflict management and harm reduction to promote tourism in a community. The patterns and types of conflict resolution between specified stakeholders and beneficiaries can help promote tourism, as evidenced from the Mekong experience (Theerappapisit, 2003).

In case of a possible conflict between stakeholders of the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur, the Mekong experience can help. There is high risk that the Mekong experience can be irrelevant in this given case due to less likelihood of any possible conflict. In the Buddhist
Vihara of Paharpur, the stakeholders are relatively few in number and their interests are also not also huge. This is because the capacities and sources of revenue generation are relatively low in the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur (Brown, 1998). Thus, the Mekong experience as an example can be viewed as having less efficacy where grounds for conflict remain absent or at very negligible stage.

34.7 Some implications

The planning and implementing CBT in a site with religious importance need some attention covering both concept and practice (Rinschede, 1992). The theoretical meaning of CBT with principles and underlying ideas are important. The definitions and terms of tourism types similar to CBT also need to be clarified. As CBT and community development are interrelated, facilitating the development process of CBT becomes important. The Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur has marketing potentials. In this regard, policy support of the government and the local administration are important to support CBT in the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur. These can help facilitate funding and the organisation of CBT. This also help deal with the negative and positive impacts of tourism, as well as the weaknesses and strengths of the communities involved (Beeton, 2006).

For CBT in the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur, planning deserves special attention, in terms of element selection, strategy planning, plan making, community capacity, element building and market planning, followed by monitoring and evaluation planning (Hassan and Rahman, 2015). CBT in the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur needs to address administrative organisation with the important analysis of elements of CBT administrative organisation, participation, role division, benefit division, transparency and measures for controlling and preventing cultural and natural effects. In CBT, programme design principles, element selection, carrying capacities analysis, tour and service fee quotation have importance (Shultz, 2012).

Interpretive guiding for CBT in the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur requires the understanding of its meaning, types and acceptance by the users. On the other hand, CBT marketing is expected to cover marketing, issues settling, marketing mechanisms, tourist preparation and evaluations post-tour (Mittelstaedt et al., 2015). CBT also needs to address monitoring and evaluation with its meaning, benefits, schedule monitoring, monitoring framework, tools, indicators and the evaluation process (Shultz, 2012).

Many stakeholders can be involved in CBT and their proper identification is useful. Involved stakeholders for CBT in the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur need to be involved with proper importance and attention. Also, their interrelationship with tourism should be considered, followed by approaches for working with them, cooperation levels and the cooperation process. Networking in CBT should cover its definition, importance and working meaning, supported by the benefits and rational of networks at diverse levels (Mittelstaedt et al., 2015).

CBT in attractions with religious importance deserve the involvement of local communities (Beeton, 2006). CBT in such attractions can pose both positive and negative effects. Thus, negativity minimisation measures are important to follow. In this regard, CBT in such attractions needs to follow theoretical suggestions to preserve the attraction’s fragile and sensitive appeal (Shultz, 2012). Mass tourism is a feature of an attraction with religious importance. The effects of mass tourism can be devastating and, in the long run, can jeopardise the attraction (Mittelstaedt et al., 2015). The Mekong World Heritage Site is good example of a well-planned and implemented tourism initiative with the involvement of local...
communities. In the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur attraction, benefits can be generated and simultaneously passed on to the respective community for its well-being. CBT in such attractions poses both environmental and capacity risks. The Mekong World Heritage Site is leading the way in creating an example to follow that actually balances CBT with development (Theerappapisit, 2003). This development then benefits the relevant stakeholders and local communities and supports community well-being. CBT in similar attractions can lead to the creation of economic benefits for multiple stakeholders involved, as well as the local communities. The Mekong World Heritage Site experience can be obviously shared by similar attractions across the world. But this experience has less relevance in the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur because of very low chance of conflict at present. However, mass tourism could be a feature of the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur in the future, so it deserves clear understanding.

34.8 Conclusion

This research aimed to outline CBT in a tourism attraction having religious importance, with the Buddhist Vihara of Paharpur as an example. This research is conceptual and based on reviewing the relevant literature. The history of the Buddhist Vihara at Paharpur World Heritage Site is enriched and the level of acceptance of general people and tourists is also huge. Thus, this site can hardly be viewed as a site only focused on religious activities but also promotes and encourages CBT activities to a considerable number of local communities. The potential of this particular attraction can be increased through adopting effective macromarketing approaches. It is also crucial to select and implement the right approach for getting benefits from macromarketing. Macromarketing approaches can be rewarding in this case, where religious sensitivities are relatively lower than in similar attractions. The macromarketing approach is bit more unusual and unknown in Bangladesh, where the level of knowledge of CBT is not encouraging. Also, effective conflict resolution management strategies can possibly turn this attraction into a major CBT base in terms of popularity and attractiveness. The lack of primary data and information is rather a limitation of this research, as the data and information are less comprehensive. This limitation should be addressed well in future research studies. Thus, future studies can focus on diverse aspects related to CBT in attractions with religious importance.

References