“Sight-seeing for sight less” – An empirical study on the significance of tourism for visually impaired people and their interest towards consuming tourism services in Tamilnadu, India”

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Abstract

Purpose: To assess and understand the significance of tourism and its impact on the visually impaired people. This paper will also examine attitude of visually impaired people towards the consuming tourism services. The research will also assess various factors and reasons behind the tourism consumption of visually impaired in Tamilnadu.

Methodology: It is a descriptive research based on empirical study that purely rests on the primary source of data for its critical analysis. The research adopted survey method using structured questionnaire through personally administered approach to find out the significance and impact of tourism on visually challenged people in Tamilnadu.

Findings: The paper reveals that most of the VC people have consumed tourism services in the past. The VC people are positive about consuming tourism and feel that tourism is significant for them on reasons like relieving stress, drawing happiness through the pleasure of friends and relatives. Most of them are willing to consume tourism service on regular basis and prefer going with friend and relatives and does not want consume alone for safety precaution. The VC choices of tourism location are hill station that offers them change of climate and waterfalls, lake to feel the fun from water related activities.

Practical implications: The key findings of this research will create awareness among tourism promoters and agents in serving the visually challenged people and their current tourism consumption pattern. This research will also offer insight into the various factors that support the VC people to consume tourism service to insist on tourism promoters and agents to customize their offerings & promotions that suits the special category people.

Originality/value: The new look India after liberalization offered very good potential in the world tourism market. With Indian tradition and culture that is full of monuments history it is viewed as one of the most attractive destination. The market is looking at normal people as potential for tourism services, there is an unrevealed truth that there has been interest flown from few visually challenged people to consume tourism products. Tourism services consumption among VC is becoming common as they prefer for reasons other than the sight-seeing. This research will look to understand and discuss the significance of tourism services to VC people and their interest towards consuming tourism in Tamilnadu.

Keywords: Tourism services, visually Challenged, Significance of tourism.

1. Introduction:

The recent development in the economic conditions and market growth has paved way for the tourism industry to explore more opportunities around the world. India is known for its heredity and rich history. With country full of rich culture and monuments it has been gaining lots of importance across the world. The Indian tourism industry has been thriving hard to create new opportunities that will increase its potential across the world. With advanced technology and electronic communications the tourism industry is travelling into a new era that offers information and services to everyone across every region. The tourism industry and channel partners have understood the potential of the market and are working towards it. The main concern of this paper is that the tourism players should not isolate the tourism services from the visually challenged people. Not many researchers have initiated to study or assess the importance of the VC people with tourism. This paper is designed to evaluate the importance of visually impaired people and their attitude and interest towards the tourism services.

2. Indian Tourism Industry

The tourism industry in India is substantial and vibrant, and the country is fast becoming a major global destination. India’s travel and tourism industry is one of the most profitable industries in the country, and also credited with contributing a substantial amount of foreign exchange. Several reasons are cited for the growth and prosperity of India’s travel and tourism industry. Economic growth has added millions annually to the ranks of India’s middle class, a group that is driving domestic tourism growth. Thanks in part to its booming IT and outsourcing industry a growing number of business trips are made by foreigners to India, who will often add a weekend break or longer holiday to their trip. Foreign tourists spend more in India than almost any other country worldwide. Tourist arrivals are projected to increase by over 22% per year through till 2010, with a 33% increase in foreign exchange earnings recorded in 2004. The Tourism Ministry has also played an important
role in the development of the industry, initiating advertising campaigns such as the ‘Incredible India’ campaign, which promoted India’s culture and tourist attractions in a fresh and memorable way. The campaign helped create a colorful image of India in the minds of consumers all over the world, and has directly led to an increase in the interest among tourists. The tourism industry has helped growth in other sectors as diverse as horticulture, handicrafts, agriculture, construction and even poultry. Both directly and indirectly, increased tourism in India has created jobs in a variety of related sectors. The numbers tell the story: almost 20 million people are now working in the India’s tourism industry. A new growth sector is medical tourism. It is currently growing at around 30% per annum. Medical tourist arrivals are expected to reach one million soon [1].

3. Research Objective:

The research is aimed at investigating the significance of tourism and its impact on the visually impaired people. The below are the list of objectives of this paper.
- To examine the attitude of visually impaired people towards consuming tourism services.
- To know the interest place for tourism consumption and various reasons behind the tourism consumption of visually impaired in Tamilnadu.

4. Research Methodology:

The research concentrates on studying visually challenged groups. Studying the special group needs different approach as direct questionnaire or survey will not be effective. The researcher conducted focus group interviews to source information. The focus group interview offered significant support to identify the key variables of tourism that are critical from the visually challenged People. The focus group interview was conducted with a group constituting 5 visually challenged respondents. The Focus group interview was done with 50 Visually Challenged respondents with regular monthly income. The samples were chosen through various associations of visually challenged groups. The respondents profile presented below depicts the demographic distribution of the visually challenged customer segment covered in the survey.

Table showing Demographic profile of the visually challenged respondents covered in the research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 – 30</td>
<td>7 32</td>
<td>Single 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 35</td>
<td>19 8</td>
<td>Married 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 – 40</td>
<td>22 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 40</td>
<td>2 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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5. Literature Review:

5.1 Visually Challenged People:
Potential of Visually challenged Customer Segment: About 284 million people are visually impaired worldwide: 39 million are blind and 245 have low vision. 90% of the World's visually impaired live in developing countries [2] and More than 25 per cent of the world’s blind population is in India. India has more than 12 million visually impaired people [3]. The CII report pointed out the significance rate of visually challenged people in the Indian population. The report also explains the importance of these special category people and their growth during the recent years. They are becoming more self-sufficient by transcending into careers those were challenging their potential due to their disability [4].The researchers have proved that technology has made the VCs more competent and has supported in acquiring information and consume services like normal persons [5]. With sizable population the visually challenged customer segment is gaining importance in all the industry that includes tourism.

5.2 Significance of Tourism Services:
Tourism is an activity of great importance both economically and in terms of the pleasure it gives to holidaymakers worldwide. Nearly all individuals in the western world take some sort of holiday away from home every year, although the number of days differs across and within different countries. Previous tourism studies have noted that insufficient attention has been paid to the experience and practices of the tourist. Instead, most work has focused on the effects of tourism [6]. Fodness and Murray comment that “detailed knowledge of the basis of actual tourist behavior is lacking” [7]. Many researchers have conducted study on normal customers point of view but not much of research being done in the past studying the tourism industry from visually challenged perspective. This research will contribute to the literature enormously as this would be the first ever research being done to understand the significance of tourism to the visually impaired people in Tamilnadu. This research offers wide scope for review and research in the future.

6. Discussion on Findings:

This section summarizes the major findings of the research. Each of the significant variables and tourism perspectives of visually impaired people are discussed to reveal their attitude and interest towards consuming tourism.

a. Tourism consumption perception of visually challenged people:
The data analysis revealed that 45 out of 50 respondents have consumed tourism services during last two years. This shows that around 90% of the visually challenged respondents have been on tour in recent time. This signifies the significance of tourism for this special category people in spite of their limitation to enjoy or have fun as they cannot see. The data also revealed that all the VC people who have consumed tourism have done so either with their friends or with their relatives. This statistics also shows that none of them have toured individually or consumed tourism singly and they have always consumed with the group (in company of others). Most of the respondents have consumed tourism services with their friends and few of them relatives. The tourism services are consumed by VC people largely through friends than relatives or individually. The respondents also highlighted the decision to tour and choice of location or tourism place to be visited was always
decided by the group or persons accompanying the VC people. It shows that the tourism location or place to visit is not decided by the VC people instead done by the person accompanying (parents/ Spouse/ Relatives/ friends) them. The strong reason for not involving in deciding the tourism locations can be attributed to lack of information and inability to access pictures about by the locations by VC people.

b. **Visually Challenged People's attitude towards significance of Tourism consumption:**

The visually impaired group felt that touring or consuming tourism is very important for them. They reveal that they need to consume tourism regularly. They are positive about consuming tourism as they feel it helps them relax or reduce monotonous feeling. They state it helps them to change the mood of their family members that helps them change the atmosphere at home as well as supports the work life balance.

c. **Visually Challenged people’s preference and interest towards various tourism places and their motive to the choice of location:**

The research tried to find out the interest places to which the visually challenged people are willing to tour and to identify the factors and motives that influence the choice of location. The interview proved that all the respondents are willing to tour to a hill station, and waterfalls. The reason for interest towards touring to hill station is to experience the feel of new climate (chillness) that gives them unique experience. They have also preferred places like lake, waterfalls, etc that gives them access to water related activities like taking bath, feeling the force of waterfalls. The main reason behind choosing water related touring places is to experience fun through by getting drenched in the water.

The visually impaired people have preferred to go with friends and relatives than alone or independently which is largely due to their inability to travel alone. The basic reason quoted by them for travelling with groups are basically due to their inability to travel alone. They have also preferred places like lake, waterfalls, etc that gives them access to water related activities like taking bath, feeling the force of waterfalls. The main reason behind choosing water related touring places is to experience fun through by getting drenched in the water.

The respondents have also quoted that though they prefer hill station and waterfalls as their choice of location to tour, the decision on touring itinerary and location is too made by people who accompany them.

The visually challenged respondents reveal that their main source of tourism related information is word-of-mouth. Few respondents have also cited the Website as the source of information as they are familiar with browsing using the JASS software that reads the content of the web pages. Some of them have also quoted Mobile device as the source as they are very comfortable using Mobile devices when compared to other technological media of communication. The mobile devices have special software called ‘talks’ that allows them to hear the text messages from the mobile. Therefore the Visually impaired respondents have felt that the mobile devices will be the most suitable source for communication that provides information about tourism services.

7. **Recommendations:**

With the VC customer segment showing lots of interest in tourism consumption and showing positive response to consume at regular intervals the tourism players like travel agents and Development Corporation needs to work on designing and developing tourism services that matches the special needs of the VC segment as their needs and desires are unique and completely different from the persons normal. They seek to consume with group of normal persons and does not involve in decision making in spite of their interest because of their disability. The tourism players can create keen interest and make these people more participative in decision making by customizing their services that can be specially consumed by them. The theme parks can create more safe and secured games that can be enjoyed by the VC segment without help. The Tourism industry needs to look at some of the electronic media as the special mode of communication that can reach these special category people. Having said all these it is early stage for this segment and industry to synchronize their requirements and offering without studying the market variable in detail. The Tourism development corporations’ needs to conduct research in amidst VC segment from different dimensions to understand their consumption pattern and behavior that will prove insight into designing newer services for this special group.

8. **Conclusion:**

The research was initiated to identify and understand the significance of the tourism consumption with special reference to the visually challenged people. The potential of the VC people has seen a transformation with the technological support as they have started excelling in various fields and sectors like IT, Academics, etc. in spite of their challenges and limitations. The research overall result reports favourable response of this special category people’s interest towards consuming tourism services. The findings report the VCs positive attitude towards tourism services as they feel it is important for them to relieve stress and take time from routine to eradicate monotonous feeling. They also report the significance of touring with the group especially friends group instead of touring alone citing safety reasons. The decision on tourism rests on the person accompanying the VC people. They have discussed the importance of Word-of-mouth, Mobile devices and Web sites as the most important sources they seek for information related to the tourism services. This research offers wide scope to the literature and inquiry into further variables and details from the visually challenged people’s perspective apart from bringing the importance of this special category people into light and its significance to the tourism channels to design and deliver customer specific components that meet the special requirements of these people.

**REFERENCE:**

4. CII (confederation of Indian Industry), 'Banking Access for the visually challenged customer, May 2010