

THE IMPACT OF WORD OF MOUTH ON TOURIST CHOICE OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract

Word of Mouth is a way of providing the information from an individual to another individual i.e. it is a form of oral communication and used as a mean of marketing and advertising a product or service. This paper deals with how word of mouth helps in promoting and advertising the tourist destinations of Himachal Pradesh. For the purpose of this study a sample of 100 tourists has been selected out of which 35 were foreign tourist and 65 were Indian tourists. The responses from the respondents were collected by using a well designed questionnaire and these responses has been analysed by using SPSS 16 software.

Key Words: Word-of-Mouth, Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation, Tourist Destination, Foreign Tourist, Indian Tourist.

Word of Mouth

Word of mouth is the passing of information from person to person by oral communication, which could be as simple as telling someone the time of the day. Story telling is a common form of word-of-mouth communication where one person tells others a story about a real event or something made up. Word of mouth may be defined as, "An unpaid form of promotion in which satisfied customers tell other people how much they like a business, product or service".

However, it is important to point out that word of mouth need not necessarily be brand, product or service - focused. It may be organization - focused. Neither needs word of mouth face to face, direct, oral or ephemeral. The electronic community, for example, generates virtual word of mouth is not face to face, not direct, not oral, and not ephemeral. Many Marketers find this type of marketing strategy to have many advantages to the whole advertising campaign of a certain product. One positive aspect of this marketing strategy is that sources of this word of mouth advertising are mostly personal. This means that they are not subject to persuasion from the organisation for personal gains or subject to being bias. This has a positive

effect on the advertising campaign as it shows what consumers honestly think about a product and the motivation to try the particular product or services increases, due to the consumer being recommended by a trusted reliable source.

Word-of-mouth marketing implies that an organisation takes active steps to encourage word of mouth (e.g. offering a reward to the word of mouth sender), whereas normal word of mouth implies that the sender is not rewarded. To promote and manage word-of-mouth communications, marketers use publicity techniques as well as viral marketing methods to achieve desired behavioural response. Companies can focus on brand advocates, the people who proactively recommend their favourite brands and products online and offline without being paid to do so. Influencer marketing is also increasingly used to seed word of mouth marketing by targeting key individuals who have authority and many personal connections.

Himachal Pradesh Tourism

Himachal Pradesh is famous for its Himalayan landscapes and popular hill stations. Many outdoor activities such as rock climbing, ice - skating are popular tourist attractions in Himachal Pradesh. Shimla, the state capital, is very popular among tourists. The Kalka - Shimla Railway, is a mountain railway which is a UNESCO world heritage site. Shimla is also famous skiing attraction in India. Other popular hill station includes Mandi and Kasauli. Dharamshala, home of the Dalai Lama, is known for its Tibetan monasteries and Buddhist temples. Many trekking expeditions are also being here. The Ridge is a large rode in Shimla which is centre for most of cultural activities in Shimla.

The natural beauty of Himachal Pradesh has made Himachal Pradesh tourism really popular for a long time now. Tourists in Himachal Pradesh can indulge in a plethora of activities while they are on vacation. In Himachal Pradesh tourists can go trekking and camping, indulge in adventure tourism, eco - tourism, religious tourism, visit wildlife sanctuaries, tour lakes, and attend fairs and festivals.

Tourist destinations in Himachal Pradesh

Kullu - Manali:- Kullu in Himachal Pradesh is one of the most frequented tourist destinations. Often heard along with the name Manali, yet another famous tourist spot, Kullu is situated on the banks of Beas River. Kullu valley is also known as the 'Valley of Gods'. Manali offers splendid views of the snow-capped mountains. The land is not just a feast to your visual senses; it

also offers you the chance to ascertain your fitness level with the sporting facilities here.

Shimla - The enchanting beauty of Shimla made British declare the land as their summer capital. The colonial influence is still evident in the city. The hill station offers spectacular views of the snow-capped Himalayan ranges. Here are the leading destinations in Shimla, Jakhoo Hill, Simla State Museum, The Ridge, Summer Hill, Daranghati Sanctuary, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Naldehra and Shaily Peak, Chadwick Falls, Kufri, Christ Church, Annandale, Wild Flower Hall etc.

Chamba - The spectacular beauty of Chamba has made this place dear to nature lovers. Located on the banks of River Ravi and at an altitude of over 900 meters above sea level, Chamba makes an excellent holiday retreat. Here are some important destinations in Chamba are Khajjiar Lake, Chamera Lake, Kalatop Wildlife Sanctuary, Bhuri Singh Museum.

Dharamshala - '*The Scotland of India*', as Dharamshala is famously referred to, has snow-clad mountains on three sides and valley on one side. The mountains being over 4000m height, you can have an excellent view of them from every viewpoint. Pine trees and tree gardens along with snow covered mountains render magic to the air.

Kasauli - Kasauli is situated at an altitude of 1927 meters and like a few other places in Himachal Pradesh, reflects the influence of colonial rule. The views from here are spectacular. The serenity of the place is enchanting. Here are some top attractions in Kasauli, Monkey Point, Sunset Point, Christ Church, Dagshai, St. Patrick's Church, Gurkha Fort, Central Research Institute, The Mall, Timber Trail Resort etc.

Solan - Solan, famously called 'The mushroom city of India', is a beautiful city located amidst scenic snow-clad mountains and forests. Mushroom farming being very extensive here, the land is named thus. It is a great place for trekking and it is heaven for those who love to feel oneness with nature.

Sirmaur - Sirmaur is located on the south-eastern part of the state. The district is famous for its peach, which is from Rajgarh region, famously called the Peach Bowl. Fossils aging 85 million years have been found here. Every one of the destinations here is important and interesting are , Shivalik Fossil Park, Churdhar Peak, Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary, Mini Zoo, Nahan, Jaganath Temple, Trilokpur Temple, Daula Kuan etc.

Literature Review

Various studies on different aspects of word of mouth have been worked out in the past. Laczniak et al. (2001) found that people sometimes reacted against advice and became even more committed to a brand that was subject to negative comment. Silverman, (2001) through study stated that any other type of communication would be perceived as commercial and formal because advertising, public, and media relations communicate a message specifically selected, conceived, and expressed by the product or service vendor through an owned or leased medium. Senecel & Nantel, (2004) argued that the expert systems and discussion forums as impersonal recommendation sources because consumers are influenced in their choice of products online by recommendations posted online.

Goldsmith, R.E. & Horowitz, D (2006) studied that the word of mouth has a dissimilar impacting people that are without a fundamental knowledge of this part of business. When you do not have any experience in a part of business you will be more biased by someone who will tell you something positive or negative about a picky brand. Allsop al. (2007), found that word of mouth has an important impact on customer decisions, and al. helps to present a good post - purchase wakefulness.

Allsop, Basett, & Hoskins (2007) through their study revealed that the word of mouth is a complex phenomenon and generally not something that can be controlled directly. East, Hammond, & Lomax, (2008) used role - play experiments and survey methods and found that positive word of mouth usually had more effect than negative word of mouth. They showed that the impact of both positive word of mouth and negative word of mouth had the same determinants.

Tsuifang et al. (2010) claimed that power of information transferred in negative online word of mouth, expertise of sender and strength of the relationship between sender and receiver are effective in customer purchasing. Furthermore trust is a mediator between negative communication and purchasing decision. Kim & Lee, (2011) found that when a customer was satisfied with the services or products of a given company, the tendency to be loyal to that company is usually high because of positive reinforcement and other potential customers are encouraged to do business with the company.

Need For Study

Himachal Pradesh is one of the most beautiful states of India. Every year a number of tourists visit to Himachal Pradesh from various states of India as well as from various countries of the world. If we see the last ten years tourist arrival trend in Himachal Pradesh then we will find that the tourist arrival is increasing every year except only one year i.e. 2013 due to some reasons. From the economic point of view, tourism is a great source of income for the people of Himachal Pradesh. Tourism industry is one part of service sector where it is very difficult to define or explain that what actually we are offering. The actual satisfaction can be taken by visiting at a particular destination in tourism sector.

The study on word of mouth in context to the tourism can be helpful to increase the tourist inflow in the state. It can be beneficial in order to build a brand image and it can be also beneficial in the promotion of tourism in Himachal Pradesh without incurring any promotional cost. If the word of mouth of tourists will be positive towards various tourism destinations of Himachal Pradesh then it will influence the decision of other future tourists by the views of already visitors and vice versa. This study would be beneficial to make a comparison that on which promotion method for the promotion for Himachal Tourism the government need to work out. Through the study we can find out that which promotional tool, the tourists prefers more in tourism industry.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study were as follows :-

- To find the impact on word of mouth on tourist decision about tourism destinations.
- To find out the impact of word of mouth on brand image in tourism industry.
- To find out the effectiveness of word of mouth as a promotional tool in comparison to other promotional tools for the promotion of tourism industry.

Methodology

This research study was conducted in Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh. A survey is conducted to collect data related to the study from various domestic as well as foreign tourists. In the present research study the data is collected from 100 tourists which includes both Indian as well as foreign tourists. Out of these 100 tourists 35 are the foreign tourists and 65 are the

Indian tourists on the basis of convenience sampling technique. In order to obtain the required information, a well designed questionnaire was administered to different domestic and foreign tourists. The questionnaire covered different aspects of tourists such as the demographic profile of tourists, attitude of tourists towards word of mouth, views of tourists towards impacts of word of mouth on their behaviour, media of promotion for Himachal Pradesh tourism. The information thus collected was analysed with the help of statistical tools and techniques. The attitude of the respondents was analysed with the Likert Scale. Through the Likert Scale the score was calculated, with the help of WAS (Weighted Average Score). For Strongly Agree (SA), five marks were allotted; four marks were allotted to Agree (A), three marks for Neutral, two marks for Disagree (D), and one for Strongly Disagree (SD). Same the technique is used to analyse other statements.

Analysis and Results

Tourist Inflow in Himachal Pradesh: Tourism industry in Himachal Pradesh is a major contributor to the GDP of the state. According to the table - 1 total tourist inflow has increased in the year 2006 as compared to the year 2005. In the year 2007, 2008 it has decreased from 11.46 % to 10.91% and 10.52% respectively. In the year 2009 It has again increased with a very high rate that is 17.31%, but after that from 2009 to 2013 it start to decrease continuously and then took a little increase in the year 7.82. Same type of up and down in the tourist arrival rate we can see in the column of Indian and Foreign tourist arrival, separately.

Table 1 :- Domestic and Foreign Tourist Arrival in HP between year 2004 - 2014

Year	Indian Tourists Arrival	%age Change	Foreign Tourists Arrival	%age Change	Total Tourist Arrival	%age Change
2004	6345069	-	204344	-	6549413	-
2005	6927742	9.18	207790	1.68	7135532	8.94
2006	7671902	10.74	281569	35.50	7953471	11.46
2007	8481988	10.55	339409	20.54	8821397	10.91
2008	9372697	10.50	376736	10.99	9749433	10.52
2009	11036572	17.75	400583	6.32	11437155	17.31
2010	12811986	16.08	453616	13.23	13265602	15.98
2011	14604888	13.99	484518	6.81	15089406	13.74
2012	15646048	7.12	500284	3.25	16146332	7.00
2013	14715586	- 5.94	414249	- 17.19	15129835	- 6.29
2014	15924701	8.21	389699	- 5.92	16314400	7.82

Source: - Himachal Pradesh Tourism Corporation

The demographical characteristics of the respondents were collected keeping in view the six variables such as residential status, gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, and income level. The sample units were selected on the basis of convenience and judgement sampling methods. Table 2 makes clear that out of 100 tourists, 35% are foreigners and 65% are Indian tourists, male were 71% and female were 29 % in the age group of 15 - 30 (55%), 31 - 45 (18%), 46 - 60 (19%), and 60 year and above (8%) tourists were. Out of 100 tourists 45% tourists were married and 55 % tourists were unmarried. The educational status of these tourists were, that out of 100 tourists, illiterate (0%), under-metric (0%), matriculate (5%), higher secondary (8%), graduate (47%), post graduate (36%) and any other (4%) were. And occupational status of these tourists were, that out of 100 tourists, unemployed (22%), govt. employee (20%), private employee (43%), self - employed (13%), and other (2%) were. Table is also showing the data about the income level of these tourists that, out of 100 tourists, between the income level of 0 - 2 lakh (21%), 2.1 - 6 lakh (28%), 6.1 - 15 lakh (29%), 15.1 and above (29%) tourists were.

Table 2 :- Demographic Profile of Tourists

(N = 100)

Items	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1. Residential Status	Foreign Tourists	35	35
	Indian Tourists	65	65
2. Gender	Male	71	71
	Female	29	29
3. Age (years)	15 - 30	55	55
	31 - 45	18	18
	46 - 60	19	19
	61 and Above	8	8
4. Marital Status	Married	45	45
	Unmarried	55	55
5. Educational Level	Illiterate	0	0
	Under - Metric	0	0
	Matriculate	5	5
	Higher Secondary	8	8
	Graduation	47	47
	Post Graduation	36	36
	Any Other	4	4

6. Occupation	Unemployed	22	22
	Govt. Employee	20	20
	Pvt. Employee	43	43
	Self - Employed	13	13
	Other	2	2
7. Income Level (Lakh)	0 - 2 Lakh	21	21
	2.1 - 6 Lakh	28	28
	6.1 - 15 Lakh	29	29
	15.1 and Above	22	22

Table 2 contains the information about the tourist including the frequency of visiting, tourists mostly visits with, purpose of visiting, arrangement of the tour, and what kind of arrangement generally they do in the tour. Majority of the tourists that is 66% tourists has visited first time to Himachal Pradesh, 12% have visited second time, 8% have visited third time and 14% have visited more than three time or they have not exactly remember which time they have visited to Himachal Pradesh. Majority of the tourists that is 60% has visited with their family. 25% of the tourists have visited with their friends, 5% has visited with their colleagues or co - workers, and 10% of the tourists has visited with any other persons. The major purpose of the tourists behind visiting to Himachal Pradesh is to see the natural beauty of Himachal Pradesh that 45% of tourists were said. 10% tourists have visited ere for the fun, 9% has visited to see the heritage sites of Himachal Pradesh. 27% of tourists have visited due to all these reasons, and 9% tourists has visited for any other purpose. Out of 100 tourists, majority of the tourists that is 81% has arranged this tour themselves, and 19% of the tourists have purchased the tour package from the tour agents. During this tour the tourists has arranged many things. Out of 100 tourists, 26% has taken a hotel stay only, 34% has taken hotel stay and travelling vehicle, 5% has taken hotel and tourist guide, and 35 % has taken all these things in their tour.

Table 3 :- Information related to Frequency, Purpose of visit

(N = 100)

Items	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1. Frequency of visiting	First Time	66	66
	Second Time	12	12
	Third Time	8	8
	Not exactly Remember	14	14
2. Visited with	Family	60	60
	Friends	25	25
	Colleagues	5	5

	Any Others	10	10
3. Purpose of visiting	To enjoy natural beauty	45	45
	To see heritage sites	9	9
	To have a fun here	10	10
	All of the above	27	27
	Any other	9	9
4. Tour arrangement	Self - Arranged	81	81
	Purchased Tour Package	19	19
5. Tour Includes	Hotel stay only	26	26
	Hotel + Travelling Vehicle	34	34
	Hotel + Tourist guide	5	5
	All of the above	35	35

The attitude of tourists towards word of mouth has been analysed in table 3. The analysis reveals that majority of the tourists i.e. 62% agree with the statement that *"the word of mouth impacts on tourist choice decision about tourism destinations"*, 15% tourists were strongly agree with the statement. The WAS for this statement was worked out as 3.84. Along with this for statement *"the word of mouth should be considered for tourist's decision about the choice of tourism destinations"*, 65% tourists were agreeing with the statement. The WAS for this statement was calculated as 3.95. Similarly, 56% tourists were agreeing with the statement *"the positive word of mouth impacts positively on brand image in tourism industry"*, 32% tourists were strongly agreed with the statement. The WAS for the statement was 4.17. Majority of the tourists that is 38% was agree with the statement that *"the negative word of mouth impacts negatively on brand image in tourism industry"*, 17% tourists are strongly in favour of the statement. The WAS for the statement was worked out as 3.5.

While assessing the attitude of respondents towards the word of mouth as a promotional tool the majority of the tourists that is 45% were agree with the statement that the *"word of mouth is an effective promotional tool for the promotion of tourism industry"*, 37% tourists were strongly in favour of the statement. The WAS for the statement was calculated as 4.15. For the statement *"word of mouth is a reliable tool of promotion in tourism industry"*, 55% respondents were agree, 32% tourists are strongly agree with the statement. The WAS worked out for the statement was 4.17.

Table 4 :- Attitude of tourists towards word of mouth*(N = 100)*

Sr. No.	Statement	SD	D	NAND	A	SA	TWS	WAS	S.D.
1.	The word of mouth impacts on tourist's decision about the choice of tourism destinations.	2	4	17	62	15	384	3.84	0.801
2.	The word of mouth should be considered for tourist's decision about the choice of tourism destinations.	2	1	15	65	17	394	3.94	0.736
3.	The positive word of mouth impacts positively on the brand image in tourism industry.	0	3	9	56	32	417	4.17	0.711
4.	The negative word of mouth impacts negatively on the brand image in tourism industry.	1	38	24	20	1	350	3.50	1.030
5.	The word of mouth is an effective tool as compare to other tools of promotion for tourism industry.	1	2	15	45	37	415	4.15	0.821
6.	The word of mouth is a reliable tool for the promotion of tourism as compare to other tools of promotion for tourism industry.	0	2	11	55	32	417	4.17	0.697

Views of tourists towards impacts of word of mouth on their behaviour: - The attitude of tourists can be assessed by table 5, majority of tourists that is 47 % have said that positive word of mouth impacts more on their behaviour, 40% have said that both type of word of mouth impacts equally on their behaviour. On the other hand 6% tourists have said that negative word of mouth impacts on their behaviour more, while 7 % are saying that they do not influenced by any type of word of mouth. The WAS calculated for the statement was 2.93.

Table 5: - Attitude of tourists towards impacts of word of mouth on their behaviour
(N = 100)

Statement	NPNN	BPN	N	P	TWS	WAS	St. Dev.
Which types of word of mouth have a greater impact on your behaviour?	7	40	6	47	293	2.93	1.075

Medias of promotion for Himachal Pradesh Tourism: - The information related to the various Medias for the promotion of Himachal Pradesh Tourism has analysed in table 6. Majority of tourists that is 46 % has said that they came to know about Himachal Pradesh tourism through the word of mouth they received from others about Himachal Pradesh. 27% tourists are attracted by the information available on internet about Himachal Pradesh Tourism. The WAS for the statement was calculated as 3.02. So, according to the word of mouth is the major factor due to which most of the tourists came to know about Himachal Pradesh tourism. 46 % has said that they attracted towards Himachal Pradesh tourism due to the word of mouth they received from others about Himachal Pradesh. 32% tourists are attracted by the information available on internet about Himachal Pradesh Tourism. The WAS for this statement was 2.86 So, according to the research information available about Himachal Pradesh on internet and word of mouth are the major factor behind the attraction of tourists towards the Himachal Pradesh tourism.

For next statement, majority of tourists that is 43 % has said that internet provided them the actual information about Himachal Pradesh tourism, 39% are saying that word of mouth. The WAS for the statement has calculated 2.70. so, according to the research, information available about Himachal Pradesh on internet and word of mouth are the major sources or tools of promotion which provides the actual information to the tourists about the Himachal Pradesh.

35% has said that internet is the best method of promotion for Himachal Pradesh tourism, 30% are in favour of word of mouth. The WAS for the statement has assessed as 2.57 so, according to the research internet is the best method for the promotion of Himachal Pradesh tourism.

Table 6 :- Medias of promotion and Himachal Pradesh Tourism*(N = 100)*

S	Statement	A	I	WOM	EE	AO	TWS	WAS	S.D.
1.	You came to know about Himachal Pradesh Tourism through.	4	27	46	9	14	302	3.02	1.044
2.	You attracted towards Himachal Pradesh Tourism due to.	3	32	46	14	5	286	2.86	0.876
3.	Which method of promotion for HP Tourism has provided you the actual information about HP tourism?	3	43	39	11	4	270	2.70	0.859
4.	Which one of the following is the best method of promotion for Himachal Pradesh tourism?	15	35	30	18	2	257	2.57	1.018
5.	In context with the tourism industry, on which promotional tool you trusts upon more?	4	12	30	52	2	336	3.36	0.871

Conclusion

The word of mouth is a free promotion for any type of organization. The research study has revealed many facts about the word of mouth. The word of mouth has a great impact on tourism industry. It can be a good promotional tool for the promotion of tourism industry. The word of mouth, involves a human touch and it also reflects the experience about a particular thing of the person who is providing a word of mouth. Most of the people generally, always want to know the reviews of others about a particular thing before trying it as a early adapter. This represents that word of mouth can be an influential tool in order to influence the behaviour of a person. In tourism industry a word of mouth can be a great promotional tool for the promotion of tourism destinations. If a tourist will receive a positive word of mouth about the tourism destinations then he will attract towards that destination, and the attraction of tourists leads to the visiting. This can be lead to the economic benefits of the people of those destinations as well as of that state. The word of mouth has a positive effect on the advertisement campaign in tourism industry what the tourists honestly think about the tourism destinations and the motivation to visit the particular destination, state or a country, due to the tourist being recommended by a trusted reliable source. The word of mouth will always contribute in the promotion of anything. In

tourism industry a word of mouth motivates a person to visit in a particular destination, if the word of mouth is positive and vice - versa. Ultimately the word of mouth is contributing in the promotion of tourism industry, without incurring any promotional cost. And it will lead to increase the tourist inflow in that particular destination, improve the socio - economic conditions and standard of living of the people of that particular area, if the word of mouth is positive. On the other hand, if word of mouth is negative then it can also produce the adverse results. In tourism industry the word of mouth have a greater impact on the behaviour of tourists in order to attract them towards a tourism destination or vice-versa.

Recommendations

The research study has revealed a lot of facts about the word of mouth in relation to the tourism industry. On the basis of these findings the researcher is suggesting the following suggestions to the various stakeholders of a tourism industry.

The tourism destinations must be clean and there must be a proper facility of sanitation etc. for the tourists.

The tourism destinations should be attractive, and according to the expectations of the tourists, if there is an artificial beautician or creativity is created.

The community, whose economic benefits are associated with tourism destination i.e. cafes, restaurants and hotels etc., should respect the tourists and do not overcharge them.

The local community of that particular destination must help to the tourists if they needed, and should co - operate to them up to a maximum extent.

The tourism hotels, restaurants, and cafes should provide a better quality of food and hospitality services to the tourists, so they can visit again.

Tourist help centres should be available near the various tourism destinations, so the tourists can be get maximum help as according to their requirements.

A huge amount of information should be available on the internet and tourism websites, about the tourism destinations, so the tourists can be familiar with that destination.

All the real facts related to the tourism hotels, home stays, tourist package, should be shown on the tourism related websites.

The local transport services should be improved for the sake of tourists.

- A certain amount of local tax - charges should be fixing to the associated authority, so the taxi drivers cannot over charge the tourists.
- A tourist feedback should be taken about his visiting experience, and tourism department should work on the necessary improvement areas.

These all things will be somewhere beneficial for the tourists. If the tourist will feel benefited and satisfied then he will share his experience with others. His experience will become the word of mouth for others, which will lead to the increase the tourist inflow in the future. And this will ultimately increase the economic, social status of the people and also increase the standard of living of local community.

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Pratibha
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