



Eco-tourists love strategy model for ecotourism products development

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Abstract: Ecotourism is a focused travel to ecological site to understand and experience the enriching natural beauty of the ecosystem. Local communities are an integral part of ecosystem. The vital role of local community in ecotourism is to safeguard the biodiversity; protecting, planning and managing the ecosystem. Ecotourism serves as an ecological guardian who personally intercedes in circumstances where the environment is spoiled. Ecotourism development means developing the ecotourism product in such a way that it contributes to the economic, social and environmental progress of local community in the host destinations. A pleasant and satisfying experience involving local community is crucial for the development of destinations image. The development of model for ecotourism products development requires blending of ecotourism's strategic vision, plans, policies and guidelines. In the present scenario ecotourism industry needs a new paradigm because 'ecotourism as usual' is just not working anymore. The present research focuses on the development of new model for the development ecotourism products in the state of Kerala with active community participation.

Keywords: Conscious Capitalism, Cross Selling, Viral Marketing, ELS

Introduction

The new and enlightened strategic model is essential to achieve sustainable ecotourism product development. Sustainable ecotourism in its purest sense is one which attempts to make low impact on the environment and local culture. It is responsible tourism, both ecologically and culturally sensitive. The sustainable ecotourism development needs all benefits, economic, environmental, and social activities taken into account for planning and development process. The development strategy is vital for attracting eco-tourists through delivering better service, quality and value, exceeding visitor expectations and also through establishing superior relationship which ensures continuous loyalty.

The developed ecotourism sells ecologically sustainable tourism products to the potential tourists by allowing them to use it at reasonable cost and profit. Development of ecotourism involves actions undertaken by the ecotourism promoters for improving or preserving the environmental factors of the natural area. Ecotourism development focuses on the idea of keeping the environment clean and green. Ecotourism industry in the state is aspiring to encounter the difficulties of fast-



changing ecotourism development environment. The industry should follow a unique strategic model to adapt quickly to changing market changes.

Objectives of the study

- To investigate the existing strategy adopted for the development of ecotourism industry in the state of Kerala.
- To examine the development practices of ecotourism industry in the state of Kerala
- To extend new model for the development of ecotourism industry in the state of Kerala.

Methodology

The study was designed as an empirical and exploratory in nature. It was conducted in four different stages. In the initial part of the study, the present status of ecotourism industry and the different marketing strategies used in ecotourism industry were described. In the second stage, a well-structured interview schedule was prepared. The efficacy of the draft interview schedule was pre-tested after interviewing thirty respondents. In the third stage, the perception and opinion of different stakeholders in the ecotourism industry were collected and analysed.

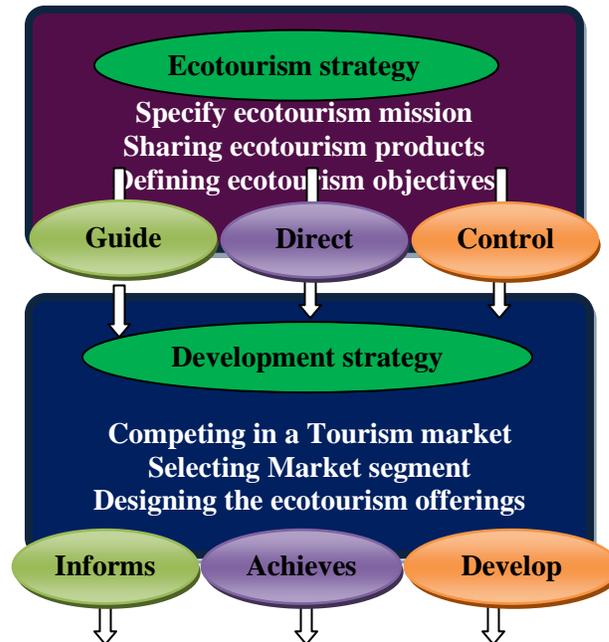
Status of Ecotourism Development Strategy

Ecotourism industry can build and maintain a strong and profitable relationship with their tourists and local community. Ecotourism promoters ensure that the organization achieve a sustainable competitive advantage through a structured approach to planning and strategy development. The word strategy appeared for the first time in the business literature in 1952 in a book by William Newman. At that time, strategy was implicitly regarded as a plan for achieving organizational goals. Ecotourism development strategy is the overall plan for deploying ecotourism products to establish a favourable position in the tourism scenario. The utilization of key elements of ecotourism offerings is the developing strategy to achieve the ecotourism mission and objectives.

Figure 1 shows the relationship between ecotourism strategy and development strategy. It shows that ecotourism strategy gives a direction to marketing strategy for awareness and development.



Figure 1 Relationship between Ecotourism strategy and Development strategy



Source: Developed from Strategic Marketing

Ecotourism strategy describes the industry's overall direction in terms of mission, objectives and products. These strategic features provide a guidance and direction to marketing strategy. Marketing strategy develops the products of ecotourism industry, inform ecotourism information and achieve the ecotourism mission and objectives. The marketing strategy designs the marketing mix elements to ecotourism and select market segment to compete in a tourism market.

Ecotourism has the potential to reduce the threats posed by conventional tourism to natural areas and to the community who live in and around the local ecotourism destinations. A sense of crowding can be a problem within both communities and the natural ecotourism destination. Table 1 states the factors that hinder successful development of ecotourism products in Kerala. The opinion of local community and stakeholders about the factors that hinder development of ecotourism products in central region reveals that lack of community participation scored First Rank (57 score) and Lack of finance and infrastructure scored second rank (55 score). The southern region shows the lack of community participation, outdated marketing techniques, lack of Government support and Hartal scored First rank (29 score). Lack of infrastructure and superstructure facility was the next major factors that hinder development of ecotourism products in southern region scored 27 responses



(Rank 2). In northern region lack of Government and NGO support ranked first (43 score), and lack of finance scored second position (42 score).

Table 1 Factors that hinder Development of ecotourism products

| Factors | Region | | | | | |
|---|----------|------|---------|------|----------|------|
| | Southern | | Central | | Northern | |
| | Score | Rank | Score | Rank | Score | Rank |
| Hartal | 29 | 1 | 50 | 5 | 40 | 3 |
| Lack of community participation | 29 | 1 | 57 | 1 | 39 | 4 |
| Outdated marketing techniques | 29 | 1 | 51 | 4 | 37 | 5 |
| Lack of finance | 24 | 3 | 55 | 2 | 42 | 2 |
| Lack of Govt. and NGO support | 29 | 1 | 54 | 3 | 43 | 1 |
| Lack of infrastructure and super structure facility | 27 | 2 | 55 | 2 | 39 | 4 |
| Polluted environment | 21 | 4 | 40 | 6 | 32 | 6 |

Source: Primary data

From the analysis it can be seen that development of ecotourism products in different regions is not free from hindrances. In order to examine the validity of the responses Kruskal - Wallis test (H test) is applied here.

Table 2 Ranks and Test Statistics for Local community opinion about Factors that hinder development of ecotourism product

| Region | N | Mean Rank | χ^2 | Sig. |
|----------|---|-----------|----------|-------|
| Southern | 7 | 4.00 | 17.100 | 0.000 |
| Central | 7 | 17.64 | | |
| Northern | 7 | 11.36 | | |

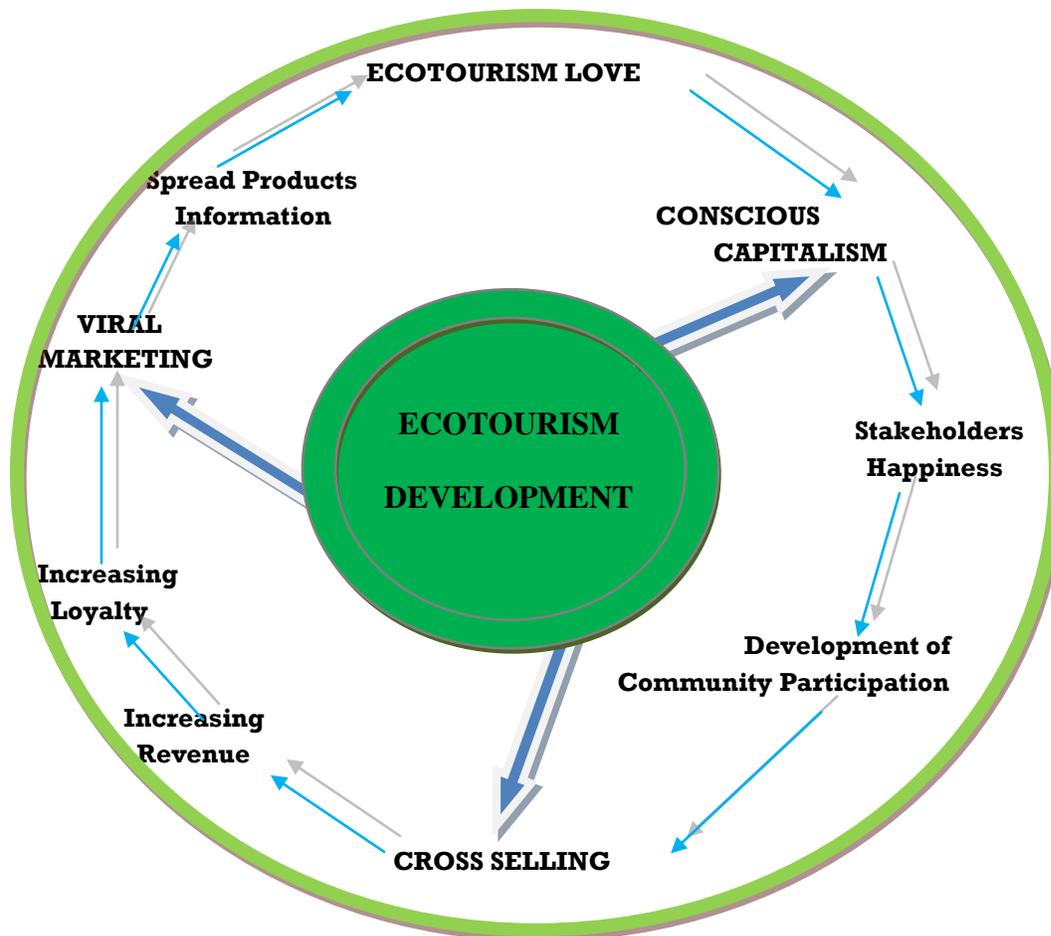
Source: Primary Data

The computed χ^2 (chi-square) value is 17.100 and the p value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, the assumed level of significance. Therefore we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1) i.e. there is significant difference in the local community and stakeholders opinions among the factors that hinder development of ecotourism products in different regions of Kerala. Therefore the opinion of local community and stakeholders in relation to different factors that hinder development of ecotourism products in different ecotourism regions are different. The outcome derived from the present study is the development of new model for the development of



ecotourism products with active community participation. Based on the strategies identified, a strategic model is developed for ecotourism product development. Various identified doctrines have to be applied for the development of strategy model i.e. 'Eco-tourist Love Strategy' (ELS). This is presented in the Figure 2. The present status of ecotourism industry shows that increased stakeholder happiness and community participation is essential for ecotourism product development. The successful application of different doctrines fulfills the needs of the local community and other stakeholders in ecotourism at the inception level of ecotourism projects. The first doctrine i.e. Conscious Capitalism strategy brings higher degree of community participation in ecotourism industry through the application of conscious capitalism strategy. Stakeholders will become very active in the ecotourism product development.

Figure 2 Eco-tourist Love Strategy model for Ecotourism Products Development



Source: Developed by the Researcher



The next doctrine Cross Selling strategy will induce the local community and promoters to make innovative ecotourism offerings. This strategy will reap the benefit of increased ecotourism revenue and tourist loyalty. The increased satisfaction level of stakeholders in ecotourism industry will force to introduce more innovative product development practices for ecotourism development.

A full-fledged Viral Marketing strategy will help to spread the ecotourism offerings worldwide through word to mouth with the effective application of this strategy. The present strategy is very cost effective for marketing ecotourism products and services. Spreading of ecotourism products will in turn lead to the development of an attitude of *ecotourism love* on the part of stakeholders engaged in ecotourism industry.

Conclusion

Ecotourism love strategy means where the ecotourism industry goes beyond building a relationship with eco-tourists to a point where there is a stronger emotional bond between the ecotourism promoters and the stakeholders. This is where the stakeholders believe that the ecotourism industry cares for their well-being and happiness and also safeguarding the trust, reputation and credibility of entire community in the ecotourism destinations in the state of Kerala. The present status of ecotourism industry shows that increased stakeholder happiness and community participation is essential for ecotourism product development. The successful application of ELS model fulfills the needs of the local community and other stakeholders in ecotourism at the inception level of ecotourism projects.

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