The 4 C's of Tourism Marketing

Customer Solution.   Customers receive thousands of offers on daily basis, trying to persuade them to buy one product or another. Then, what is it that actually makes them purchase something, parting with their hard-earned money? The answer lies with this C of marketing, that is, customer solution. It is only when the product solves a perceived customer problem or satisfies a desire that it will be bought. It can be further linked to the perceived utility or value of the product, which according to a simple economic theory, should be more than the cost of the product in order to make the customer buy the product. That is why most successful products that command a premium are those that are able to offer real value to the customer, either real or perceived. For instance, Nokia mobile phones provide real value in terms of reliable mobility solutions, while most of the value coming with a Mercedes car is perceived. The same

theory applies to tourist destinations, too, when they are being marketed as products. The basic question that a tourist destination has to clarify while marketing is what is the customer problem that it is trying to solve or what is its customer value proposition. This value proposition, in turn, can be derived from the unique capabilities of the destination – for example, Rishikesh trying to promote itself as a destination for rafting. Yet, it will be meaningless to present a value without understanding what customers want – it is similar to designing a product without even analysing what features customers would want in it. Here are a few needs that the customer usually expects to be fulfilled at a tourist destination, and a destination can promote itself as meeting one or many of them. Although a few items in this list are generic enough to be applied anywhere, they are mostly pertinent to Indian customers. They are religious tourism or pilgrimage, leisure/fun/relaxation, adventure, medical and bussiness tourism.

- **Religious tourism or pilgrimage:** India presents a milieu of people from numerous cultures and faiths and has innumerable places of religious importance. The number of people visiting some of the most important destinations such as Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh or Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh runs into millions, which shows how important religion is to people.
- **Leisure/fun/relaxation:** This is one universal need that most of the tourist destinations are associated with. The importance of this need has been enhanced even further in recent times by an increasingly hectic lifestyle, which has led to higher levels of stress. This need can be addressed in an even better way by packaging various de-stressing features like serene environments, close-to-nature living conditions and spas offering ayurvedic massage. Kerala can easily be recognized as one such destination that offers all this.
- **Adventure:** The need of adventure sports is increasing at an appreciable rate all over the world. In India too, this need is building up among the burgeoning youth workers with higher disposable income.
- **Medical:** Travelling for the sake of treatment is common in India, especially with good health facilities concentrated only in a few places. Though a traditional Indian would usually not associate this kind of travel with tourism, the new trend is emerging. It is further strengthened by the influx of foreign tourists, who have started considering India as a place offering high-quality medical facilities at low cost and also excellent opportunity for tourism and sightseeing.
- **Business tourism:** With an onslaught of software and BPO companies, the traditional image of the Indian employee who worked "9 to 5" is fast changing into that of a fun-loving person, who loves to work hard, but parties harder. Companies have also started seeing fun activities as opportunities to create bond among the employees and, thus, promote teamwork and reduce attrition. This has created the need for tourist destinations that can be booked by corporate companies for a number of employees at once. Money is usually not a problem, but these customers need high levels of service and also assurance of safety of their employees. Also, since employee time is at a premium, there is a need for destinations located closer to business centres.

Cost. India has been a highly price-sensitive market. The economic growth has definitely increased income levels and spending power, giving rise to a new class of Indian consumers, who have the ability and the desire to spend for premium products. The tourist destinations, while providing enough avenues for such tourists, should not leave out middle-class customers. This becomes especially important for destinations like religious places, which people from all classes would want to visit. Another problem is measuring the cost of a tourist destination, as it is not just one single product but constitutes various components. Broadly, the spending components can be characterized into transportation, study and actual tourist activity:

- **Transportation:** How much does it cost to reach the destination? This will largely depend on the personal choice of the visitor, as multiple modes of transport are usually available to reach a particular destination.

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- **Stay:** This will depend on the cost of living in the area. For example, this component will be much higher in a metro like Mumbai as compared to a tier II city like Agra.
- **Actual tourist activity:** In case the destination is famous for some particular activity or site, for example, rafting or safari, the cost of actually carrying out that activity – like hiring of equipment, ticket costs, etc., should be taken into account. For example, if somebody is going to Bandhavgarh, the cost of hiring a vehicle or an elephant and a guide to see the jungle and the tigers will be a major component of cost.

Convenience. This C addresses the question related to the user-friendly nature of the tourist destination. The obvious issue that comes first to the mind is the availability of transport. Just think of the untapped beauty of the northeastern region of India, and one would realize how big a detriment this can be in developing a tourist destination. Another important factor in today's era of the emerging global threat of terrorism is the safety of the tourists. If a destination is marked as unsafe, no matter how attractive it is, it is bound to see a steep fall in number of visitors. Kashmir, which was the favourite tourist destination in the 1980s, owing to its beauty that had earned it the status of "heaven on earth," hardly finds any tourist today. Safety is also linked to general law-and-order situation in the region. Even a few untoward incidents publicized in media can get a destination branded as unsafe and drive away tourists. There are a few more factors such as local travel options, places of stay and cuisines/quality of food as listed below.

- **Local travel options:** Good travel facilities enable the quick movement of tourists within the destination, so that they can visit more places. This gives more value for both money and time to the tourists.
- **Places of stay:** Convenient places of stay like hotels and resorts are important for a tourist. Though the type of place one wants is a matter of personal choice, a place should ideally have hotels ranging from five stars to inexpensive dorm rooms in order to be able to cater to all types of customers. In case a destination is trying to project itself as belonging to a particular class – for example, of luxury type – it should then have places of stay to match the same. One can positively expect upper-class tourists to look for luxury resorts.
- **Cuisines/Quality of food:** Food is a factor that works both ways. To understand this, consider a north Indian tourist visiting a south Indian destination or vice versa. For some time, the person would enjoy the local food and welcome the change. Hence, it is important to have good-quality local cuisine available. But at the same time, a lot of tourists cannot digest the change and want the food

Mini-Europe is a park located in Bruparck at the foot of the Atomium in Brussels, Belgium. Mini-Europe has the reproductions of the most attractive monuments in the European Union on show, at a scale of 1:25. It offers one a journey across Europe by means of some 350 exquisitely made model buildings and sites, which are exact replicas of these architectural jewels of the European Union. All the monuments have been recreated, down to the smallest detail. Big Ben is 4 m high. With its height of 13 m, the Eiffel Tower projects above a three-storey building. One may marvel at many other working models, like the erupting Mount Vesuvius.
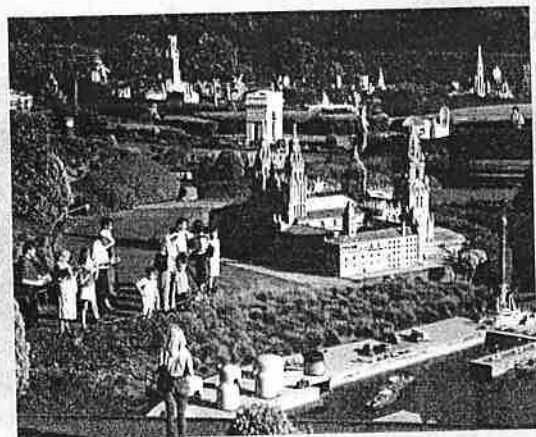
they are accustomed to. So, it is also critical to ensure availability of multiple cuisines serving people from various cultural backgrounds.

Communication. This is the final step in understanding the customer. One has to understand the point of view of target customers while communicating the value proposition of the destination and realize how they will interpret the message. It is also worth noting that tourists usually love to talk about the places they visit. So, word of mouth is an important medium, especially now when one can spread one's opinion with the click of a mouse. This further points out the need to recognize the channels of communication where visitors look for information and putting the message across by using these. There can also be hidden messages going in the form of souvenirs being taken back by the tourists.

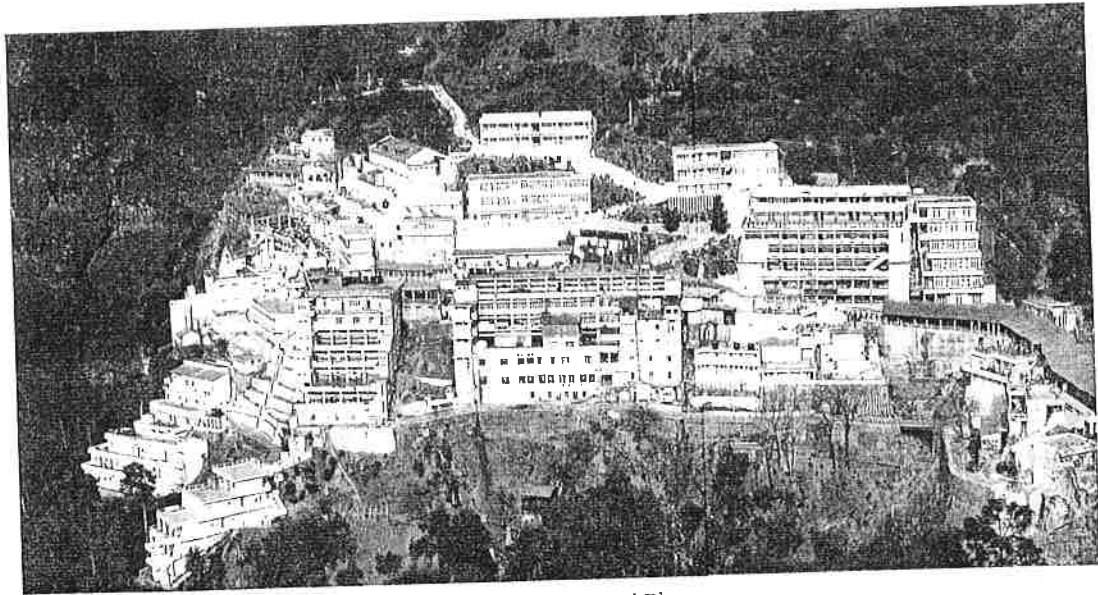What is the one product that does not need marketing?

Try this: What is the one product that might be lethal and yet sells like crazy? Still no clue?

Since this is a book on tourism, let us try to look for the tourism product (a tourist place) that fits the description.

The smart mind will scream the answer — a famous religious place. Add the element of danger to life, and it is set in Jammu & Kashmir.

Maa Vaishno Devi Temple, or Bhavan as it is called, is perched on the Trikuta Mountain at a height of 5,300 feet. It is considered as one of the holiest pilgrimages and is the most visited after Tirupati in southern India.

Maa Vaishno Devi is also called *mooh maangi muradein poori karne wali mata* — the goddess who fulfils every wish her devotees ask for. Millions of devotees brave the 13-km stretch from Katra (50 km from Jammu) to reach the holy cave, to fulfil their *mannat* — a vow to a deity. It is visited by the poorest of the poor and the richest of the rich, and they stand together united, while waiting for *mata ke darshan* — a glimpse of the goddess. Fervent shouts of *Jai Mata Di* are heard throughout, as all pilgrims wish each other with chants of devotion.

A View of Vaishno Devi Bhavan