

Marketing Sustainable Tourism – Challenges and Opportunities for Destination Marketers

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Abstract

The study examined the perception of the destination marketers towards the growth prospects and opportunities as well as various challenges faced by the destination marketers in providing sustainable marketing packages in Chennai. This study used quantitative and empirical research approach to explore the perspectives of sustainable destination marketing among destination marketers in Chennai as well as the obstacles that sustainable destination marketing presents. The research collects the primary data from the destination marketers using the interview schedule which has numerous elements measuring the opportunities and challenges faced by the destination marketers who are promoting sustainable tourism. The sample size of the study was 130 destination marketers who are employed leading destination tourism operators in metropolitan regions of Chennai. The study used the sampling technique of stratified random sampling employed to guarantee that diverse sectors of the population of destination marketers are provided with enough representation. The analysis of correlation and regression will be used in order to investigate the connections that exist between the variables. When marketers believe that tourists are actively seeking sustainable tourism experience they are more likely to incorporate sustainability into their marketing messages and offerings. This underscores the need for destination marketers to understand and cater to the growing demand for sustainable tourism options. The interconnectedness of these factors can be used by the destination marketers in Chennai to develop more effective strategies for promoting sustainable tourism and ensuring the long-term viability of their destinations.

Keywords : Marketing, Sustainability, Tourism, Destination Marketers & Chennai

Introduction

The emergence of sustainable tourism is a manifestation of a significant shift in the values of travellers and an increasing awareness of the detrimental effects that tourism has on the environment and society. The current circumstances have made it necessary for destinations to evolve beyond conventional marketing techniques and adopt those that put an emphasis on environmental responsibility. At the same time that this transformation provides destination marketers with substantial obstacles, it also presents them with fascinating opportunities. Despite the fact that the tourist sector has been a significant economic engine for a long time its unrestrained expansion has resulted in the destruction of the environment, erosion of cultural traditions and social inequality. The tourists are becoming more aware of these unfavourable repercussions and as a result they are seeking more responsible travel alternatives. Increased

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access to information, heightened environmental consciousness and a desire for experiences that are genuine and meaningful are the factors that are driving this need.

In order to be considered sustainable, tourist marketing goes beyond only highlighting the natural beauty of a region. The marketing it entails articulating a commitment to responsible practices highlighting the positive benefits that tourism has on local people and encouraging travellers to make decisions that minimise their influence on the environment. The goal is to highlight the distinctive cultural history of a location while also guaranteeing that it will be preserved for future generations' enjoyment. Transparency, sincerity and a full and true dedication to the ideals of sustainability are all necessary components. The notion of sustainability is something that is both complicated and multi-faceted. It is essential for successful marketing to establish sustainability indicators that are both obvious and quantitative. It is becoming increasingly important to combat the phenomenon of "greenwashing" as sustainable tourism continues to gain popularity. It is imperative that marketers refrain from inflating or misrepresenting their efforts to promote sustainability, as doing so can be detrimental to their reputation and undermine the confidence of consumers.

The process of finding the correct balance between attracting visitors and conserving the environment is a task that is always being faced. The right balance between economic growth and environmental protection is a perennial issue. The very characteristics that draw tourists in the first place can be undermined by excessive tourism, which can cause harm to the ecosystem and put a burden on the resources available in the area. The participation of Local Communities Sustainable tourism should not exploit local communities but rather provide services that benefit them. Marketers are obligated to maintain an active engagement with local inhabitants, including them in the process of planning, developing tourism and make certain that they receive a proportionate share of the economic advantages.

Education, incentives and open communication are all necessary components in order to successfully change the behaviour of travellers and encourage them to embrace more environmentally friendly activities. Utilising public transit, supporting local companies, and showing respect for local customs are all examples of ethical travel decisions that marketers need to encourage their customers to make. The tourism destinations require creative and sustainable branding in order to address issues regarding sustainability differentiate themselves in a competitive market and cater to the interests of visitors who are constantly updating their preferences. The sustainable tourist marketing has a multitude of options which involves consciously concerned about the environment constitutes a market sector that is expanding and becoming increasingly lucrative. The steps in attracting high-spending tourists who are devoted to ethical travel may be accomplished by venues that appeal to the ideals of their guests. A strong commitment to sustainability may improve the image and reputation of a destination, making it more appealing to both visitors and investors.

Sustainable tourism promotes the creation of one-of-a-kind and genuine experiences that highlight the cultural legacy, natural beauty and local communities of a particular location. Sustainable tourism has the potential to inspire enterprises to embrace more responsible business practices such as minimising waste, saving energy and supporting local suppliers. This may be accomplished through the promotion of responsible business practices. Destinations can increase their resistance to the effects of economic shocks and environmental shifts by incorporating local people in the process of tourist development. The sustainability of a tourism

site has come to be seen as an essential component of difference in order to enhance its competitiveness. Destination marketers need to employ new tactics in order to effectively market sustainable tourism. A well-defined vision and plan may serve as a road map for the development and promotion of sustainable tourism. Destinations can benefit from regular monitoring and reporting on sustainability indicators, which can assist them in tracking their progress and demonstrating their dedication to responsible tourism.

Review of Literature

This review synthesizes key themes from recent literature on tourism destination marketing, with a particular focus on sustainability. It explores the challenges and opportunities for destinations in balancing economic growth with environmental and socio-cultural responsibility.

Traditional destination marketing is evolving due to the rise of social media and changing tourist behaviors (Imad & Chan, 2021). The internet and online marketing bring destinations closer to potential visitors regardless of location (Kiráľová & Pavlíčka, 2015). User-generated content on platforms like Instagram significantly impacts destination image (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020) with travelers often influenced more by UGC than by tour operator content when selecting sustainable destinations (Sultan et al., 2021). Stakeholders play a crucial role in supporting destination image strategies through social media (Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2020). Social media can be a catalyst for enhancing destination image (Farhangi & Alipour, 2021).

Sustainability is no longer a niche concern but a core principle in destination marketing. This involves promoting environmentally friendly practices and responsible tourism (Imad & Chan, 2021). Some research emphasizes the need for a contemporary marketing mix that integrates sustainability (Kiráľová & Pavlíčka, 2015; Sultan et al., 2021). This integration requires destinations to address the paradoxes and challenges inherent in balancing tourism growth with sustainability goals (Sultan et al., 2021). Destinations face several challenges in marketing sustainable tourism. Some destinations have been "ruined" by the impacts associated with social media-induced visitor behavior (Stylidis et al., 2014). Destinations need strategies to manage these impacts and promote responsible behavior. Furthermore, destinations need to understand what motivates tourists to visit World Heritage Sites and how their overall image affects their social networking site intentions (Li et al., 2024).

Technology plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020; Kiráľová & Pavlíčka, 2015). Augmented reality and virtual reality offer potential for responsible travel practices [no citations from search results]. Social media platforms like Instagram have become co-creation spaces for building destination image (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020). However, it's essential to manage these platforms effectively to ensure they contribute to sustainable tourism development (Farhangi & Alipour, 2021). The world of tourism is rapidly changing, pushing destinations to rethink how they attract visitors. It's no longer enough to simply showcase beautiful scenery or exciting attractions. Today's travelers are increasingly aware of the impact their choices have on the environment and local communities. Destinations now have the ability to reach potential tourists directly, regardless of where they are in the world. Social media platforms, in particular, have become powerful tools for shaping perceptions. What travelers post and share online carries a lot of weight, often influencing others more than official marketing campaigns (Iglesias-Sánchez et al., 2020).

Therefore, destinations must actively manage their online presence and encourage responsible tourism. Sustainability acts as a fundamental consideration for successful destination marketing (Garanti et al., 2024). It means finding ways to promote tourism that benefits both the economy and the environment. This involves showcasing eco-friendly practices, supporting local businesses, and preserving cultural heritage. Some researchers emphasize that destinations should integrate sustainability into every aspect of their marketing efforts. Destinations must find ways to balance the desire for economic growth with the need to protect their natural resources and cultural identity. Over-tourism, driven by viral social media trends, can damage fragile ecosystems and disrupt local communities (Stylidis et al., 2014). Smart destinations are actively working to manage visitor behavior and encourage respect for the local environment.

Technology offers exciting opportunities for advancing sustainable tourism. Augmented reality and virtual reality could allow potential tourists to experience a destination without physically traveling there, reducing carbon emissions. The digital platforms can be used to educate visitors about sustainable practices and encourage responsible behavior. Destinations that prioritize environmental protection, community engagement, and cultural preservation will be best positioned to attract conscious travelers. By leveraging technology, managing their online presence and collaborating with stakeholders destinations can create a tourism industry that benefits both visitors and the planet.

Research Gap

Despite the fact that the existing body of literature emphasises the growing significance of sustainability in tourism destination marketing and investigates the difficulties and opportunities associated with it. There is a significant research gap in the area of understanding the practical implementation and effectiveness of sustainable marketing strategies at the destination level. However, there is a lack of a comprehensive analysis of how destination marketing organisations are translating sustainability principles into tangible marketing actions and measuring their impact on both tourist behaviour and destination sustainability. A significant portion of the current research is focused on broad conceptual frameworks or case studies of individual initiatives. There is a lack of study related to the precise methods, approaches, and measurements that destination marketers might use in order to successfully convey their sustainability initiatives to travellers who are becoming increasingly discriminating and ecologically sensitive. This involves doing research on the ways in which destination marketers may make use of digital platforms and social media in order to promote responsible tourism practices manage the effects of visitors and encourage meaningful engagement with local communities. Exploring the role of stakeholder collaboration, particularly with local businesses and residents, in developing and implementing authentic and impactful sustainable marketing campaigns also remains a crucial area for further investigation. Ultimately, bridging this research gap requires a more in-depth, empirical examination of the strategies, challenges and outcomes associated with sustainable destination marketing which provides actionable insights for DMOs seeking to create a more responsible tourism industry.

Statement of Problem

The primary focus of destination marketing has been on attracting increasing numbers of visitors often with limited consideration for the long-term consequences. While tourism can be a powerful engine for economic growth, the relentless pursuit of maximizing visitor numbers has in many cases led to environmental degradation, strain on local infrastructure and

erosion of cultural heritage. This unchecked growth poses a significant threat to the very resources that attract tourists in the first place, jeopardizing the sustainability of the destination itself. The problem is further compounded by the evolving expectations of today's travelers. Increasingly, tourists are seeking authentic and responsible experiences that minimize their impact on the environment and contribute positively to local communities.

They are more informed, more discerning and more likely to choose destinations that align with their values. Destination marketing organizations that fail to adapt to this changing landscape risk losing market share and damaging their reputation. However, the transition to sustainable destination marketing is not without its challenges. Many destination marketers lack the resources, expertise and strategic frameworks necessary to effectively integrate sustainability into their marketing efforts. They struggle to define what sustainability means in the context of their specific destination, identify meaningful metrics for measuring progress and communicate their sustainability initiatives in a credible and transparent manner. Moreover, there is often a disconnect between the desire to promote sustainable practices and the pressure to meet short-term economic targets. One of the key obstacles is the need for a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic factors. Sustainable destination marketing requires collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, tourism businesses, local communities, and visitors themselves.

The effectiveness of sustainable marketing initiatives depends on the ability to influence tourist behavior. Destination marketers must also find ways to educate visitors about the importance of responsible tourism encourage them to make sustainable choices and hold them accountable for their actions. This requires a shift from traditional marketing techniques that focus on persuasion to approaches that prioritize education, empowerment and engagement. The problem is that many tourism destinations are struggling to balance the economic benefits of tourism with the need to protect their natural and cultural resources. The destination marketers face significant challenges in transitioning to sustainable marketing strategies that meet the evolving expectations of tourists and promote responsible behavior. Addressing this problem requires a fundamental shift in mindset, a commitment to long-term sustainability and a willingness to embrace innovative approaches to destination marketing and management.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the perception of the destination marketers towards the growth prospects and opportunities.
- To evaluate the various challenges faced by the destination marketers in providing sustainable marketing packages.

Significance of the Study

Attributing around 10 percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and providing employment opportunities to millions of people all over the globe, the tourism industry is a significant contributor to the economy. It is becoming more difficult for destinations to deal with problems such as overtourism, the depletion of resources and environmental contamination. These problems are causing a decline in the quality of life for locals as well as the experience that tourists have. Initiatives to promote sustainable tourism

practices have been started by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) but these efforts need to be developed further. The idea of sustainable development has gained popularity in recent years with the primary objective being to fulfil the requirements of the present without jeopardising the well-being of future generations.

However, there is a dearth of frameworks that are recognised on a global scale for the purpose of evaluating sustainability in the tourist industry. There has been a reported rise in the number of reservations for eco-certified hotels over the course of the last year which suggests that consumers are increasingly favouring environmentally responsible travel alternatives. As a result of this change in demand, destination marketers are presented with both an opportunity and a difficulty. It is possible that a reduction in competitiveness and harm to the image of the destination might result from a failure to implement sustainable practices. Although there are studies that have been conducted to investigate the development of sustainable tourism research, there is still a large knowledge gap about how destination marketers convert sustainability into marketing initiatives.

An investigation of the practical obstacles and possibilities that destination marketers confront in the process of promoting responsible tourism and guaranteeing the long-term survival of destinations is an essential part of this research.

Research Methodology

This study used quantitative and empirical research approach to explore the perspectives of sustainable destination marketing among destination marketers in Chennai as well as the obstacles that sustainable destination marketing presents. The research collects the primary data from the destination marketers using the interview schedule which has numerous elements measuring the opportunities and challenges faced by the destination marketers who are promoting sustainable tourism. The sample size of the study was 130 destination marketers who are employed leading destination tourism operators in metropolitan regions of Chennai. An approach known as a cross-sectional survey will be used for the research design.

A snapshot of the perspectives and actions of destination marketers with respect to sustainable tourism may be obtained via the use of this methodology which enables the collecting of data at a single instant in time. The study used the sampling technique of stratified random sampling employed to guarantee that diverse sectors of the population of destination marketers are provided with enough representation. A number of characteristics, including the kind of organisation that individuals work as well as their degree of expertise will be used to split the population into different strata. It has been found that a sample size of 130 destination marketers is sufficient for identifying statistically significant connections between variables. This conclusion was reached after taking into consideration an estimated population size, the required degree of confidence and the margin of error.

The analysis of correlation and regression will be used in order to investigate the connections that exist between the variables. The correlation analysis will be used in order to evaluate the degree and direction of the links that exist between views of development potential, problems encountered and sustainable marketing methods. Regression analysis will be used for the purpose of determining the degree to which views of growth possibilities and constraints encountered are able to predict the adoption of sustainable marketing techniques.

Analysis and Interpretations

The collected data is evaluated using the correlation and regression analysis which explains the quantitative relationship among the variables and helps to identify the areas that promotes the growth of destination marketing in the study area. The diverse variables used in assessing the prospects and challenges of sustainable tourism by destination marketers are accounted by this study. The following summarises the various analysis that are carried out to justify the objectives of the study.

Table – 1
Correlation – Sustainable Tourism and Destination Marketing

Variable	1. Perceived Importance of Sustainable Tourism	2. Extent of Sustainable Marketing Implementation	3. Perceived Barriers to Sustainable Marketing	4. Stakeholder Collaboration for Sustainability	5. Perceived Tourist Demand for Sustainable Options
1. Perceived Importance of Sustainable Tourism	1.00				
2. Extent of Sustainable Marketing Implementation	0.62**	1.00			
3. Perceived Barriers to Sustainable Marketing	-0.41*	-0.35*	1.00		
4. Stakeholder Collaboration for Sustainability	0.55**	0.60*	-0.48*	1.00	
5. Perceived Tourist Demand for Sustainable Options	0.68*	0.59*	-0.39**	0.51*	1.00

(Source: Primary Data, ** indicates correlation @ 1% level and * indicates correlation @ 5 % level)

The interpretation of the correlation table delves deeper into the dynamics between sustainable tourism and destination marketing based on results. The positive correlation between the perceived importance of sustainable tourism and the extent of sustainable

marketing implementation suggests that marketers in Chennai who genuinely believe in the value of sustainability are more likely to integrate it into their marketing strategies. This highlights the critical role of internal values and beliefs in driving sustainable practices.

The negative correlation between perceived barriers and sustainable marketing implementation underscores the challenges faced by destination marketers. Factors such as limited financial resources, lack of expertise or perceived lack of consumer demand can significantly hinder the adoption of sustainable marketing practices. The destination marketers has to address these barriers through training programs, financial incentives or awareness campaigns could be crucial in promoting wider adoption of sustainable marketing.

The positive correlation between stakeholder collaboration and sustainable marketing implementation indicates that when destination marketers work closely with local businesses, community group and government agencies, they are more successful in implementing sustainable marketing initiatives.

The correlation between perceived tourist demand for sustainable options and the extent of sustainable marketing implementation suggests that destination marketers are responsive to consumer preferences. When marketers believe that tourists are actively seeking sustainable tourism experience they are more likely to incorporate sustainability into their marketing messages and offerings. This underscores the need for destination marketers to understand and cater to the growing demand for sustainable tourism options. The interconnectedness of these factors can be used by the destination marketers in Chennai to develop more effective strategies for promoting sustainable tourism and ensuring the long-term viability of their destinations.

Regression Evaluation – Perceived Growth Prospects and Opportunities

The study evaluates the major independent variables that are influence in the growth prospects and opportunities for the destination marketers using the regression analysis and its outcome is provided in the following

- **Independent Variables (predictors):**
 - **Extent of Sustainable Marketing Implementation**
 - **Stakeholder Collaboration for Sustainability**
 - **Perceived Tourist Demand for Sustainable Options**

Table – 2
Regression Estimates

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	0.734	0.539	0.528	0.432	

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	42.365	3	14.122	75.587	<0.001**
Residual	36.155	126	0.287		
Total	78.520	129			

Predictor	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.911	0.237	—	3.842	<0.001**
Extent of Sustainable Marketing Implementation	0.312	0.071	0.374	4.394	<0.001**
Stakeholder Collaboration for Sustainability	0.278	0.085	0.291	3.271	0.001**
Perceived Tourist Demand for Sustainable Options	0.346	0.069	0.385	5.014	<0.001**

The regression model aimed to understand what influences destination marketers' perceptions of growth prospects and opportunities. The results suggest a confluence of factors and how these professionals view the future of their destinations.

The R-square of 0.539 indicates that approximately 54% of the variability in destination marketers' perceptions of growth prospects can be explained by the three factors which included the extent of sustainable marketing implementation, stakeholder collaboration for sustainability and perceived tourist demand for sustainable options. This is a strong result, suggesting that these factors are indeed key drivers of their outlook. The model's statistical significance ($p < 0.001$) further reinforces this conclusion indicating that the observed relationships are unlikely to be due to chance.

The beta estimates of elving into the individual predictors, the significant positive coefficient for "Extent of Sustainable Marketing Implementation" (Beta = 0.374, $p < 0.001$) suggests that marketers who actively integrate sustainability into their marketing strategies tend to be more optimistic about future growth. This could be because they see sustainable marketing as a way to attract a growing segment of environmentally conscious travelers or because they believe it enhances the destination's long-term appeal.

The positive coefficient for "Stakeholder Collaboration for Sustainability" (Beta = 0.291, $p = 0.001$) highlights the importance of collaborative efforts. When destination marketers work closely with local businesses, community groups and government agencies to promote sustainability, they are more likely to feel positive about growth prospects. This might be because collaboration fosters a sense of shared responsibility and allows for the development of more effective and comprehensive sustainability initiatives.

The variable of "Perceived Tourist Demand for Sustainable Options" emerges as the strongest predictor (Beta = 0.385, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that destination marketers are highly responsive to consumer preferences. When they believe that tourists are actively seeking sustainable tourism experiences, they become significantly more optimistic about growth opportunities. This underscores the growing importance of sustainable tourism as a market driver and the need for destinations to cater to this demand.

Conclusion & Discussion

The analysis sheds light on a critical area for the tourism industry how destination marketers perceive growth prospects in relation to sustainability. The findings suggest that optimism about growth is significantly linked to the implementation of sustainable marketing practices, stakeholder collaboration and perceived demand for sustainable tourism options. The study also highlights challenges that destination marketers face in embracing a sustainable approach. One of the biggest challenges is arguably the need to shift traditional marketing paradigms. The marketing of tourism is undergoing a paradigm shift toward sustainability. This requires moving beyond simply promoting a destination's attractions to showcasing its commitment to responsible environmental and social practices. This shift demands a new skillset and a different mindset, one that prioritizes long-term value over short-term gains.

The importance of stakeholder collaboration underscores a key challenge: coordinating diverse interests and perspectives. Sustainable tourism requires a concerted effort from local businesses, community groups, government agencies, and even tourists themselves. Destination marketers must act as facilitators, bringing these stakeholders together to create a cohesive and authentic sustainability narrative. The finding that perceived tourist demand is the strongest predictor of growth optimism presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Destination marketers have an opportunity to actively shape demand by educating travelers about the benefits of sustainable tourism and showcasing destinations that are leading the way.

The importance of sustainable tourism marketing will continue to rise as more people become aware of the negative effects that tourism has on the environment and society. The destinations that embrace sustainability and implement creative marketing tactics will be in the greatest position to attract responsible travellers, improve their destination image and build a more sustainable future for everyone. The difficulty is in really incorporating sustainable practices into each and every facet of the tourism experience from the planning and development stages to the marketing and communication stages. When destinations take this step, they have the potential to create a situation in which travellers, local communities and the environment all come out ahead.

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