

Spiritual Marketing in Abhaneri: Case Study of Harshad Mata Temple

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Abstract: In ancient era, devotees used to go to the temple and donate some part of their income to get spiritual satisfaction or 'punya' in Hindi. In modern, materialistic world of today, such donations are treated as revenue of the temple and spiritual satisfaction is treated as the end service provided by the priests or care takers of a temple. This altered treatment with our spiritual behavior is termed as 'spiritual marketing' by modern economists. India is a developing economy facing this change in treatment of our spirituality also. Amazingly India's spiritual and religious market is estimated to be over \$30 billion. Thus each and every temple/religious place of the country has become an operating unit of this spiritual industry and contributes to its revenue. This transformation is affecting all the religions of Indian population in this modern era of online Prasad, online 'Katha' telling and online darshana. Originality and truth of spirituality seems dwindling in the country. But in this materialistic age, it is nice to have seen a temple which is above all sorts of ill-treatments to spirituality while generating revenues, instead it is trying to survive through traditional and ethical tools of marketing for years. The author has tried to analyze these tools used by Harshad Mata Temple (Abhaneri) to market itself to the devotees/visitors. (The temple here stands for management of the temple). The analysis may be used to develop more efficient and ethical marketing strategy, after identifying increasing demands of various segments of visitors with varying interests and demands.

Key words: Spiritual marketing, Spirituality, self-actualization, Abhaneri, Harshad Mata Temple.

I. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The study proposes to analyze the status of spiritual marketing in a small village of Rajasthan – Abhaneri. Since the research object is situated near a tourist attraction – Abhaneri Chand Baori, so daily footfall in the temple reaches a high number as compared to other temples in Abhaneri or nearing villages. If enough and efficient marketing tools are used to market the temple, then its contribution to the revenue of industry can add a significant amount to the economy of India.

Rachin Suri and Jitender Rao opine, "We need to understand and outline a strategy after understanding that not all visitors to a spiritual destination are 'pious travelers'. Understanding the motives of their visit is the key that will unlock the door for an ideal strategy." Keeping this in mind, the author has tried to list promotional factors used in Harshad Mata Temple, which may lead to other factors like historic interests, belief, inner peace, and family suggestions etc. which later can become a motivating drive for the visit of the person. The study may help the management to plan an ideal strategy suitable to promote the temple.

II. Research Methodology

The research is exploratory in nature and is based on primary and secondary data. Tools used for primary data collection are:

- a) Unstructured interviews of caretakers of Harshad Mata temple and Chand Baori.
- a) Personal Communication with residents of Abhaneri.
- b) Personal communication with the tourists at the temple and water reservoir.
- c) Recorded observations (Photographs).

Secondary data has been collected from magazines and tourism websites. Scope of the study is Harshad Mata Temple of the village Abhaneri, which has its unique identity and faith that motivate the devotees towards spiritual growth.

What is spirituality?

The term 'spirituality' is originated from old French word 'spirituel', from Latin 'spiritualis' and has become a part of Middle English now. Spirituality is a noun relating to, or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things. It is not concerned with material values or pursuits. (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2009)

What is 'Spiritual Marketing'?

Initially combination of these two terms 'spiritual' and 'marketing' was not easily accepted by the common public. As it was connecting two extremely opposite elements- First, spirit or soul, which was above any sorts of materialism, second marketing, which was directly related with sales and profits undoubtedly based on a materialistic approach. But gradually, the concept was understood in terms of revenue of temples to run spiritual functions of a religious place. Lately in India, this new concept of spiritual marketing is being accepted by marketers. This has encouraged inclusion of money in being spiritual. Some opine that spiritual marketing may result in religious places

losing their spiritual value because spiritual is truth or nature. This is true for all religions – be it Hindu, Muslim, Jains, Christians or Sikhs. It would be appropriate to quote serial entrepreneur K Ganeshan from Shilpa Phadnis’s article in TOI here, “with 1.2 billion people and 330 million gods and goddesses in India, faith was price inelastic. “Devotees don’t take a decision to make a pilgrimage or visit a temple based on price. Online Prasad has a network of 50 temples, including Vaishno Devi, Shirdi Sai and Jagannath Puri, and charges Rs 501 to deliver prasad anywhere in the country in 7-10 working days.”

Fortunately there are temples, which are above this materialistic approach and provide the devotees with true spiritual satisfaction. Harshad Mata Temple is one such temple which does not attract visitors and devotees by its good marketing of spirituality but possesses a treasure of spiritual and historic heritage which bring the visitors to the temple.

III. Harshad Mata Temple: An Introduction

Harshad Mata temple is an ancient temple devoted to Harshad Mata and is located near Chand Baori in Abhaneri. Inscription on a billboard near the temple states that the temple was built in 8th or 9th century by the King Chand, who was the ruler of Abhaneri. Harshad Mata temple is still in use but stands in ruins and needs restoration. A traveler Marty Downunder from Canberra Australia has submitted his review at ‘tripadvisor.in’ in these words, “Take time to look (at Harshad Mata Temple) when going to the Chand Baori stepwell next door.....thousands of beautifully carved stones awaiting to be reconstructed someday” The statement is sufficient to evaluate tourism value of this temple. According to another traveler, “Architecture of the temple is amazing, the wrecks of temple still boast architectural and sculptural style of ancient India. The temple is worth visiting for its amazing architecture.” This statement adds architectural and sculptural values to its spiritual and historic values which are drivers of tourism of this place.

Tools of Marketing in Harshad Mata Temple

a) Marketing through Billboards



As per Oxford Dictionary of English, “a billboard is a large outdoor board for displaying advertisements.” Above image is the only billboard seen near the temple which displays its historic significance. No other billboards, signboards or advertising material was seen around the temple, except a small Government notice informing visitors that the temple has been declared a protected monument. Content of the bigger billboard is too brief to explain historic value of this temple to the visitors. Language used in this billboard is Hindi and English, making it understandable for Indian as well as foreigner visitors. The billboard is not artistically designed to market the temple and lacks illustrations.

b) Marketing Through Historic Pieces of Art



Historic pieces of art from the ruins of the temple are scattered here and there in the temple premises, while significant ones are preserved in the stepwell premises. These pieces speak about the glory of the temple and the curious tourists are tempted to visit the temple. This acts as second drive in the process of consumer buying decision. It is good to see that most of the idols kept in Chand Baori, have been tested by archeologists and marked with authenticated identification as a particular God or Goddess. Such materials motivate visitors to visit the temple where they were originally placed.

c) Display at the Point of Sale



When a devotee/tourist visit the temple, s/he comes across this beautiful line of 'Kangooras'. Kangooras are a special architectural design built in very huge buildings. To beautify strong walls to safeguard the building, these kangooras were built at the highest points of these walls. This sequence of kangooras familiarizes the visitor with ancient grandeur of the temples. It also indicates that this line was a part of a huge and wonderful temple once. This line has been built by putting all remaining broken pieces of the wall together, which seems an intelligent use of the remains to market the temple.

Apart from these pieces at the boundary of the temple, we see magnificent history of Indian architecture and sculpture on the walls, where remains of the temple have been rearranged to give it a temple like look. Above photographs are just a glimpse of the treasure.

These artistic architectural designs mesmerize the visitor and make him/her sit there for hours in the peace of high spiritual silence. Only these statues and walls speak for the idol in the temple and acts as third drive in the process of consumer purchase process.

d) Word of Mouth Marketing by Local Residents/Caretakers

This is author's personal experience at the village that local residents of Abhaneri speak high about the temple when asked or interviewed by an outsider. They warmly reply to all the questions best to their knowledge. This spirit of caretakers and residents motivates the tourist/visitor to visit the temple at least once. Hence we can say that the need is created by these localities which acts as a drive in consumer buying process.

This temple has a locational advantage too being near the world famous water reservoir-Chand Baori, Abhaneri - Centre of attraction for a large number of Indian and international tourists. This locational advantage has been well utilized by the care takers of the temple and the reservoir. They guide the visitors to the temple after they are through with the sight-seeing of architectural marvel of the reservoir.

IV. Scattered and Lost Pieces of Art of the Temple



Above photograph was clicked by a Jain devotee who found this statue in the wall of a well in a jungle near the village Baswa. There is a possibility that the idol was once part of Harshad Mata Temple treasure of statues but when it was being destroyed by Muslim invaders, a devotee saved this statue and put it in the wall of the well. But the Historians still need to prove the historicity of this carving in a well's wall near Abhaneri. This photograph has been exhibited in a Jain temple in Baswa. If there are more such pieces, they need to be rediscovered and taken care of for amplified devotee/tourist attraction.

V. Fear in marketing Spirituality

The above said fear of losing truth of spirituality in front of profits has also been felt by prominent Christians, "Churches started applying business-world's marketing techniques (or secular marketing, referred to by the author) to 'sell' their church, and as we all know, the competition between churches start to begin, many marketing tools (especially promotion and communication) have been developed, and even worse, some institutions make 'religion' as a business."

The same argument applies on temples also. If we replace the word church with temple and reread this statement, we will be in a better position to understand that the two temples are not competitors, but two units walking on the same road simultaneously.

VI. Recommendations & Suggestions

In the end it is suggested that the temple of our study has a large scope of improvement and updating of its marketing tools to increase the revenue. According to Shilpa Phadnis, "India's spiritual and religious market is estimated to be over \$30 billion." Harshad Mata Temple is hardly making any contribution to this huge amount of revenue to the industry of spiritual marketing. The Government or the Trust that is taking care of the temple, can think of profitable measures in terms of its historic value and scarce piece of arts in ancient idols etc. But at the same time it is highly recommended that its spiritual value is not ignored and less paying devotees are not deprived of spiritual satisfaction. Also we need to take care that the brand war does not enter this pious field of spirituality. Hence in order to increase the revenue we should not dent the image of other temples or religious places.

VII. Limitations of the study

1. Scope of study is not all the temples of the village.
2. Data has been collected as per convenience of the author.
3. Photographs used to record the observations are not clicked by a professional photographer

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