

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK EMBEDDING FOOD AND TOURISM: AGRO – CULINARY TOURISM AS A RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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Abstract

Agro tourism is one of several initiatives such as food fairs, farmers' market etc. concentrating specifically upon the local and rural culinary products. The country side in most countries is the repository of authentic and virgin culture of the place boasting of rich culture and indigenous gastronomic heritage that have been considered apt for developing differentiated food based strategies. Providing rural areas with an economic and competitive advantage through culinary mediums would require a strategy formulation that involves taking advantage of the environmental, cultural and economic factors of the place and locating it profitably within the reach of the probable market. The purpose of this study is to develop a framework of agro tourism networks to use culinary tourism as tool for rural development in India. The study is based on secondary data analysis along with implementing intimacy theory and post service economy model embedded with region branding and social enterprise model. The study finds itself explicitly in community based tourism development.

Keywords: Culinary tourism, rural development, intimacy theory, social enterprise model, branding, niche marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Culinary tourism is acknowledged as a narrative of a destination's culture, history and quality of life delivered through food. Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance describes culinary tourism as: 'A travel experience through which a consumer learns about, appreciates and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional and national cuisine, heritage and culture' (Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, Skift, 2015). The increased interest and concern regarding the food and curiosity about its origin has been utilized by various destination marketing organizations for developing innovative markets in order to extend the existing tourism business to a wider, remote and regional operators working in the travel sector. Although, dining experience has remained one of the most important parameters of consumer satisfaction in tourism, trends of tourism or travel specifically for food

and beverage have been a recent development. American Culinary Traveller Report suggests that the number of culinary travellers had risen substantially to reach 51% in 2013 from 40% in 2006, out of the total global leisure travelling percentage of 77%. The widespread use of social media has further augmented the growth of culinary tourism by creating an impulse binge and increased awareness regarding various traditional food destinations in other consumers. (Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, Skift, 2015)

However, desires for fresh food, willingness to support the local producers and pursuit of sustainable food have also been the driving forces behind the development of rural agro tourism networks. As with majority of the economies, agriculture in India has undergone a significant change since the liberalization which was initiated to take advantage of the globalizing economy. However, the benefits received have remained largely limited to the urban regions (One World

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Foundation, 2013). The impacts of rapid global adjustments along with inherent constraints in Indian agricultural supply chain are largely undermining the identity and individuality of the rural communities (Stolarick, Denstedt, Donald, & Spencer, 2010).

Critical factors affecting the lives of these rural communities include:

- Absence of systematized access to market
- Lack of awareness about supply and demand requirements
- Ignorance of price fluctuations
- Inadequate finances
- Increased dominance of middlemen
- Restricted availability and access to credit facilities

Source: (One World Foundation, 2013)

One of the solutions cited for alleviating such a situation requires infusing the traditional agricultural activities and converting them into culinary experiences by efficiently associating the local production activities with the complementary tertiary level businesses or/and service sector activities constructed on the basis of unique cultural, economic and environmental characteristics of the region in a network of activities, termed as 'creative economy' (Lee, 2012). Marketing such a business model requires a mix of strategies which focus on products of local heritage as 'niche' and take it beyond to something more intimate and experience oriented (Kotler, Jatusripidak, & Maesincee, 1997).

A global effort in rural direction encompasses activities like farmers' market, food movements etc. Culinary tourism can be customized to suit the rural development requirements by promoting the rural destination based on the diverse product mix offerings that are indigenous to such a place, which essentially means designing a branding strategy focused on the psychological and softer elements of the region i.e. local traditions, arts, stories, food, and the quality of life, that remains an inseparable part of the a particular destination's identity (Lee, 2012). Moreover, there is ample evidence from the research works conducted in

the area that highlight the existence of a latent demand for food produced through artisanal methods limited to the expertise of passionate artisans in places with a history of its origin (Tamagnini & Tregear, 1998).

Thus, what needs to be highlighted is that culinary – agro tourism depends upon the ability to develop a 'culinary cluster', which is a combination of activities involved in enabling the visitors to experience the culture of the destination through the traditional food and beverage. Such a creative culinary economy can be effectively used to serve the unconventional but an emerging category of customers that are resilient to globalization and in a pursuit of reconnecting with nature and freshness of food (Sidali, Kastenholz, & Rossella, 2013). However, the effectiveness of such an economic model depends heavily upon the collaboration between the various stakeholders involved in the process, without which it will be no different from the traditional agricultural models that provide little if any autonomy to the rural communities (Aas & Ladkin, 2005).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rural communities and agriculture:

Agricultural and allied sector contribution to GDP is as high as 16% while it also amounted to about 10% of the total export earnings in 2012. The vast and diverse agricultural produce places India second in terms of gross area under production with 159.7 million hectares (Athena Infomics, 2012). Sustenance and livelihood of more than 85% of the Indian population depends directly upon the agricultural activities. Most of the farming and production activity takes place in the rural India with the approximate span of about 6.25 lakh villages. With such a substantial amount of influence, Indian economy has been rightly termed as being predominantly agrarian (Pandurang Taware, 2012).

However, much of the agricultural activity is undertaken is undertaken by small and marginal farmers who remain trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty and deprivation in spite of significant efforts from most of the authorities. This is partly due to the restricted access but more importantly due to the power concentration with the middle

men in the agricultural supply chain. Consequently, even with the gross increase in the quantity of production, the lives at the grass root level remain exploited (One World Foundation, 2013). Introduction of tourism to such a network is primarily with a hope to shift the control from

middle men and other power structures to the farmer (Pandurang Taware, 2012).

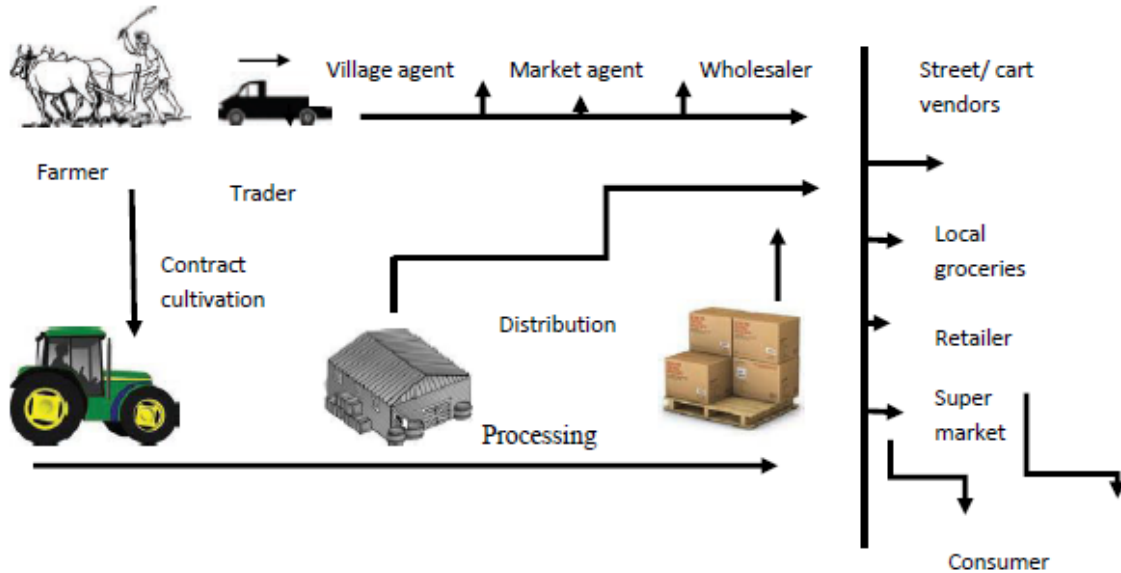


Figure 1: Food supply chain in India

Tourism in India:

The dictum of “Athithidevo bhava” or “The guest is truly God” illustrates the cultural importance of hospitality in India. Tourism amounted for about 6.6% of the total GDP, providing sustenance to about 7.7% of the total

population in 2012. It has been predicted that the Indian tourism industry will continue to grow at rate of 7.9% from 2013 to 2023, making it one of the fastest developing tourism sectors in the world. Following is an account foreign tourist arrival in India from 1998 to 2014.

Table 1: Foreign tourist arrivals in India (1998-2014)

Year	FTAs in India (in millions)	
1998	2.36	
1999	2.48	
2000	2.65	6.7
2001	2.54	-4.2
2002	2.38	-6.0
2003	2.73	14.3
2004	3.46	26.8

2005	3.92	13.3
2006	4.45	13.5
2007	5.08	14.3
2008	5.28	4.0
2009	5.17	-2.2
2010	5.78	11.8
2011	6.31	9.2
2012	6.58	4.3
2013	6.97	5.9
2014	7.68	10.2

Source: (Ministry of Tourism (Government of India), 2014)

Agro Culinary Tourism:

The purpose of this study is to develop a framework that extends the existing tourism network to the rural players in a profitable manner. Such an extension would result in additional income generating gateway for the participant rural communities. Bringing tourism and agriculture together would result in transfer of benefits from one sector to another which is expected to create network of activities that result in a substantial value addition to both the producers and consumers.

A conceptual framework embedding food and tourism would require a multidimensional analysis primarily focusing upon the consumers, destination characteristics, marketing strategies as well as a management model that facilitates shared decision making. Intimacy theory and experience model are the established models traditionally used for constructing the characteristics of consumption related to tourism products, while marketing and promoting strategies can be interpreted using the destination branding concept that focus on building a niche identity for rural locations, that reiterate the concept of consuming the local artisan products in the environment that is sustainable and authentic.

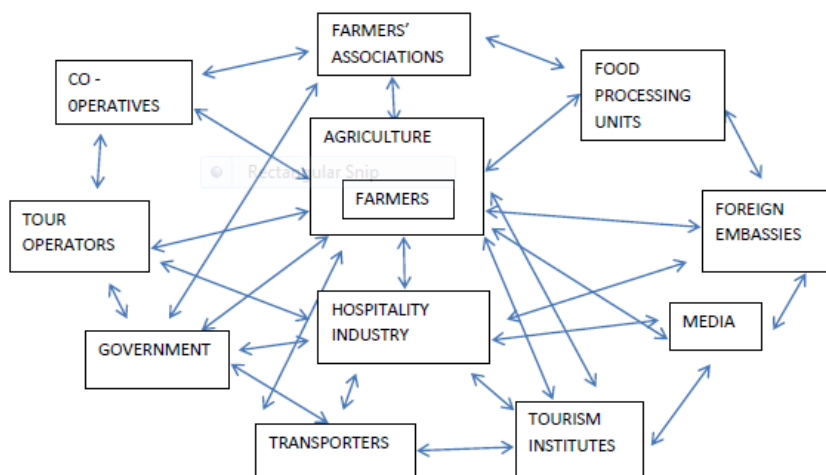


Figure 2: Major stakeholders in this economy would include the following players

The balance of power and a platform for shared decision making that empowers the collective group of small scale participants can be analysed using social enterprise model. Social enterprise model is a relatively recent development that has resulted from the combined efforts of government, private institutions, corporate entities, etc. Which focus upon the business intensive social – economic growth. It is in this aspect that though not completely related to tourism sector, a social enterprise of fragmented units can serve well as a better and a profitable epitome of the destination’s cultural products centred on food experience.

Consumer in agro-culinary:

The occurrence of alternative consumerism in food industry is the premise for developing a rural tourism framework. The root of demand for local and artisan food emerges from multiple psychological and social issues. The food consumption patterns in majority portray indifference for local or traditional food with consumers characterizing a widespread ‘calculated consumption’ (Dagevos, 2009). However, multiple food indignities and scandals have resulted in valid suspicions regarding the globalized and mechanized food quality. This has caused an upward trend in demand for alternative food choices that represent a more transparent local production system (Albersmeier, Schulze, Jahn, & Spiller, 2009). Apart from these, consumers also tend to relate local food specialities with exceptional experiences from food activism and the ability of the traditional local meal to prompt nostalgia in domestic tourists belonging to the similar regional pattern. The rise of demand for customization and rejection towards homogenized consumption is also one of the strong driving forces for crafting an agro tourism strategy.

The demand for alternative food chains has been supported by the supply side dynamics

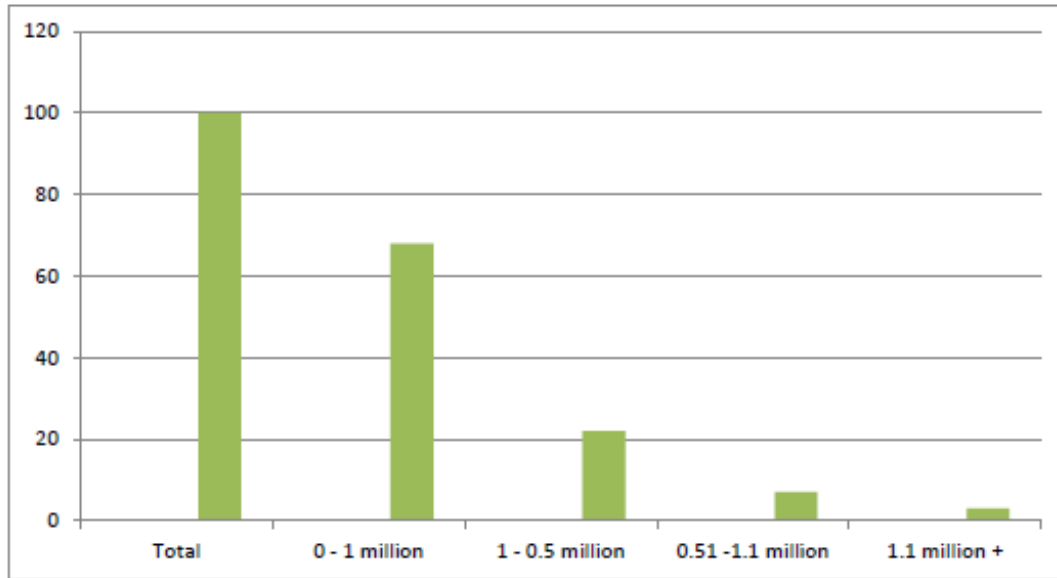
across the globe, including in India where in the farmers protested against selling their products in super markets. The matters caught fire with the renewal of laws regarding foreign direct investment in India, especially in the retailing sector. The farmers especially from the West Bengal territory protested the rise of super market chains for the fear of looming danger towards their livelihood (Cohen, 2013). The success of innovative and social lodging facilities like “Air BnB” provides evidence regarding the benefits of de – commercialization and developing cultural ethos in hospitality. It has also been evident from the studies of (Cederholm & Hultman, 2010) that the above mentioned techniques result in attracting a specific category of tourists in rural tourism. Studies have indicated that such tourists tend to be well educated and display involvement and interest in food activities. Their income levels depict medium and upper level social strata. Psychologically the consumers represent two major types namely pleasure oriented and high food involvement tourists. To conclude the implementation of rural tourism is an attempt to provide the willing consumers with food that is relatively less anonymous, more importantly it takes a shift from the traditional systems by aiming to build business parallel to building relationships (Sidali, Kastenholz, & Rossella, 2013).

DISCUSSIONS

Social Enterprise models:

Social enterprises in emerging economies like India are reaching the less served market in India without compromising the value for the producing segment. Following is the account for social enterprise by revenue in India.

Table 2: Percentage of social enterprises with annual revenue



Agriculture with its substantial contribution to the GDP has also been one of the most important sectors requiring social enterprise models to supplement and improve the conditions at the grass root level in Indian agricultural supply chain. Agriculture provides sustenance to about 70% of the rural population but there has been a decline in its contribution to GDP from 50.1% in 1950 – 1951 to 14.6% in 2009 (Asian Development Bank, 2012). However, there has not been a corresponding absorption of the agricultural workforce by the emerging service sector due to prolonged training and skills required for service sector (Kannan & Sundaram, 2012).

Social enterprise model would enable the agricultural communities to develop a much more robust system of supply chain from advanced technical assistance in seed technology to post harvest strategies. Most rural communities fail in implementing a sound system of transporting and retailing the produce that an aggregated composition of stakeholders can assist in developing. Shri Jagadamba Samiti in Uttarakhand has developed a model for securing the livelihood of apple farmers in the region through a joint venture with Stichting Het Groene Woudt (Netherlands) which is slowly being taken

over by the member farmer communities. The project handles storage, processing, transport and retailing (One World Foundation, 2013). However, like most social enterprise units in agriculture, the vision here is limited to identifying and training farmer entrepreneurs but this study aims to broaden the horizon by bringing a paradigm shift in the business model and incorporating a concept of supporting the economy through food tourism and developing a food economy for the community by the community. Mavroric Companies in Zagreb, Croatia represents a similar model. Social enterprises help the financially weak agro communities by bringing different entities together and enable them to work in the same environment. Shared commitment and responsibility enables the marginal farmers to reap the benefits that large multinationals can achieve by developing an alternative strategy for economies of scale. Swaton Berry farm, in Davenport, California is an example of one such enterprise that deals specifically with organic strawberry gardens and artisan processing of the same. Mahabaleshwar in Maharashtra, India is known for its berry plantations. It has also received acknowledgement as a much preferred weekend destination to escape the Indian heat. Developing this destination on the food basis and providing a similar exhilaration with a value – added food experience helps to take a paradigm

shift in the destination image from a summer getaway to a perennial holiday destination satisfying the pursuit for greenery (Shuman, Barron, & Wasserman, 2009). Social enterprise models like in the ‘Apple farming project: Uttarakhand’ allows the farmers to control the supply chain thereby eliminating the middle

players. This model creates a better price regime for the farming community and offers a better source of food for the consumers (One World Foundation, 2013). The services provided by linking social enterprise model with rural tourism can be depicted as follows:

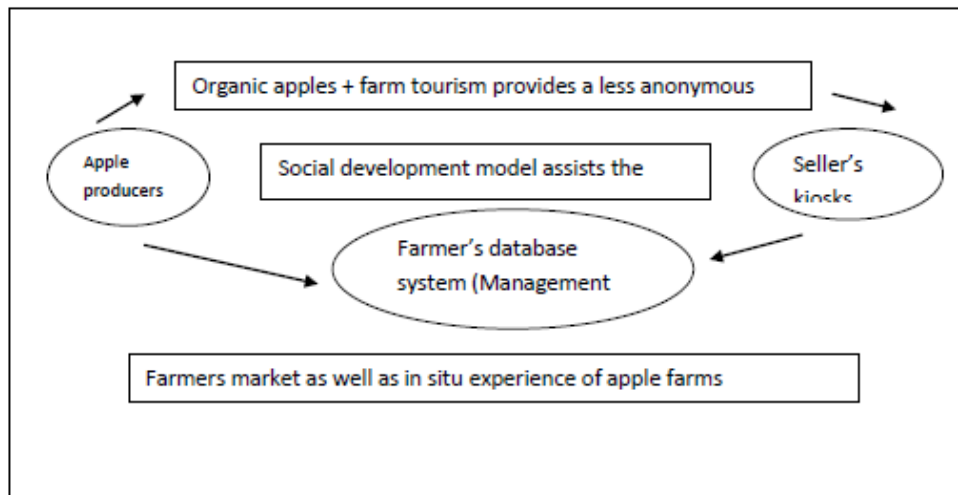


Figure 3: Tourism as a component of an agricultural social enterprise model

Creative food networks:

Creative food networks and alternative food chains are strategies that provide robust remedies for rural areas rich in natural and cultural heritage. The concept of agro – culinary tourism is hence essentially a creation of creative network for pooling the resources, which will leverage the primary sector of agriculture as well as secondary activity of tourism. Constructing a model that facilitates the above mentioned network involves modifying the Porter’s diamond model. The construction of such a cluster requires a place where the relationship between geography, history and human factors creates a distinct flavour of a place that cannot be imitated elsewhere (Musgrave, 2009, p. 158). It has most often been identified with traditional areas of production like Parma (Prosciutto ham), Red wine (Bordeaux), etc.

The concept essentially focuses upon allowing the rural and distant areas to leverage their indigenous advantages and provide them with unique branding and marketing strategies. As an example for this the renovation in the brand image of Goa as a beach destination to a destination rooted in its culture. Agro tourism shifts the purpose of travelling for thrill or adventure to cultural motives. Adventure and exhilaration being the basic psychological factors drawing most tourists to Goa replicating the same meant constructing spice trails and providing a boost for artisan cashew liqueur industry as well as reaping benefits of various farm markets and cottage accommodations within the farmlands of interior Goa. Thus a nexus of agriculture and tourism when framed strategically with an accurate understanding of the consumers can provide supplementary income to the farmers while preserving the local heritage and knowledge.

Place branding:

One of the aspects of this study is to analyse the extent to which the local structures contribute towards social, cultural and economic development of regions and places, while primarily focusing on rural areas. The rise of globalization and knowledge economy has brought with them a distinct set of opportunities and challenges for various economic sectors. However, the distinct social and geographical settings of rural communities pose a set of challenges and opportunities that are different from those prevalent in the economy. Thus in the truest sense of the term, development of these communities would mean cultivating the ability to sustain themselves in the face of extreme and adverse global changes (Knox, 2009). There has been an increased importance given to the development of alternative strategies that leverage the place based characteristics of the rural areas that would arrest the ongoing decline of economic activities in the rural region and more importantly construct a framework that resonates with cultural and traditional indigenous patterns of the place. Hence, building innovative alternative strategies that focus on partnership and collaboration of the stakeholders (thereby creating a network, or a cluster) for holistic community development at the rural level is of paramount importance in such places (Stolarick, Denstedt, Donald, & Spencer, 2010).

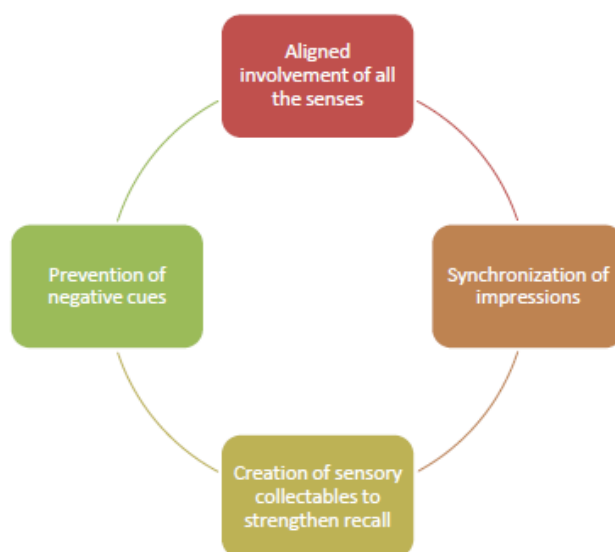
The Experience economy:

Sophistication in consumption patterns paved a path for the development of brand personality concept; recent decade experienced the growth of brand importance which in essence meant a move away for mere calculated consumption to consumption that is an extension of one's personality in the form of a symbolic expression (Aaker, 1997). The researches on symbolic consumption and the theorization of "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) were one of the earliest attempts to understand the importance of experience in tourism. The framework of

experience in tourism is a complex network of psychological factors that operate in a multi – dimensional manner. Literature on tourism so far has identified various understandings of tourism experience that range across a diversified spectrum, from pleasure based hedonic motive to a pursuit for travel as an occasion for release and emotional liberation. Other leading motives for most travel include novelty and change and quest for genuineness (Farber & Hall, 2007).

The application of experience to the tourism sector has been subsequent to consumer behaviour, wherein the studies by (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), marked the dawn of post service economy/experience economy. Fundamentally, their work aims to differentiate the services from the experience oriented strategies. While service economy involves provision of intangibles, with the 'experience' component being incidental to the main service, experience strategy focuses on elevating experience to 'special statuses. This means designing the experience and selling experience as the primary product with service being a platform for its delivery. One of the best means of designing such a strategy is by taking advantage of numerous local programming events that may take place in the vicinity. Music concerts, modern art exhibitions, book shows etc. exhibit a varied assortment of creative energy; these provide local food suppliers with an opportunity to reach out to a vast majority of consumers

The Greenbelt Harvest picnic is one such massive outdoor event combines the creative influences of food and music. It is an annual festival held outside Hamilton, Ontario that includes extensive farmers' markets with a chain of concert performances by various well known music artists. Thus in an experience oriented tourism management, designing the experience becomes the primary activity with service serving as a stage for the transaction to place (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The ground breaking work by Pine & Gilmore (1998, 1999) which emphasized experience in tourism and related industries has been identified as an epoch making research which established creating 'memorable experiences' as a hallmark for travel sector.



Figurer 4: Characteristics of a tourism product in experience economy

Application of the experience economy model:

Forbes (2014) wrote that the millennial traveller’s relationship with food is going to be distinct from what it may have been earlier. It further indicated that millennial prefer the food that is authentic; they want to be informed about its production and more importantly they expect food to be a shared experience. The rise of ‘slow food movement’ in North American continent embodies a careful application of experience model. The Mardi Gras festival of New Orleans combines the local flavour of music with a cultural expression of food that provides the visitors with an opportunity to indulge in an alternative chain of production and participate in a completely different storytelling regarding the origin of their consumption. Similar experiences prevail at the Southern Living Taste of Charleston Festival. It features pop up restaurants by local native chefs along with sampling stations and local beer tastings. These festivals reinstate the recall strength by embedding the culinary events with powerful sensory indulgence of local and country music performances (Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, Skift, 2015).

Intimacy model:

Intimacy approach deals with psychological factors concerned with love and intimacy in relationships. However its application in a fairly commercial world became manifold with the advent of globalization and consequent rise of relationship marketing (Berry, 2000). Globalization has on one hand made it possible to create a network of similar interests while at the same time has also been perceived as a threat to self-identity. The need for personalization is the most manifest form of pursuit for intimacy in buying and consumption behaviour.

Such a combination of a shared experience and identity and apparent discomfort with commercialization has been a predominant feature of most economic sectors and more so in the case of leisure and consumer products. ‘Quest for the roots’ is the most popular reflection of the intimacy approach as far as tourism is concerned. This coincides with the aforementioned competencies of rural tourism. Hospitality models based on intimacy theory, depending upon the varying degrees of intimacy approaches include couch surfing, sofa hopping, religious flights, etc. (Cederholm & Hultman, 2010).

Application of Intimacy model:

Leveraging the nostalgia eliciting ambiances as well as personalization of services prevalent in family owned businesses and country houses of the rural region replicate the intimacy theory in part. This is the kind of relationship that can be explicitly marketed in the rural tourism context. This provides rural communities with a scope to venture into something collectively known as ‘lifestyle entrepreneurship’. In this way, tourism thrives on the basis of not just memorable experiences but more importantly in the through personally valuable relationships and authenticity. The tradition and ritualization of the place is more important in this case as against the conventional quest for adrenaline and rush (Kastenholz, 2009) ‘Hoffeste’ a German farm based tradition is one such ritual that testifies the modern intimacy approach that may be replicated in India around the festivities of Andhra Pradesh based ‘Sankranti’ or a ritualistic practice concerning ‘Lodi’ of Punjab in North Indian. ‘Hoffeste’ is a ritual wherein the farmer and his family host a feast on their premises to share their produce with the guests and the fellow farmers, marking the dawn of harvest season. Such a celebration has remained a symbol of organic and small scale farmers. It has remained a success over the years on account of sustained and lucid communication of traditional value system. These systems build a sense of belongingness in the guests that leads to post vacation sustenance of relationship. It decreases the anonymity in the consumption chain by developing a ‘natural circuit of awareness and information’.

CONCLUSION

Conceptual framework:

The aim and the purpose of this paper is to create a nexus of various development models and use these to uplift and improve the neglected sections of the society by incorporating them in the tourism economy. With limited nature of resources and the emergence of new class of consumers, sustainability and native solutions in the scheme travel and tourism endeavours has gained ground. A conceptual framework has been developed to provide a complete as well as a holistic business

model that enables the farming communities across emerging economies to continue the agricultural activity with much more autonomy and transparency. At the same time, embedding tourism with food takes the market to the farms and not vice versa, thereby enabling the consumer cum tourist to better appreciate the food produces. Heritage and cultural conservation is another very crucial element in the recent times. Food has a mystical as well as cultural appeal that narrates the history of the place in a subtle but lasting manner. Hence food tourism becomes a much appreciated form of storytelling and consequently leads to a much better conservative activity with enthusiastic set of participants.

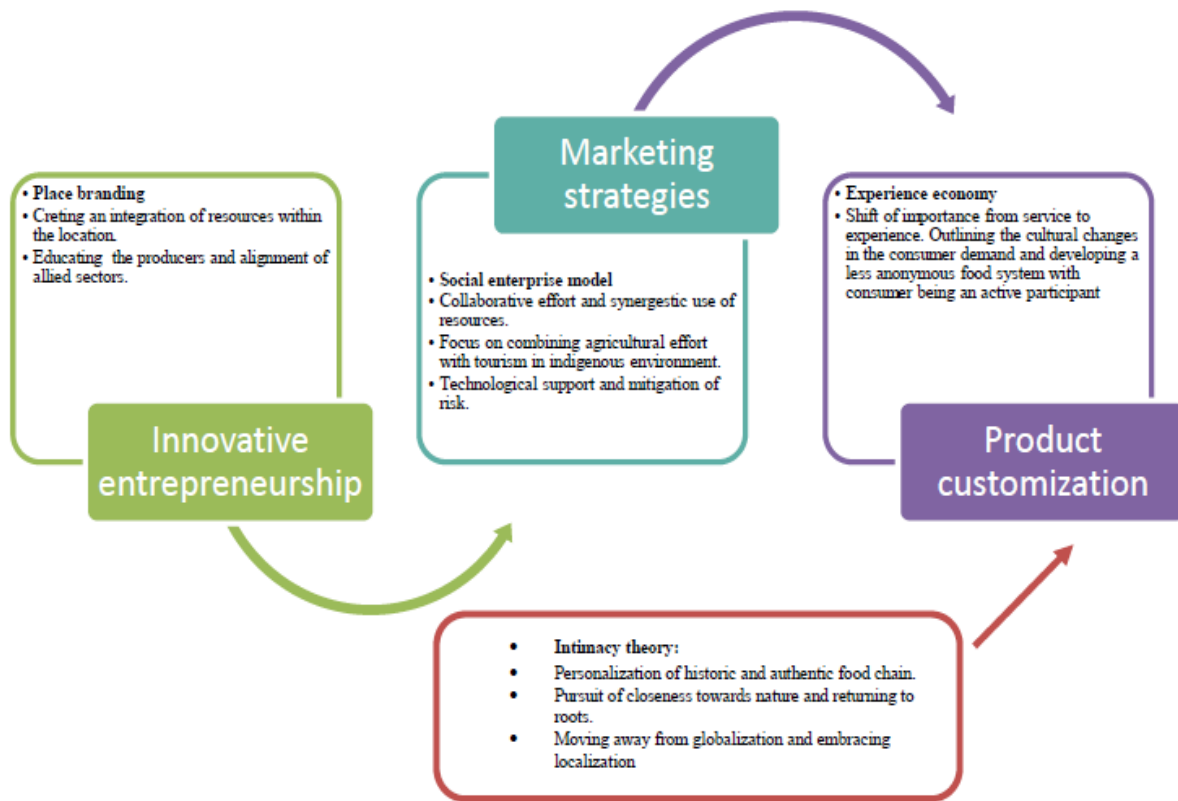


Figure 5: Conceptual framework embedding food and tourism

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