



REBUILDING AND REBRANDING OF RURAL TOURIST DESTINATIONS OF RAJASTHAN

Ms. Surbhi Arora
(Freelancer)

Abstract

Rebranding and rebuilding any destination can help people become attentive of the existence of new place products and distinguish that they possess real benefits, style and culture. It may comprise of name creation and registration, the design of a logo and visual image or advertising and promotion. At this point of time, tourism and hospitality industry has experienced a very sudden shock when COVID - 19 limitations and regulations brought down the various tourism activities. The tourism industry looks very far from recovery. Travelling after COVID -19 pandemic will be more accountable and the places need to rebuild and rebrand their image towards safe and sustainable experience. Rebuilding and rebranding rural tourism destinations can necessarily modify the spirit of an area. In India the government is taking this situation as an opportunity to ensure future recovery of the tourism industry. The purpose of this paper is to present insights into the rebuilding and rebranding of rural tourist destinations of Rajasthan using secondary data (literature review). Researchers found that rural tourist destinations usually have a quiet atmosphere and are less densely populated with fewer people contacting each other. The study will provide an important opportunity for the development of rural tourist destinations and the rural communities of Rajasthan. Therefore, rural tourism could be tomorrow's mantra. Among the niche areas of rural tourism emerging in India are eco-tourism, culture tourism, religious tourism, medical tourism, wellness tourism, sports tourism, adventure tourism, etc. This is a promising sector, one that is being pushed by the government of India through the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative.

Keywords: *Rebuilding, Rebranding, Tourism, Destination, Rural Tourism, COVID -19, Rural Community, Promotion, Under-tourism, Over-tourism.*

Introduction

Tourism destination branding has radically evolved from a concern with coping with success to a concern with rebuilding and rebranding from the COVID - 19 pandemic in only three years. For competitive reasons, large corporations sometimes rebrand themselves as fresh corporate brands after overhauling or completely replacing their image. Similar to the tourism sector, rivalry among rural tourism destinations to attract fresh ventures, services, travelers, and inhabitants has led to the formation of entire new brand identities in many rural communities. Rural tourism is a form of tourism that is located in rural areas and displays a complex pattern of rural environment, economy, and history. Rural tourism will gather people of all cultures, faiths, languages, and lifestyles closer together, giving them a broader perspective on life. The stresses generating from urban life and the impassiveness and distance from natural environment occasionally provoke the urbanites to escape from their monoculture city life. In such case, rural locations seem to be an ideal place to release stress and also provide an opportunity to be re-engaged in a simpler way of life that offers rest and absolute peace for a certain period of time. In addition to providing individuals with economic opportunities, it will also promote cultural, educational, and social values. Additionally, to COVID - 19, other factors such as an increase in interest in heritage and culture, easier access to rural areas, and environmental consciousness also contribute to the move to rural tourism. Thus, rural attractions must be renamed and rebuilt. Through rebranding a region, people can become aware of new products and understand that they have real



benefits, style, and culture. It can help to set a location apart from others and hence aid in the promotion of a product. Rural tourism is defined as any type of tourism that promotes rural life, art, culture, and heritage in rural areas, thereby supporting the local community economically and socially while also allowing tourists and locals to engage for a more fulfilling tourism experience (Nagaraju L.G. & B. Chandrashekara 2014). Among the states, however, Rajasthan has managed to successfully manage the epidemic through programs such as 'No Mask, No Entry' and 'Rajasthan Satark Hai.' Rajasthan is also ahead of the curve when it comes to vaccination, making it a safe area to visit. Rajasthan Tourism Department has also made many efforts to enhance visitor safety at tourist attractions, restaurants, and hotels, all of which have been implemented on a timely basis. This helped the tourist units operate and survive the difficult period while also ensuring the safety of the visitors. A number of relief measures were also offered by the state government during COVID to assist the ailing tourism sector, and as a result, tourism in Rajasthan is creating a strong and safe comeback.

Rajasthan was the first state in India to ascertain a new tourism policy after the COVID pandemic broke out (Bhardwaj T. 2021). COVID-19 issues are specific to each country, state, and region. Tourism businesses have responded differently. Some choose to entirely halt operations, while others choose to refocus, rebuild, or rebrand their efforts and products to request to the local population. COVID-19 is viewed by some as an opportunity to refocus their business. Local customers or tourists were considerably more vital and valuable than previously due to lockdowns or international travel restrictions. The new normal for the tourism industry means that destinations will have to reconsider how they are branded and positioned in the minds of passengers in the future, as demand for more safe and sustainable tourism practices will alter. Tourism marketing pitches emphasize food, hidden gems, adventure, and culture, rather than pilgrimages or monuments as in the past.

Literature Review

In general, destination branding is a collaborative effort between stakeholders and destination marketing organizations to create a unique and distinct destination image (San Martín et al., 2019) and personality (Vinyals-Mirabent et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2020) that will contribute to destination brand equity (Gartner and Ruzzier, 2011; Sartori et al., 2012; Dedeoğlu et al., 2019) and loyalty (Chen et al., 2020) and ensure that tourists visit the destination (Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2019). According to Ghazani et al. (2017), villagers believe that promoting tourist education leads to increased engagement, more money, not evacuating the village, the flourishing of rural industries such as tourism, agricultural stabilization, and rural environment preservation. Place branding should not imply the creation of a new identity for a place, but rather an awareness of how tourists view the destination in order to influence potential visitors' location decisions (Chan, C.S. & Marafa, L.M. 2018). This encompasses all facets of the destination on both a functional and emotional level (Pike, S. 2005). It should also be noted that, in order to preserve their level of esteem, even well-established and profitable locations must undergo brand restructuring from time to time (Buncle 2009; Baker 2012). "Rebranding" "involves a process where an outmoded or irrelevant brand identity is updated and re-launched with a new focus, according to Baker (2012, p.54). The fundamental purpose of rebranding, according to Chellan, Mtshali, and Khan (2013), is to create a shift in the organization as well as to support a new destination image, resulting in a new customer perception. And rebranding is a powerful weapon for restoring a product's, service's, or destination's image and credibility following a disaster (Brophy R., 2014). Any rural tourism destination can be rebranded and rebuilt by changing the logo (visuals) or slogan (short phrases), creating a new name or word, or a mix of these as a communication identity and to distinguish the destination from others. Rajasthan Tourism, for example, is preparing to greet visitors with its great



old campaign 'Padharo Mhare Des,' which will replace 'Jane Kya Dikh Jaye.' Making promises and ensuring that they are kept is at the heart of rebranding. In other words, rebranding is enhancing the value of a brand that has already been established. As destinations seek to reinvent themselves by stressing characteristics and attributes that create a contemporary image, rebranding or repositioning becomes critical in order to attract tourists among the immense competition. The tourism industry has faced numerous obstacles as a result of COVID-19, but there is optimism among the general public, researchers, and practitioners that adjustments taken during the crisis will contribute to more sustainable tourism development in the future (Gössling et al., 2020). The COVID - 19 has had a far-reaching collision on local folk musicians in Rajasthan, such as the Manganiyars (a small Muslim tribe) who were completely reliant on tourists for financial and nutritional support. On the basis of a monthly stipend, hotels and resorts organize concerts by Manganiyars involving folk music and Kalbeliya dance to welcome tourists. However, several of them have mislaid the source of revenue due to low tourist turnout. The essential roads to take are learning from catastrophe planning and resisting the advice to turn away from prospective failures (Rivera, 2020). It is also critical to re-establish customer trust in order to revive the tourism business, which has been stalled. The tourism industry's resurgence will be dependent on increasing travel confidence and lowering risk perceptions (Assaf & Scuderi, 2020). COVID-19 has an impact on consumer perceptions of tourist products and services (Yu et al., 2020). The focus of Mao et al. (2020) is on human capital and winning employee trust. To resurrect the tourism business, it will need to undergo transformations such as restarting, reorganizing, and absorbing it according to current norms and rules (Lew et al., 2020). COVID-19 has had such an impact on people's lives and travels that it has utterly transformed them. People increasingly prefer to connect and shop locally. The virus has provided an opportunity for the tourism industry to re-invent itself and contribute to the well-being of society (Benjamin et al., 2020; Rowen, 2020). According to Budayana and Adi (2021), tourism cannot be stopped during an epidemic in places that rely on rural tourism because the economies of these societies are based on tourism. In this instance, incentives should be provided to encourage innovation in order to boost rural tourism and local trade. According to Nagaj and Žuromskaite (2021), COVID - 19 affects not only the health system and people's health, but also the financial system. Due to the disease's effects on mobility and travel, both domestic and foreign tourists have been negatively impacted; nevertheless, the outbreak has led to a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions in tourist areas. However, to help tourism recovery, approaches to recovery should be taken, therefore the aim of rebuilding and rebranding rural destinations is:

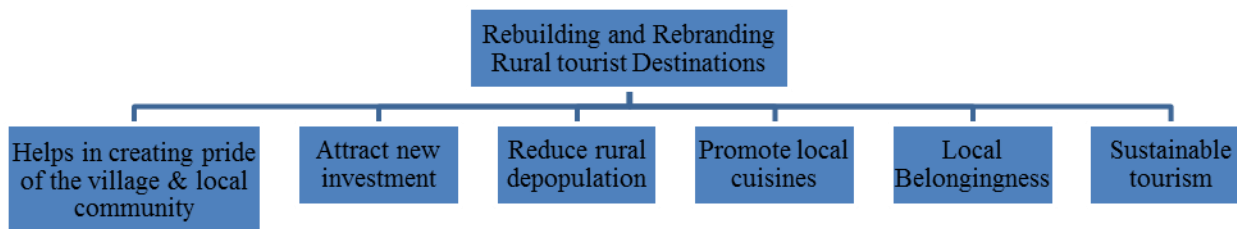


Fig. 1: Aim of rebuilding and rebranding rural destinations

Source: Compiled by Researchers

Many rural tourism businesses and sites are seeing a boost from domestic tourism, and this will prolong to be the key driver of recuperation in the short- and medium-term. The whole tourism sector is slowly



but surely being rebranded. Because of the new tourism norm, locations will need to reconsider how they are branded and positioned for the future, as tourism demand will alter dramatically.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyze rural tourism products in Rajasthan
2. To learn more about rural tourist destinations in Rajasthan.
3. After COVID 19, a variety of measures are being taken to rebuild and rebrand rural tourism destinations.
4. Providing suggestions for the development and expansion of rural tourism in Rajasthan after COVID-19.

Methodology/Approach

In this study, researchers are looking at how rebuilding and rebranding rural tourist destinations might contribute to economic growth and tourism sustainability, especially in light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Because the research is based on the analysis of books, journals, websites, and newspaper articles, topic and content analyses are vital. The paper reviews and analyzes material produced between 2010 and April 2022 about branding, rebranding, destinations marketing organizations (DMOs), and rural tourism.

Rebuilding and Rebranding

"The Dekho Apna Desh initiative launched on January 24, 2020 in Konark, Odisha, by Shri Prahlad Singh Patel, Union Minister for Tourism, asks each citizen to visit at least 15 destinations by 2022 to promote domestic tourism in India, by attracting tourists to places of tourist interest to boost the local economy, raise awareness, and promote lesser-known destinations. As soon as the lockdown and the virus are contained, domestic tourism should rebound faster than international tourism. From spotting animals in Bishnoi to riding through sand dunes in Khimsar and visiting local shops in Chandelao, there are a lot of things to do in rural Rajasthan. In addition, Rajasthan state tourism debuted with a new look before COVID - 19. The state tourism board has unveiled a new logo, a redesigned website, and a new URL (Uniform Resource Locator) for its official website. State officials are attempting to increase attention to the state's lesser-known sites.

Rural tourism products in Rajasthan

Tourism products consist of both tourism's basic components (accommodation, food, and transportation) and supplemental components (balneotherapy, recreation, sports, and farm activities). Rural tourism's product features are inextricably linked to themes of nature, culture, and gastronomy, and have the ability to appeal to more affluent consumers involved in the destination selection process (Cai, L.A et.al. 2008). A state like Rajasthan has two sides. There is a modern side and a rural and traditional side. In a typical Rajasthani hamlet, residents live in thatched-roof cottages made of clay, cow dung, and hay. A camel safari is the best method to tour these villages. The fact that visitors can stay in a homestay and interact with the locals makes rural tourism so appealing. Villages have folk dances, music, and traditional food like Bajre ki roti, Kadh, Sarson ka saag, and handicrafts.

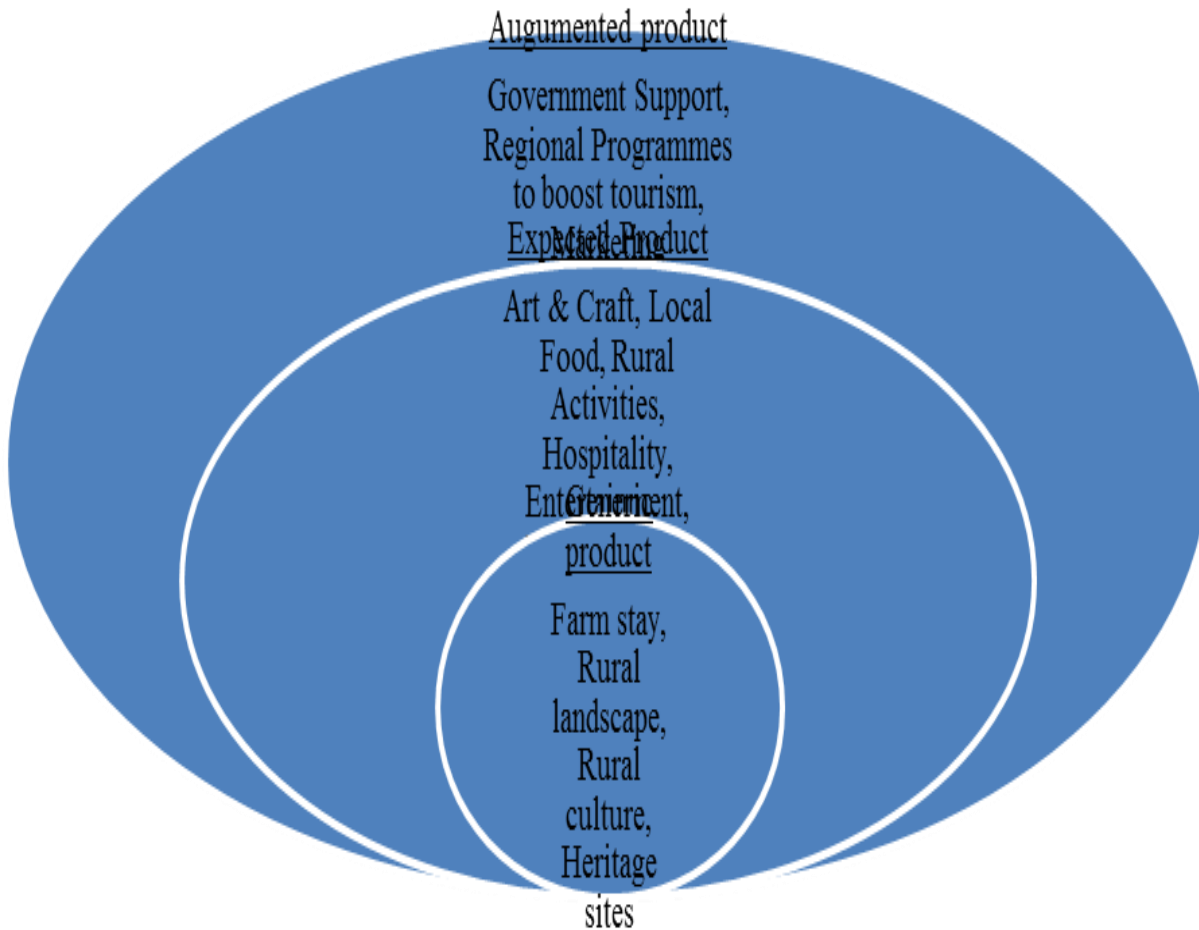


Fig. 2: Types of tourism product
Source: Researchers

The rural tourism product consists of activities such as milking cows, pounding grains to remove husks and winnowing rice, chopping wood, lighting the chulha (earthen stove), making cow dung cake, cutting grass, cooking authentic Indian food, travelling in bullock carts, participating in traditional fishing and farming activities, and enjoying seasonal fruits, local beverages, and village festivals. Rural tourism, particularly in India, has the potential to become a tourist destination if properly planned and implemented. However, many aspects, including as roads, sanitation, drinking water, infrastructure, energy, and healthcare, need to be improved.

Rural Tourist Destination of Rajasthan

The state of Rajasthan's new tourist policy aligns with the World Tourism Day subject of 'Tourism and Rural Development,' focusing on the promotion of tourism in rural and lesser-known areas of the state. This new state tourism policy emphasizes the charms of rural areas and other lesser-known places in the hopes of attracting a new visitor base following the end of the active COVID pandemic (Tekwani M. 2020). Covid-19 has touched the livelihoods of millions of people throughout the world who work in the travel and tourist industry. The Rajasthan administration is working hard to reduce its impact in the state. In addition, the Tourism Department has been working to encourage skill development in rural areas as well as the reinforcement of the Tourist Protection Force. A number of incentives, tax



breaks, and relaxations have also been granted to support tourism start-ups and experiential tourism activities across the state, particularly in rural areas.

Zipline rides are available near the renowned Mehrangarh fort and at Kaylana Lake in Jodhpur, among other activities currently being held in Rajasthan. Paragliding rides are held at Agolai hamlet in the Jodhpur district's rural districts. In the Rajsamand district, water sports and paragliding activities along the Rajsamand Lake are becoming increasingly popular. In Banswara area, paragliding is also available, and a 410-meter-long Zip-Line spans the length of the Kagdi Water Reservoir. The Water Zip-Line at the Kagdi Pick-up Weir in Banswara is the state's longest water grazing Zip-line.

Other rural destinations that can be renovated and may be in high demand following COVID – 19 include

1. Kuchaman city: One of the largest cities in Rajasthan. One of the hidden forts in Rajasthan is located in Kuchaman Fort, which can be found in the city. It has been the location of several Bollywood films. The fort now has been changed into an inheritance hotel.
2. Rusirani village: If one wants to recognize the traditions of Rajasthan, visit this unexplored place in Rajasthan. The green fields, striking old temples, and hand art work in Rusirani village will facilitate to get an experience of the rural culture and tradition of the state.
3. Kheechnan: While going from Bikaner to Jaisalmer, the area Kheechnan has been converted into a bird sanctuary. Separately from spotting various birds, there are lot of other things to do such as photography and exploring the entire village.
4. Jawai Leopard Camp: This place is a must for those who love wildlife and would like to see leopards in their natural habitat.
5. The spooky village of Kuldhara: Known as a haunted village and travelers have had intimidating experiences.
6. Bishnoi Village (Near Jodhpur) – Must-Visit for Animal Lovers
7. Bijaipur Village (Chittorgarh) – An Offbeat and Untouched Village
8. Khimsar Village (Jodhpur) – Catch A Glimpse of the Sand Dunes
9. Chandelao Village (Jodhpur) – A Serene Village
10. Khuri Village (Jaisalmer) – Famous for Its True Rural Beauty
11. Samode Village (Near Jaipur) – An Ideal Getaway from Jaipur
12. Ranakpur Village (Pali) – Popular for Its Jain Temples
13. Kuchaman Village (Nagaur) – Popular for Its Rich Culture

The importance of less crowded sites, clean air, authentic and organic cuisine, endangered animals, and nature conservation will be key priorities in the post-COVID-19 era, the researchers said.

Findings & Conclusions

The tourism industry was identified as a major source and carrier of the new coronavirus that caused COVID-19 to spread. While good news about vaccines has increased tourist businesses' and travelers' enthusiasm, difficulties persist. Tourism in rural areas has seen tremendous growth in recent years as visitors seek to escape crowded, dirty cities by taking vacations in rural areas with plenty of natural and manmade resources. It is also a great way to get in touch with rural culture and traditions and to learn more about how traditional people live. It is a nice alternative to holidays in coastal areas or overcrowded cities in the aftermath of COVID-19. Although foreign tourists are still interested in visiting big cities like Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur or Jaisalmer as one of the main destinations in Rajasthan, may be due to higher-quality facilities, connectivity or infrastructure that cannot be avoided. But attempts have been carried out by the government of Rajasthan and the tourism industry to promote



off-beat rural destinations and improve services, hospitality and infrastructure; however, further efforts need to be undertaken. The Ministry of Tourism has put a priority on developing local community tourism. Rebuilding or rebranding a tourism destination can be necessary, especially if the destination has experienced a crisis of some kind or if it is less known. Destination brands must be built on authentic foundations, grounded in long-lasting and local truths so that they can withstand temporary and situational crises. Re-branding a destination's position in the minds of potential tourists is difficult, but if it is authentic, and builds trust and reliability through honest appraisal, then consumer loyalty and interest will rebound.

Suggestions for improvement of rural tourism in Rajasthan after COVID - 19

Rural tourism is viewed as a tool for resolving local imbalances, and in addition to attracting touristic areas to the circuit; it has implications for territorial development, such as housing construction, road development, public service development, and the growth of small and medium-sized businesses. As a result, rural tourism has an impact not only on a country's economic and social development strategy, but also on the level of individual branches. The researcher makes the following recommendations for improving rural tourism in Rajasthan:

- Develop rural tourism while safeguarding natural resources, local heritage, and lifestyles.
- Increase awareness of traditional tourism items.
- Enhancement of the village's surroundings.
- Tourist Attractions.
- Adequate infrastructure.
- Ensuring that solid waste management and sewerage management are improved.
- Wayside amenity construction.
- Purchasing tourist-related equipment, such as water sports, adventure sports, and environmentally friendly modes of transportation for moving around the tourism zone.
- Monuments are being refurbished.
- Signages

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