
Destination Image Recovery strategies during Crisis in Kashmir, India

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***Abstract:** The valley of Kashmir has remained an acclaimed tourist destination for its magnificent & breathtaking beauty and unique culture throughout the globe. Despite being acknowledged as the 'Paradise on earth', tourism in valley has been badly hit due to a long legacy of crisis and conflicts. The consequence of this political conflict has resulted in destroying Kashmir's brand image. The present article's main endeavor is to carve out strategies adopted by the tourism officials of Kashmir, India, to mitigate the political crisis, negative perception & stereotypes brought into tourists' minds. The study also emphasis the Destination image recovery practices adopted to bring back tourists to the valley. The study includes qualitative analysis of secondary data, and well-structured interviews were conducted by selecting six destination marketing organizations (DMO's) to uncover the crisis recovery strategies to repair the Destination Image. The study's focal findings reveal that innovative promotional measures, Security & awareness initiatives,*

partnering with stakeholders, media-related maneuvers, and other strategies help in destination image recovery during the crisis.

Keywords: *Crisis, Crisis Management, Political insurgency, Image recovery, Destination Image, Kashmir Tourism.*

Introduction

The travel and tourism sector is one of the world's largest economic industries, generating jobs, foreign capital, exports, and prosperity globally, demonstrating a substantial impact on economies and labor markets (Nazki, 2018). However, the industry remains highly vulnerable to short and long-term crises and disasters, including political instability, terrorism, and natural disasters (Gani, Singh & Nazki, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected tourism in 2019, resulting in an estimated loss of 62 million jobs and \$4.5 trillion for the industry, despite 3.5% increase in the same year. Due to the covid-19 pandemic and travel limitations, domestic tourist spending decreased by 45% and foreign visitor spending decreased by 69.4%, completely halting tourism activities (Sigala, 2020; Qiu et al., 2020). Among affected industries, travel and hospitality faced some of the most harm. Governments clamped down on travel and closed borders to contain outbreaks, which completely stopped tourism (Sigala, 2020). Scholars have increasingly examined the pandemic's impacts on tourism organizations (Filieri et al., 2023; Sigala, 2020; Wut et al., 2021; Zenker & Kock, 2020) as the sector faces an ongoing crisis with destinations and firms struggling to recover. Overall, while travel and tourism is a key global economic driver, the pandemic and enduring challenges like political unrest highlight the industry's sensitivity to crises and call for measures to strengthen its resilience.

The tourism industry is vulnerable to both short and long-term impacts from crises and disasters, whether natural or human-caused. Crises are unexpected events that harm people, damage infrastructure, threaten business survival, and include terrorism, natural disasters, or corporate outrages (Pearson &

Clair, 1998). Political instability is a serious issue that is producing significant reactions and harming the destination's image. This has an adverse effect on visitor views and future tourism. Political unrest frequently tarnishes a destination's reputation, distorting travelers' perceptions and lowering traveler numbers worldwide. The effects of this decline on national economies are worrying. Instability might bring to a significant catastrophe for the destination by altering the situation. All things considered, the unpredictability of political unrest poses a threat to economies that depend on tourism by damaging infrastructure and the industry's sustainability through distorted perceptions of the destination and a decline in visitor numbers.

Kashmir's valley is well known for its mesmerizing beauty globally and is rightly described as “The Paradise on Earth”. The place is well-versed with natural and human-made tourism resources, making it a tourist destination for all seasons. The lush green forests, shrine springs, perennial rivers, alpine scenery, and pleasant cold climate of Kashmir valley have remained an internationally acclaimed tourist destination. Tourism in Kashmir valley is identified as an engine of economic growth and development. The tourism industry can create & generate both direct as well as indirect jobs. Not only this, but the tourism industry can also contribute towards the growth of secondary sectors as well, for example, the handicraft sector. Tourism in Kashmir can alleviate poverty and unemployment from the valley.

Moreover, the Valley of Kashmir is safer tourist spots as far as women tourists' safety is concerned with no harassment. The people are exceptionally warm, respectful, and polite and are incredibly friendly and happy to see more foreign tourists coming to Kashmir. Despite having such robustness in tourism resources and hospitality among natives, the place cannot get the tourist flow as expected, which is the ongoing political conflict.

Tourism in Kashmir has suffered from a long legacy of conflicts, suffered through many violent phases throughout its history, and is still struggling against many conflicting sources within the state. The political conflict in the valley has negatively impacted the tourism industry. Despite no such incidents or minor incidents where tourists have been physically harmed, conflict still has negative repercussions on tourist arrivals. The present conflict is a 70-year-old menace for the valley people, which have originated since 1947. The dispute gets its birth after the partition of the Indian sub-continent by the hands of the British. The partition, which was done on the lines of religion, led to Pakistan's formation (Muslim Majority) and India (Hindu Majority) leaves behind the dispute of Jammu and Kashmir.

Moreover, recent decades have proved challenging for Jammu and Kashmir's state due to the surfacing of violent uprisings. The turmoil in the valley, especially the recent uprising of 2008, 2010, and 2016 has discouraged travelers and tourists from visiting the valley. The longstanding conflict and political uncertainty have unremarkably impacted socio-economical activities in Kashmir and tourism being the most affected sector. Keeping in view the above background, the present article's primary endeavor is to carve out strategies adopted by the Kashmir tourism officials to mitigate the political crisis, negative perception & stereotypes brought into the minds of tourists. The study also emphasis the image recovery practices adopted to bring back tourists to the valley.

Literature Review

Crisis and its management

An unanticipated and unplanned incident, whether natural or man-made, that endangers people, destroys property and infrastructure, or puts an organization in danger is termed a crisis (Pearson & Clair, 1998). Cambridge Dictionary's (2004) defines crisis as “is a situation which has reached an

extremely difficult or dangerous point, and a time of great disagreement, uncertainty, and suffering”, which is similar to how Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2005) defines crisis as “An unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending”. The definition of a crisis, according to a number of authors, is an adverse incident with an unpredictable outcome”. (Bland, 1998; Campbell, 1999; Coombs, 1999; Faulkner, 2001; Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Moreira, 2007; Pforr, 2006; Ritchie, 2004; Ruff & Aziz, 2003). The conclusion drawn by a number of authors is that there is no widely accepted definition of crisis in the literature, and there have been few attempts to categorize the types or forms of crises (Faulkner, 2001; Glaesser, 2003; Pizam, 1999; Prideaux et al., 2003; Pforr & Hosie, 2008; Santana, 2004). The main cause of the uncertainty is the wide range of phrases that are frequently used interchangeably while discussing the problem. For example, the terms ‘catastrophe’, ‘disaster’, “risk”, ‘chaos’, and ‘negative event’ have all been used synonymously with the term “crisis”.

Conceptual categorizations of crises also proliferate among subtypes. Some academics, for example, distinguish between man-made events such as technological failures, conflicts, attacks, or political-economic crises and natural catastrophes such as storms, floods, or earthquakes (El-Khudery, 2003; Lerbinger, 1997; Sonmez et al., 1994). However, regardless of their different forms, destinations need to be able to lessen the negative effects on the tourism sector and facilitate quick recovery in the event of almost any kind of crisis (Rosenthal & Pijnenburg, 1991). As Glaesser (2006) notes, crisis management implements preparedness strategies, processes and measures to prevent, cope with and dampen crises’ destructive impacts. In a similar manner, Coombs (2007) emphasizes minimizing the negative consequences of crises in order to safeguard stakeholders, organizations, and the highly susceptible tourist sector as a whole. Joint public-private initiatives centered on resilience give tourist-dependent areas the capacity to recover from even significant shocks in crisis-prone situations.

Crisis, Image and Recovery

Tourism products are tangible; thus a key tactic used by marketers to draw in prospective customers is to project the ideal image of the location more strongly. Moreover, the industry sells experience where the image of the destination plays a significant role. The image is acknowledged as the primary draw and the primary influential aspect in explaining visitors' decision-making process (Butler, 1990; Esteban, 2006; Gartner, 1989; Goodall, 1988; Sirgy & Su, 2000; Stabler, 1990; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007). The image has been defined by authors differently, for example, Image is a "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination" (Crompton, 1979) or the concept of the image can be portrayed by the use of cognitive and affective elements (Mazursky & Jakoby, 1986). Tourism destination image can also be perceived as an overall impression of a place, product, or experience (Fridgen, 1987; Milman & Pizam, 1995).

In similar way, Reynolds (1965) describes an image as a "mental construct developed by the consumer based on a few selected impressions among the flood of total impressions; it comes into being through a creative process in which these selected impressions are elaborated, embellished and ordered." Tourism being a susceptible industry relies on the image created in the minds of the tourists; any unwanted or uneven incident impacts destination image. One of the devastating effects of the crisis is that it negatively affects the image. The Crisis in tourism defined comprehensively by Sonmez, Backman & Allen (1994), as any event that has the potential to jeopardize the regular operations and conduct of businesses related to tourism; harm a destination's reputation for comfort, safety, and attractiveness by adversely affecting visitors' perceptions of that destination; and ultimately lead to a decline in the local travel and tourism economy and disruption of business operations for the local travel and tourism industry due to a decline in visitor arrivals and expenditures.

It takes many years for the destination to restore the image following a crisis, whether it be man-made or natural (Beirman, 2002; Huang & Min, 2002). Using the Gulf War of 1991 as an example, it was observed that the Middle Eastern nations needed nineteen months to draw in American tourists (Poon, 2002). It has been observed that nations experiencing political unrest have difficulty growing their tourism industries, and that this unrest even affects adjacent countries (Hall & O'Sullivan, 1996; Teye, 1986; Teye, 1988). The crisis that occurs at the destination is beyond the control of the DMO's, but they can lessen its effects by having solid plans and tactics in place. The only response the industry knows is just to increase marketing activities, according to Hall & O'Sullivan (1996). Concurrently, a few authors emphasized the need of having planned methods and plans for handling crises beforehand (Arbel & Bargur, 1980; Beirman, 2003; Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001; Glaesser, 2003; Sonmez, 1994). Additionally, a number of writers emphasized the importance of having crisis management plans and strategies in place before the crisis strikes in order to recover (Arbel & Bargur, 1980; Beirman, 2003; Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001; Gani, Singh & Najjar, 2021; Glaesser, 2003; Sonmez, 1994; Wu and Shimizu, 2020). According to Law (1992), Martin & Mason (1988), Owen (1990), and other scholars, tourism can help revitalize a place and boost employment and commercial activity (Boyd, 2019; Chan, Nozu, & Zhou, 2020).

Research Methodology

The present study is exploratory; its main endeavor is to determine the crisis management strategies opted by Kashmir tourism to mitigate the crisis. The study also emphasis on the image recovery practices adopted to bring back tourists to the valley. To achieve the study's objective, the researcher used a qualitative approach. The primary data was collected by using an in-depth semi-structured interview from the DMO's. According to Longhurst (2009), "The In-depth, semi-structured interviews are the verbal interchanges where

one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions." The unit of analysis was the Chief Executive officers (CEO's) of destination, development authority/ directors, a total number of six CEO's from Srinagar (Directorate of Tourism Kashmir) (01), Gulmarg Development Authority (01), Sonamarg Development Authority (1) Wullar Manasbal Development Authority (01), Lolab-Bangus-Dangyari Development Authority (1) and Dodpathri Development Authority (01), was interviewed. However, the secondary data was collected from various international and national journals, books and by reviewing the articles and data available on the internet and the reports or materials from the Department of Tourism, Jammu and Kashmir. The interviews were conducted in the month of June-July 2019. A total of six in-depth interviews were conducted, and the saturation of data was achieved at the sixth DMO while interviewing the respondents. Although many qualitative research experts believe that "data saturation is a subjective phenomenon, there is also the view that more observations and interviews do not affect the interpretation of the results" (Naderifar et al. 2017). The following questions asked to the Destination managers of respective development authority / chief Executive officer (CEO's) during an interview:

Q1. Do you feel the current conflict has influenced the image of the Kashmir Tourism?

Q2. What are the different Crises management Strategies adopted at destination & Do these crisis management strategies (adopted) help image recovery of destination?

Q3. What is the Role of Stakeholders in Image Recovery of Crisis-hit Destinations?

Q4. Marketing and promotional strategies play a pivotal role in image recovery of crisis-hit destinations. What are your initiatives in this perspective?

Q5. What other essential strategies are beneficial in recovering the destination image during the crisis adopted?

Data Analysis & Discussions

Undoubtedly, the tourism industry is one of the most susceptible and vulnerable industries to crises. Recent significant events that had devastating impacts on the industry range from natural disasters to epidemics and mismanagement to terrorist attacks. The disasters and crises lie beyond our control, but the only thing that remains in our hands is mitigating the crisis and putting forth strategies to overcome it. The Kashmir valley has been chosen as the study area in the present research. The Kashmir valley, being bestowed with both natural and human made resources, has the potential to become the spot for tourism globally, but the main obstacle and hindrance which came in its way is the political crisis. The valley is facing a current political crisis from the last 70 years. It has been a challenge for all stakeholders, whether government or non-government, to tackle this crisis. Stakeholders, mainly the DMO's (Government Stakeholders) related to the tourism sector, always came up with strategies to counter the effects of conflict on the tourism industry. Keeping in view the role of crisis management strategies in image recovery of the crisis-hit destination, six respondents (Government DMO's/ CEO's of development authorities) named as R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, & R6 were interviewed, and responses were recorded, transcribed, and are thematized as follows:-

- 1. Conflict and Image*
- 2. Crisis Management and Image Recovery*
- 3. Stakeholders and Image Recovery*
- 4. Marketing, Promotional measures and Image Recovery*
- 5. Media, Communication, and Image Recovery*

The emergent mentioned above themes concerning the crisis mitigation strategies and image recovery were extracted from the interviews conducted and discussed as follows:-

I. Conflict and Image

Destination image is the critical factor in tourists buying behavior, and authors have laid emphasis that there is a strong correlation between choosing a destination to visit and the image that this destination carries (Goodrich, 1978; Pearce, 1992; Woodside & Lyonski, 1990). If the destination has a positive image in tourists' minds, this will drive their purchasing behavior and act as positive word of mouth to others as well. On the contrary, negative image results in malicious buying behavior among potentials tourists. Tourists dissuade themselves from traveling to risky (Mansfeld, 1996; Richter & Waugh, 1986; Santana, 2004; Sönmez, 1998; Vukonic, 1997). One of the horrible impacts of the crisis is that it tarnishes the image of the destination that has been built over the years. In the present study, respondents on being asked about their perception regarding the Kashmir conflict has it impacted the image of Kashmir Tourism? Almost all the respondents have opined that the ongoing political crisis has impacted the Kashmir tourism and have maligned its image. Some of the responses are

“Kashmir is known as the paradise on the earth, nature has bestowed it with everything, and it seems god has created the valley with its own hand. But the crisis which Kashmir is facing from the past 70 years because of political instability has been the bolt on the image of Kashmir Tourism” (RI)

Tourism is a susceptible industry. One single ugly event can deteriorate the image of the destination. There have been various studies concerning image recovery strategies during the crisis globally (Avraham, 2015; Ritchie, 2009; Santana, 2004). When respondents were asked regarding this, one of the respondents said:

"Kashmir valley is bestowed with both natural and cultural zest, but still it has not attracted the number of tourists as it should have been. The only reason is the political crisis which has engulfed the Kashmir tourism and has maligned its image"
R3

Political uncertainty in the country leads to the weakening of economic conditions, and the places that depend on tourism heavily face an economic downturn after the decline in tourism demand. For example, due to the political uncertainty in African countries, "Africa is perceived to be unstable; therefore, both international and domestic tourism investments are rare" (Richter, 1992), and it eventually has impacted tourism. Respondent number 6 responded similarly:

"It is quite obvious that political uncertainty has tarnished the image of Kashmir Tourism. Despite having such diversity in tourism products we are unable to attract the masses, the reason is the ongoing crisis" R6

2. Crisis Management and Image Recovery

The tourism industry is the most susceptible and vulnerable industry to crisis because of its nature (Brownell, 1990; Santana, 2004). Respondent 4, on being asked crisis has impacted the image, he responded:

"Crisis is an unfavorable incident with an unpredictable result, and the current political mayhem has created the havoc for Kashmir economy, especially to the tourism sector. The most alarming impact that crisis has made to the tourism industry is that it has destroyed Kashmir tourism's image. The most priority of the DTK is to rebuild the image of Kashmir Tourism, and DTK has always come up with new plans and activities that proved beneficial in the past" R4

Scholars have laid stress that it is challenging to change the operational environment of the tourism industry as being sensitive, but what lies in our hands to mitigate the impact of the crisis by proper crisis management strategies in order to recover the image of the destination (Gani, Singh & Nazki, 2018; Pizam et al., 1997; Santana, 2004; Sönmez, 1998). Respondents on being asked What are the different Crises management Strategies adopted at your destination & Do these crisis management strategies help in image recovery of destination? They responded as :

"The Department of Tourism Kashmir always tries to find new strategies to recover Kashmir tourism's image in the past. As we see at the global level, tourism is flourishing, but at the same time, the industry has seen different crises in various countries, whether it's in Asia or Europe or America. We always try to examine the strategies that they are using at their places to mitigate crises and always try to find out the best feasible for our state" R1

One of the respondents further added similarly as his statement was like this:

"Crisis is an unwanted event that lies beyond our control or cannot be easily mitigated and managed. However, what lies in our control is how we formulate strategies to overcome its effects. And the department of tourism Kashmir is always concerned about it, and we have formulated the plans and strategies, which have somehow nullified the negative impact caused by the crisis on our tourism sector" R5

3. Stakeholders and Image Recovery

Government, non-government stakeholders, and Local communities are the vital catalysts in promoting tourism destinations. They play a crucial role in developing tourism destinations, especially in crisis (Gani, Singh & Nazki,

2018; Patterson, Weil & Patel, 2010). The respondents during an interview were asked about the role of Stakeholders in Image Recovery of Crisis-hit Destinations, and they responded as:

"Stakeholders have a very vital role to play in crisis mitigation, they are the part of the wrath facing from the crisis, and without them, we cannot manage the crisis. There is a need for cooperation with them, whether hotels, houseboats, airlines, travel agents/ tour operators, locals or tourists, effective communications is must" R2.

Stakeholders have an immense role to play to rebuild the image of a tourism destination, and crisis management strategies will be successful only when there will be full involvement of stakeholders, especially the local community (Gani, Singh & Nazki, 2018). The respondent no. 4, when we are asked about the role of stakeholders in crisis, he responded:

"Stakeholders are the key players of Kashmir tourism, whether private or public, and they play their role in enhancing the tourism influx to Kashmir Valley. The main task of DTK is to act as the bridge between stakeholders because if we want to see the prosperity in Kashmir Tourism, the cooperation amount the various stakeholders are a must. Besides, we are collaborating with embassies to improve travel advisories for Kashmir Valley" R4

Despite crises is a very complex process, but it can be managed with the cooperation of government agencies, academicians, local community, and tourism practitioners (Gani, Singh & Nazki, 2018), they play an essential role in rebuilding the image of destination (Abraham, 2016).

"We are working closely with the community and tourism industry representatives, as they are our tourism industry's main players. Moreover, we inspire volunteerism among locals; this

behavior could inspire tourists to visit Kashmir Valley. Besides this, we are also partnering with outside tour operators and travel agents" R5

Similarly, respondent number 6, when were asked about the role of stakeholders, he placed his view like this:

"Establishment of a partnership between law enforcement agencies, tourism enterprises, the local community, and tourists is one of the pioneer strategies which can be beneficial in combating the crisis at the destination. And DTK always act as the catalyst in maintaining the partnership among stakeholders because if we have to rebuild the image of Kashmir tourism, everyone has a role to play, and goal can be achieved only when we act as one unit" R6

4. Marketing, Promotional measures and Image Recovery

“Place marketing” and “place promotion” are the leading fields of knowledge used by marketers and researchers to create a positive image for places (Avraham & Ketter, 2008; Avraham, 2013; Avraham, 2015; Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993; Singh & Nazki, 2019; Stock, 2009; Walters & Mair, 2012). The next questions posed to respondents were about their perception regarding marketing and promotional strategies that play a pivotal role in image recovery of crisis-hit destinations and their initiatives in this perspective.

"Marketing and promotional efforts play an enormous role in crisis management at the destination. Department of tourism Kashmir always tried to combat Kashmir's negative image due to the crisis with efficient and effective marketing strategies. We have introduced new tourism products/activities at the destination; for example, we started innovative ideas like lighting shows in the famous Dal lake and many other efforts.

The idea behind starting these activities is to cater to the new market of potential tourist besides the existing leisure tourists"
R3

Another respondent also emphasized the role of marketing and promotional activities in repair, the image which has been deteriorated as a result of the crisis.

"Marketing plays a pivotal role in any business organization, especially to the tourism industry and that too at the time when the destination is suffering from the crisis. At DTK we are always confined to portraying Kashmir's good image in the minds of tourists and brand Kashmir tourism to the fullest. We are always tracing out new potential tourism markets to enter and bring unexplored destinations to Kashmir's tourism map. Besides this, we are focused on overseas marketing and effective travel advisories" **R4**

The academic literature contains analyses of many case studies of countries and tourist destinations that have sought to re-brand themselves by creating and promoting cultural events, exhibitions, sports competitions, and tourism (e.g., Baker, 2007; Gilboa, 2006; Lahav, Mansfeld, & Avraham, 2013). Kulendran and Dwyer (2009) showed that investment in destination promotion and marketing has a direct positive effect on inbound tourism (Avraham, 2015).

"As you are well aware, the role ICT plays in our lives, social networking has become an important part of life. Department of Tourism focuses on promoting Kashmir tourism by using tools like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Moreover, we have seen a positive result when we have uploaded a high definition video of the tourist destinations of valley on these social networking sites. The drone captured mesmerizing

videos that depict Kashmir's natural products and cultural products with the local people; this activity is magnetizing the tourist to visit the valley. In addition, we are arranging familiarisation trip for travel agents and tour operators from outside the valley, in order to spread the positive word of mouth" R1

Film festivals, concerts, dance performances, art exhibitions, and local food fairs are examples of cultural events abroad that are meant to influence countries' image with public diplomacy (Avraham, 2015). One of the respondents replied when the interview in a similar way:

"Tourism expansion across the globe has amplified the competition among the tourist destination, especially during the crisis. Every destination tries to attract tourists more and more by adopting marketing techniques. Moreover, the destinations suffering from crisis promotion plays a significant role, and we have taken several initiatives in this regard, like organizing roadshows and recovery campaign at different parts of the country as well as abroad, Celebrity endorsement, fostering shooting of movies at destination and development of good promotional materials" R2

Authors stressed that a destination going through the crisis could restore image or repair image by using marketing and promotional measures (Benoit, 1995; Benoit, 2000; Brinson & Benoit, 1999; Avraham, 2015). The respondent number 5 in a similar way, replied as :

"We live in a world characterized by risks, untrodden paths that lead to the crisis. Moreover, tourism is more susceptible to the crisis, and any uneven incident will lead to the image deterioration of the tourism destination. The only solution that remains in the stakeholders' hands is to cope with this by

having good marketing efforts. We are undertaking intensive marketing campaigns to convince the general public that things are back to normal. We are organizing festivals like Snow festivals, winter festivals, spring festivals. at various tourism destinations to increase tourist flow and bring back the glory of Kashmir tourism" R5

5. Media, Communication, and Image Recovery

The information communication plays a very considerable role in disaster and crisis management. It can play a mitigating role or can even aggravate the influence of adverse events (Gani & Singh, 2019; Park et al., 2019). Today, we live in the information communication age, where the internet is the most accessible tool to seek any information, and in case of destinations that are suffering from crisis, it plays a significant role. (Gani & Singh, 2019; Park et al., 2019; Peters & Pikkemaat, 2006). The studies suggested that media reports should highlight activities that can help trust development in crisis-hit tourism destinations (Tsai & Chen, 2010). The researches have shown that the distorted media coverage of crime incidents, insecurity, being victimized, the political crisis has led to negative impacts on countries tourism, like Florida for example, has witnessed the real crisis experience such kind (Brayshaw, 1995; Santana, 2004). When respondents were asked about the role of communication and information in context to Kashmir tourism, one of the respondents said:

"We are communicating tourist education programs aimed at reducing the risk of being victimized; we are guiding tourists and inform them about the situation at the destination. We maintain many visible security measures, easily accessible friendly police to tourists, and training police officers following tourism issues. Encouraging travel writers to travel and cooperation with media houses are the steps taken by our departments" R3

Media has a significant role to play in crisis management. Avraham & Ketter (2017) have examined how countries in Asia have employed strategies focused on the message, source, and target audience. In their study, the authors have stressed that these media strategies generate a positive image during the disaster and crisis. Countries such as Jordan, Egypt, and Pakistan have used these strategies to mitigate the crisis's impact on their tourism sector. Jordan invited travel writers and journalists from the United States of America and Canada to positively highlight their tourism. Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) uses this strategy in the same way as arranging media familiarization trips to the media outlet to visit various cities and towns in their country. In the same manner, Egypt organized media trips to visit significant historical, cultural tourism attractions in 2011, intending to highlight the positives of their country, hoping to revive the country's positive image (Avraham, 2015). During the interview, one of the respondents highlights how they focus on media-related strategies in Kashmir.

"We are providing press releases and briefings to travel media, and upgrading internet sites to provide positive information to the target audience. We are much focused that media should be spreading a feeling of safety and security to tourists. They should highlight positive tourism activities, like zero percent crime rate against the tourist and safe place for solo women travelers " R4

Many destination managers and marketers in the Middle East used the strategy of minimizing crisis, also known as a narrowing crisis. The strategy focuses on ignoring or limiting crises and was used before the Arab Spring crisis. The main aim was to pretend that the minor or less severe crisis occurred than the damage shown in media coverage. For Example, Turkey & Egypt disregarded attacks by terrorists in 2000 and launched an advertisement campaign that never mentioned their countries (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Besides this, some Middle Eastern countries exerted pressure

on media outlets, especially international media, to portray distorted and biased coverage to crisis events. For example, Egypt's tourism minister pointed out that Italian media have portrayed Egypt's negative image during Tahrir square events (eTN, 8 February 2013). The same way the minister from Tunisia voiced the complaint against the French media (eTN, 18 September 2013). During the interview, most respondents believed that Kashmir tourism has also been the victim of biased and distorted media coverage of events. One of the responded said :

"Media shapes the views of the audience at large, it can magnify the minute incidents. The image that the media portray in front of the audience remains in the minds of tourist. Moreover, personally speaking, few media channels have played a negative role and have somehow become helping hands in maligning Kashmir's image for their own TRPs. We are closely monitoring them and are threatening and blocking the media for propagating false and distorted information" R6

Implications of the Study

The present study focuses on the destination image recovery strategies during the crisis and carved out various strategies used by the DMO's of Kashmir tourism to mitigate the political crisis in Kashmir. Moreover, the study also emphasized the perception of DMO's regarding the impact of the destination image crisis. The present study can be beneficial for tourism practitioners, academicians, and society at large. Several destinations across the world rely on travel and tourism for growth and existence. The dependency on the tourism sector raises DMO's responsibility to consider the potential crisis's impact on tourism and devise plans and strategies proactively. The present study carved out the various strategies employed by DMO's in Kashmir to tackle the political crisis. These strategies can help the DMO's and tourism practitioners at other places to employ them at their destinations, especially those facing a political crisis and political instability. Moreover, the study also

has theoretical implications as well, as the study laid stress on the crisis and its impact on the image, which broaden the horizon of knowledge. Moreover, the study highlighted various crisis management strategies utilized by DMO's to recover the image of a crisis-hit destination, thereby adding the existing knowledge about crisis management.

Conclusion

Kashmir valley is known as the "Paradise on earth" and is full of tourism resources, whether natural or human-made, but the only misfortune is the ongoing political crisis that has hit hard tourism industry of Kashmir valley. Kashmir is also known as the "Switzerland of Asia" because of its topography and tourism resources. However, if we compare the tourist arrivals, there is a hell of a difference between the two destinations. The ongoing political crisis is the leading cause of Kashmir tourism to lag behind its potential. Nevertheless, if we look at the global level, crises and disasters are everywhere, and it has badly affected the tourism industry because tourism is the most vulnerable industry towards crisis. Disaster's ad Crisis, particularly political instability and terrorism, has a negative impact on the destinations; mitigation and management is the only requisite. While facing adverse events resulting from the crisis, the tourism industry needs the public, tourists, and DMO's understating and tolerance to mitigate the negative impacts. Although crisis management is not an easy task, it is exponentially a complex; the only solution lies in cooperative efforts between government agencies, practitioners, locals, and academicians.

Moreover, evidence suggests that recovery is complicated in the industry due partially to the poor logic of tourists' risk perception. Potential tourists are also ready to shift or switch to other substitute destinations and products available; this makes it more complicated for the crisis-hit destinations. Even though the crisis is a very complex process, it can be managed with the cooperation of government agencies, academicians, and local community and

tourism practitioners. The DMO's and stakeholders related to tourism can promote destinations hits by the crisis by connecting local businesses and tourists through effective strategies. As its apparent disasters, political instability, and terror attacks impact tourist flow destinations, it gets escalated with negative media coverage and ruined image of the destination.

The study's primary purpose was to determine DMO's perspective regarding destination image recovery during a crisis. The study concluded that the crisis has an adverse impact on the tourism industry, and crisis can be mitigated only by proper planning and strategies. During the study, DMO's of Kashmir tourism were asked their perspective on destination image recovery, and they admitted that the political crisis in Kashmir had impacted the tourism industry. Moreover, they laid stress on the significant distressing effect of the crisis, i.e., it has maligned the image of Kashmir tourism in tourists' minds, both domestic and foreign. Moreover, this has resulted in a decline in tourist arrival and eventually leads to an economic downturn. The study concluded with crisis strategies and plans implied by the DMO's in Kashmir to counterbalance the impact on the image. While recording the perceptions of DMO's, almost all the respondents agreed that political conflict is the leading cause of tourists' downfall, and it has maligned the image of Kashmir as a tourism destination for all reasons and seasons. Besides this, the study carved out various strategies used by DMO's to counter the crisis's effect, and these strategies and steps were effective in image recovery. Besides, this study also revealed a stakeholder role in image recovery; DMO always facilitates the cooperation between various stakeholders.

Moreover, it is also pertinent to mention the marketing and promotional efforts play an enormous role in crisis management at the destination. Department of tourism Kashmir always tried to combat Kashmir's negative image with efficient and effective marketing strategies. Besides, this media has a significant role to play in crisis management, and DMO's put forth various

media-related strategies to tackle the crisis and tried to bring back the glory of the valley like the back to potential.

Limitation and Future Research

The present study has certain limitations and needs to be considered for future research. First, the present study is qualitative; further research should be carried out using a quantitative approach. In the present study, the Destination Management Organization (DMO's) perspective was taken towards destination image recovery during the crisis; future researchers should take the perspective of other stakeholders and tourists, travel agents & tour operators, locals, hoteliers. Furthermore, the study has a limitation of generalizability, as the study included only crisis-hit tourist destinations of Kashmir, future research should be carried out in other crisis-hit destinations.

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