



E-ISSN: 2708-4469
P-ISSN: 2708-4450
IJAMCJ 2025; 6(1): 121-125
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www.masscomjournal.com
Received: 14-01-2025
Accepted: 20-02-2025

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Endorsing the Buddhist circuit through the lens of social media: A descriptive study on the Odisha diamond triangle

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Abstract

Buddhism has extensively spread in India over the years. The 2011 census reports show Odisha, with approximately 13000 Buddhists. Since a very long period of time, Buddhists acts as a major cultural component in the state and is still doing so. In spite, of the growing percentage, people are still not aware of the “diamond triangle”, the significance of Buddhist culture, the meaning behind the depictions, etc. The study attempts to analyze the effective role in spreading awareness among the international tourists; critically highlighting the gaps and bridging the links that how social media as a tool can help in both growth and development towards the tourism of Odisha and eventually provide recognition to it. Especially, in the era of digitalization, where people are mostly inclined towards digital culture, that is the usage of social media platforms; Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Furthermore, the study also focuses on the infrastructure, safety concerns, environmental sustainability, workforce developments, etc which can help in creating a greater impact and how Odisha tourism can promote Buddhism or the culture attached with. Secondary data will be taken into account to assess the extensive gaps of research. In the secondary data, case studies, content analysis, etc will be practiced Also, Odisha, faces strong regional competitions from neighboring states who have well established tourism industries, the research will propose data on how it can be controlled over time. The limitations and following recommendations will be given in the conclusion section of the research.

Keywords: Diamond triangle, sustainability, digitalization, social media, tourism

Introduction

Research Background

Buddhism, a global religion which gives serenity, happiness, subtleness into one’s soul and has quite evidently played an important role in the society. The aim of Buddhism is to provide peace to the humans who are suffering in their respective lives. Buddhism has been adopted by more than 300 million people across the world. In India, Buddhism was visible mostly in the ancient kingdom of Magadha, which is Bihar at present and eventually was spread all over the parts. Among which, Odisha is one state, who has quite significance. In Odisha, since the Ashokan era, Buddhism is quite evident in nature and has been creating a major impact in the cultural, societal beliefs, etc of Odisha. With the evolution of Web 2.0, the ICT (Information Communication Technology) has played an immense role in the society. The social media acts as a key factor through which people share information, express feelings, attributes, etcetera within the society. Today, most people have inclination towards the” digital culture “rather conventional mediums. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram are the major tools used, be it in terms of awareness, recovery of tourism, international connectivity, etc. Furthermore, Odisha, the state which focuses primarily on Tourism and creates space for its travelers who come across from several parts of the globe. It has always been considered the tourist diversified state which has splendid opportunities to explore, heal among the spirituality, historical legacy, and cultural race. Over the years, Odisha tourism is somewhere making attempts to establish Buddhist spots among other major spots be it Puri, Konark, Lingaraj Temple, etcetera internationally. The spectacular diversification encircles the Kalingan designs quite evidently. Among, all the places in Odisha, The Ratnagiri,

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Udaygiri, Lalitgiri is termed as the “Diamond Triangle”. Moreover, the three peaks are highly prioritized but lack proper infrastructure, safety standards, workforce, promotion, especially in the world where there is huge rate of regional competition. Though, there is an immense growth in tourism sector in a state like Odisha. Approximately, more than 800 crores have been allocated for Odisha Tourism in the following year with approximate growth of 9%. Hence, looking at the scenic beauty, sustainable growth, the growth rate shall be higher and hence requires improvise.

Research Problem

According to some definitions, the cultural tourism entails experiencing with the distinctive heritage, character of places to varying degrees. Moreover, with communicating with the locals, the tourists can gain profound insights, knowledge about the essence of the culture, beliefs, its heritage (Google Books, n.d., Chapter 4) With the development of technology, the influence of social media can significantly influence the visitors internationally, which in turn can recover tourism, workforce, international connectivity with the local culture and the civilization. Destinations must stand out, provide something unique especially in a cutthroat business environment, maintaining the regional competition. A distinctive marketing factor for the destination, ancestral works can draw interests into the visitors to learn, explore the age-old culture, heritage vertices that have been unexplored since ages or have adequate knowledge about. Since, the destinations are under-developed, lack of infrastructure, safety and health need improvising. The accommodations, facilities for dining, etc are inappropriate in nature, insufficient transportation and lack of workforce. As a result, fewer visitors are spotted which lowers activities and revenue generation in the state.

Research Objectives

This paper aims to determine how the influence of social media can help in recognition of the “Diamond Triangle” and increase economic growth in the state.

- To highlight the Buddhism circuit of Odisha through the use of social media.
- To promote the various other destinations in an attempt to control the over tourism through the use of social media.
- To highlight “Diamond Triangle” as a sustainable tourism circuit in Odisha.
- Proposing destination management techniques to increase revenue generation.

Research Questions

Based on the study of literature and objectives, this paper will shed light towards the following questions:

- How social media does helps in highlighting the Buddhism circuit of Odisha?
- What are the social media applications which help in promotion of various other destinations in an attempt to control over tourism?
- How does the application of social media helps in highlighting “Diamond Triangle” as a sustainable tourism circuit in Odisha?

- What are the required management techniques to increase revenue generation?

Literature Review

Buddhism and Cultural Heritage

Buddhism originated from 5BCE-6BCE in Northern India, founded by Siddhartha who later renounced his own family in search of peace, calmness and is called Buddha. Buddhism heals, enlightens one’s mind and soul especially when one is suffering caused of desires, materialism. Although, it says, “one can achieve enlighten, only if one does not run after desires.” By following the noble Eight-fold paths i.e. (the eight rules that helps guide its followers towards the moral values that has to be maintained if one aims to gain knowledge in life). Buddhism hence denotes that one gets rewards eventually. Over the years, Buddhism has a huge influence on Indian culture and its people. It is simple in nature; understandable. People has understood the essence of sacrifice, the culture of deity, the knowledge gaining process with the help of sculptures, artworks. No particular language barrier one could experience. Buddhism also was the reason or the push behind the factor; equality, democratic values. Especially in the nation, where there were caste systems, the manner of untouchability, dominance in the society, Buddhism opened the door for the women, the Shudras to come forward and stand tall along with the men, upper caste people of India.

Buddhism and Odisha

In Odisha, Buddhism flourished from the 6th century BC. After the death of Lord Buddha, his followers were divided into two sections- “Hinayana” and “Mahayana”, later in Odisha “Vajrayana” has been originated. There are also testomials where it is stated that Hiuen Tsang visited Buddhist sites in Odisha in the 7th century and also in between 9th and 10th century. In the state, one of the famous Buddhist locations are “Diamond Triangle” i.e. the Lalitgiri, Udaygiri, Ratnagiri, situated in Jajpur district earlier called Bajra district of Odisha. In fact, more than 200 Buddhist homes can be traced in the state. Hence, there are several places in the state that are unexplored, unknown in nature. Buddhism has its own significance in Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Bihar like states. Odisha has been inclined towards tourism from the beginning. Tourists are generally attracted towards Puri, Konark, Lingaraj Temple, and etcetera. The state has a sublime beauty and cultural ethnicity which attracts its tourists. In fact, the archaeological department of the state has discovered considerable number of Buddhist destinations over the years and now becoming attractions.

Langudi: Situated in the Jajpur district of Odisha, with 36-rock cut Buddhist monuments.

Naraj: Considered one of the oldest Buddhist centres for learning relating cultures, traditions, beliefs.

Deuli: Two range rock cuts caves, pottery, known as the twin hills.

Chandragiri: A place near Jirang, in the Gajapati district of Odisha, also considered as the “Little Tibet of Odisha”, flourished with Buddhist cult in the area.

Also have several other locations alike. In Odisha, the most

emerging Buddhist attraction is due to the “Diamond Triangle” i.e. the Ratnagiri, Lalitgiri and Udaygiri. The three vertices, peaks are the main spots which are recognizable in nature, situated in and around Jajpur district of Odisha which has a close proximity from the capital city of the state. According to the archaeological survey, it is found that these three locations have Buddhist origins from 1st century AD and are among the earliest Buddhist location sites in the world (Sandual,2012). Also, several sculptures got traced once excavated in the location. Also, according to Xuanxang, these places where the disintegrations of a university building called Pushpagiri Mahavir.similar to Nalanda University. Many sculptures in Lalitgiri, Udaygiri, and Ratnagiri have Buddhist significance of harmony, humbleness, enlightenment.

- **Ratnagiri:** Located at 100km northeast of Odisha, once the major Buddhist monasteries of the state. The hill of Gems is located on the hill between Brahmani and Birupa River in Jajpur district of Odisha. Constructed from the 5th century onwards. It is said that post 16th century or so, it was left for ruins. Archaeological Survey of India excavated and hence found several sculptures relating adequate knowledge, showcasing messages or connotations relating nature of life, cultural imbibes, etc. Stupa I is considered as the finest in the country.
- **Udaygiri:** The hill of rising sun, considered as one of the most picturesque among the three. The wonder has been classified into two segments: Udaygiri I and Udaygiri II excavated in between 1990s to 2000. It is said, it belonged to the Mahayana - Vajrayana of Buddhism. A Buddha statue is located at the peak of the hill, also a path of greenery has been traced in the midway, which leads towards delicate figures and artifacts.
- **Lalitgiri:** Also known as Naltigiri, it is the earliest in nature known as the Red hill. Lalitgiri consists of three separate hills - the Prabhadhi in the north-east, the Landa or the Nanda pahar in the south-west and the Olasuni in the east. Olasuni are of little interest, devoid of antiquarian remains. Prabhadhi hill has few sculptures relating to Hathi-Khal (elephant pit). These remains were in good conditions according to the survey report. Landa hill is the main site among the three where large scales were excavated of several Buddhist sculptures including stupas, monasteries, pot-shreds, and etcetera. The earliest reference of Lalitgiri was found in the 1800s.

Tourism in Odisha- Overview

Odisha, a maritime state situated on the eastern side of India. The state ranks eleventh in terms of population. It is encircled by Bay of Bengal. The state has profound supply of minerals, and other natural resources bestowed with water bodies, hills, forests, pilgrims, cultural heritages, etc. Odisha has been recognized internationally for its artworks, metalcrafts, silver filigree works, patta chitra, sambalpuri bastralaya, and has exquisite popularity both local and on international grounds. Odisha offers immense tourism charm and joy for its visitors. There are more than 300 identified tourist centres in the state according to May 2012 report. Visitors starting from neighbouring states to several countries visit the state. Odisha, rich in cultural heritage, norms, and disciplines welcomes its visitors with

immense grace.

Social media in endorsing Buddhist Circuit of Odisha

With the development of Web 2.0, the ICT has a huge contribution and acts as a key among the people. Social media, a new factor has emerged over time which has created or developed a “digital culture” among the people. Today, there is connectivity both in between nations, people, social strata, accessibility. Especially after the Covid era, people have mostly become couch potatoes, through the social media one can trace daily schedules if we see. The platforms like Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter is playing a pivotal role to express feelings, expressions, create awareness within the civilization. The social media influencing, a new marketing tool has also emerged which is not just providing profit but also creating awareness, providing knowledge and have an ease to communicate to. Alongside, Odisha being rich in cultural heritage, onsite sculptures, monasteries relating Buddhism, it is the social media which is eventually creating awareness among the visitors who were visiting prime most spots be it Puri, Konark are experiencing the “Diamond Triangle”, that was unexplored, left for ruins since years now.

Gaps in Existing Literature

The study focuses on the involvement of Social Media in promotion, execution towards the visitors of “Diamond Triangle”. Also, the lack of workforce, infrastructure, adequate facilities, and involvement of the governing bodies or the archaeological department in building centres relating to the Buddhist culture is lacking behind. The revenue generation with the help of social media bloggers to bring tourists in the sites which would be beneficial to both the localities and the government. Also, to preserve architecture and promote it international.

Case study Approach

Selection of Case study

For the analysis of the work titled; “Interpretation for Odisha’s Buddhist Diamond “where, The study primarily focuses on Lalitgiri’s famous finds which extensively looks valuable according to the archaeological perspective and hence stated that will be kept in museums or should develop a museum relating to Buddhist sculptures, artworks but if the following monasteries, works will be removed from stupas, it will demotivate or tarnish the value of the heritage. The study suggests that whatever the Buddhists decides will be interesting to know. In Odisha, there are 300 or more Buddhist houses present and hence any modifications, their ideas will be valued or should be. The study also highlights the message conveyed by the sculptures, the paths across Lalitgiri serve the function of preservation, the study suggests there shall be no exploitations, the visitors amicably experience the little present today. Ratnagiri and Udaygiri, on the other hand are very difficult to understand as it requires sheer guidance. Thus, visitors are left to guess, the sculptures, symbolic connections.

Case Study Description

In India, tourism is emerging and is also rapidly changing day to day. In Odisha, there are several Buddhist monasteries but the “Diamond Triangle” has its own favouritism. The study entails towards presentation and

preservation of the Buddhist circuit of Odisha. Visitors management, preservation, value building, essence are all equally redistributed in the study, even the new museum strategy will be beneficiary or not. The study also shed lights to the fact, that for visitors it is mere impossible to decode the messages, the sculptures, or the artworks wants to portray or convey. Although, the visitors are expecting a more descriptive, logical sense of the messages, or knowledge they gather from the artworks, or the cultural heritage of “Buddhist Circuit”.

Social Media Applications of Case study

The purpose of this discussion is to pinpoint and examine the main characteristics of social media and determine their significance concerning the “Buddhist Circuit”. This study aims to enhance the understanding that with the rise of social media as a factor, people are aware of the Buddhist cultures, the monasteries, locations of Odisha. Especially with the emergence of mobile phones, one gets to trace the locations and visitors can easily make their appearances. The social media influencers, macro influencers are equally responsible for awareness, gaining attractions in the minds of the spectators. Generally, when one visits “Diamond Triangle”, the pamphlets or a tour guide is given or circulated among the tourists. But, with the emergence of mobile phones, social media, one can gather adequate insights from the following. The leaflets used to invite visitors but today the social media is providing adequate informations.

Challenges and Opportunities

- There are no adequate infrastructures, well connected roads, transportation facilities in the area. No visitor centre with proper informations or facilities are developed.
- No finite amenities are present be it washrooms, waste disposal systems, etc which results in harm and environmental sustainability is compromised.
- The government shall create foreign cultural exchange programs where visitors can gain insights, knowledge relating Buddhist cultures, enlightenment, etc.
- Leveraging social media platforms for promotion of “Diamond Triangle”, Buddhist Circuit internationally.
- Collaboration with travel agencies to offer package tours to the Buddhist vertices, sites.
- Like Mukteswar Festival, Rajarani Festival, Konark Festival, the governing bodies can organize cultural events, to celebrate Buddhism, its philosophies, cultural values, attract more number of tourists which would help government generate revenues and results in the process of economic development.
- The social media influencers can help bring more international spectators, collaboration can results in.
- There shall be development in accommodation, dining, especially budget-friendly hotels can bring more people around, and connectivity will improvise with time.

Discussions and Recommendations

Insights from the Case Study

The cultural and spiritual attributions of Odisha’s Buddhist circuit, needs to be communicated, explored by visitors. If the archaeological department alongside the governing bodies create museums, the sculptures, artifacts. It is the

visitors who face barriers to understand, gain knowledge finds it easier in nature. Also the “Diamond Triangle” requires assistance especially Ratnagiri and Udaygiri. Also, earlier the use of pamphlets, tour guides were given which are not really of use as these two vertices requires experienced guides. Although, today, there are mobile phones where people are all connected, communicating, with the use of social media and are hence creating awareness, providing adequate knowledge and bringing number of visitors to the place.

Recommendations and Future Possibilities

The study describes the possibilities of social media in acting as a mediator for Buddhist circuits of Odisha, enhancing tourist engagement. This provides some notable recommendations for the future researches in this area. The study also showcases how the involvement of social media can help attract people towards the cultural heritage, the social media influencing can bring international tourists in the site so the application can be used to reduce the decline of the Buddhism Circuit in the state. Future research can hence focus on digitization, how well the imbibe of “digital culture” has have made beneficiaries for the “Diamond Triangle” of Odisha, the revenue generation process, tourist engagement, educate future generations, etc.

Conclusion

The term Buddhism circuit encompasses a wide range of artifacts, cultural heritage, monasteries which requires exploration. The archaeological department preserved and presented it just for the sake of presentation and needs further outlining. The context behind the cultural setting, the messages, the portrayals of the monasteries, sculptures, needs to be demonstrated or popularized internationally and needs enlarging experimentations with it. The governing bodies and the archaeological department are mostly focused on traditional methods rather social media can be an enlarging factor in terms of promotion, revenue generation and will therefore affect in the economic management of Odisha. With every passing day, the changes will gradually occur in the area, and the social media can circulate, bring life, value to the “Diamond Triangle” and other Buddhist sites of Odisha.

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