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## **A pragmatic study on the Assam tourism promotions- with reference to the ‘Awesome Assam’ advertisement campaign**

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### **Abstract**

Assam Tourism has always been in a feeble position when it comes to promoting itself in the global tourism market. Even in the domestic sector, the state tourism board has not been able to portray its tourism products as it should have. Though Assam, as a tourism destination, was part of a few advertisement campaigns made by the Ministry of Tourism under the banner “Paradise Unexplored”, as those commercials were concentrated on all eight North-Eastern states, Assam could not manage to grab the desired tourist attention from the same. TV and other electronic advertisements are some of the most effective and widely reached mediums of promotion, and hence, it becomes very important for a product to be able to use this tool to sell itself to a wider range of target markets. However, it is also supremely important that the product shown in the advertisement is not a false promise to the target audience as it may eventually harm the potential goodwill of the tourism product.

With the 2017 tourism policy, the State Government came up with a new brand name for the state’s tourism and called it “Awesome Assam”. With this new brand name, the tourism board of the state tried to showcase a young and vibrant picture to its target audience. The Awesome Assam campaign started with a series of TV commercials starring Priyanka Chopra and tried to focus primarily on the Wildlife and Cultural aspects of state tourism. The commercials were an instant hit and appreciated not only by the Indian viewers but also by the international viewers. However, there was a big question about the availability of the products that were shown in all the commercials.

Hence, this study will try to give a pragmatic review of all the commercials that were made under the brand name “Awesome Assam” and evaluate them in terms of their practicality. This study will also recommend and suggest measures to develop tourism based on the said TV commercials.

**Keywords:** Television commercial, electronic advertisement, promotion mix, target market

### **Introduction**

Soon after the new 2017 state tourism policy, the Department of Tourism, Assam tried to take an aggressive approach to promote state tourism and came up with ideas that included renaming the brand, a new series of television commercials, hiring a brand ambassador of tourism, and several other promotional shows. Among all the approaches to promote, the rebranding of the state tourism and the new television commercials were the keynotes of the campaign.

The state tourism was rebranded as “Awesome Assam” and with this started a new series of campaigns to promote Assam as a tourist destination. The campaign began with Priyanka Chopra as the face of it and came up with two major commercials that were aired both in electronic media and satellite television.

The commercials were a huge success grabbing appreciation from both national and international audiences. The commercials tried to showcase the culture, wildlife, and other related prospects of the state, and they were successfully able to do that.

However, on the ground, certain products or services that were shown in the commercials were found to be unavailable for the tourist that visits the state. No doubt state tourism showcased the true beauty and tourism products of the state, but we also need to see whether all the products that were shown in the commercials are ready for the tourist or not.

The commercials showed the intention of developing Assam into an exotic tourism destination and were able to pull the target audience’s attention. Though, as said before, many of the products that were shown in the advertisements are not available for the tourist to experience, however, it gives us the tourism board’s vision when it comes to developing Assam as an all-seasoned tourist destination.

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Hence, the need for a comparative study was felt with few objectives regarding the recent advertisements and the prospects of developing the tourism scenario of the state of Assam.

### Literature Review

In tourism research, the definition of advertising effects has been widely agreed as consumers' responses to advertisements. Despite the commonly accepted definition, the measurements of this concept are greatly different in tourism studies. Based on the ideas of conversion studies, variables within the behavioral aspects were first adopted in tourism research to measure advertising effects.

Due to the remarkably rapid development of information technology, the advertising world today has also grown rapidly, thus generating many emerging advertising formats (Guttentag, 2010) [4]. For example, virtual reality (VR) technology is becoming more and more prevalent in the tourism industry, as it is used widely in destination marketing. However, there have been only a few academic researches to investigate the advertising effects of VR. A considerable amount of existing studies have still been examining the advertising effects of traditional formats, such as print, audio, video, etc.

Discussion and results in tourism advertising, in print, television, and radio stations, each stage has a specific effect on the tourism industry. Each country's tourism industry can generally be measured by its ability and plan after reviewing the country's interest and need for the industry. Strategies can be planned to improve the development of the sector (Ketabchi and Mohammad, 2004) [5].

### Objectives of the Study

1. To review the latest "Awesome Assam" television commercial and discuss its relevance to its availability on the ground.
2. To discuss the potential of tourism with reference to the service and products shown in the said advertisement.

### Research Methodology

This research is done using the explorative and descriptive methodologies and the same would be mostly qualitative. As this study revolves around the two major advertisements made by Assam Tourism, the data used for this study are secondary. These secondary data were collected from various tourism websites, including Assam Tourism's tourism data, the Tourism Policy of Assam 2008 and 2017, magazines, and other research articles.

### Discussion and Suggestions

"Once you visit Assam, it stays with you forever". A very carefully crafted tagline for the new (And first in a global approach) Assam tourism advertisement. The tagline tries to make its viewers believe, how magnificent and memorable will be their visit to this superlative land. This may not be the first advertisement of Assam Tourism, but this is the first one that got this much attention worldwide, especially in the online segment. The reason for this should go to the whole team of the commercial, including Assam Tourism, and the production team (YAAP – Crayons Collaborative), while giving Priyanka Chopra a special place.

Priyanka Chopra plays the central role in both videos, but the credit goes to the creator of the videos they did not allow her presence to overpower Assam as a tourist destination. The brand ambassador introduces Assam and the next clips

show different parts of the land including some of its tribes, way of living, food, local dances, forests, and many more. In their second advertisement, they added some more perspectives, such as golf, tea gardens, etc. While talking about the advertisements, one of the Assam Tourism officials said in an interview that they did not want to show Assam only as the land of Kaziranga National Park or Tea Gardens, which we can see in both the advertisements as they were successfully able to show the other tourism products of the state. So, as an advertisement, the team did a tremendous job.

Both the advertisements showed the tourism products of the state with dramatic cinematography skills and calm background music which gave its viewers goosebumps and the will to visit this astounding Indian state. But, the factual question would be, will the tourists get the same level of experience when they visit this place? Or like any other day, they will just come here, visit Kaziranga or the other national parks, and end their Assam tour?

The advertisements showed its culture, heritage, food, handlooms, forests, temples, bonfires in the middle of a jungle, different tribes and their dances, golfing, and a lot of other invaluable things, but again the question here would be, are they easily available to the tourists? Can a lone or a group of tourists experience all of these without getting lost? The answer would unfortunately be a No.

In any business organization, the primary objective is mostly to get repeat customers or influence customers who will influence others to visit the said organization while being loyal to that organization. One may attract a customer for the very first time through marketing or various sales techniques, but to convince him/her to come back and make use of the product again needs a consistent and continuous push to deliver good services. This same theory goes for all the tourist-generating regions as well. In tourism studies, there is a term called 'Pull Factor'. The pull factors are the reasons or any other attraction of a region that encourages people from other places to visit that particular region. The advertisements of Assam Tourism were trying to create the pull factors for Assam as a tourist destination.

In both advertisements, Bihu along with other tribal dances were showcased primarily. Priyanka Chopra is still in the Bihu beats and continues to dance with a child back in her own home. But, now if we imagine a real tourist who wishes to see the Bihu Dance as he saw the dance in the advertisement, where should he go now? Where he can see a Bihu Dance or any other local tribal dance? We may probably say that the tourist may go to Kalakhetra in Guwahati, or Ranghar somewhere in Bihu season. But what if it's not the Bihu season? What if he is not in Guwahati or Sivasagar? Maybe he is somewhere in Barak Valley, the southern part of Assam. Now where is he supposed to go to see the dance? Unfortunately, the answer to this question is still unclear. And this is just one part of the concern. The commercials tried to pick up all the shattered pieces and show everything as one. They have shown how the puzzle looks as a complete picture, but it's on the tourist to come and solve the puzzle and find the missing pieces.

Like the above example of Bihu, everything that the advertisements showed is some shattered pieces of a puzzle. If a tourist wishes to see different tribes and their living, just like shown in the advertisements, where should the tourist go?

Hence, it becomes very important for the state to work on the ground level to justify its tourism potential regarding the

recent TV commercials.

*"Once you visit Assam, it stays with you forever"* – these lines have two meanings. One which can be seen by everyone, the positive side, and the other one which unfortunately no one is bothered about, the negative one. One which might be the long-term result of negligence.

However, the objective of this study is not just to focus or blame the tourism board for its underperformance. The commercials were successful in showing the true potentiality of the state to become an all-seasoned tourism destination, which is not dependent on only one or two tourism products. The multi-dimensional picture of Assam tourism has been depicted in both the TV commercials and the potentiality of the state to become one of the major tourism hubs of the country can be felt.

Hence, a few suggestions are attempted to benefit the tourism of the state about the products that were shown in the recent Awesome Assam advertisements.

#### 1. **Developing the Concept of All-Seasoned Tourism Destination:**

The 2017 tourism policy came up with various new approaches to develop the tourism scenario of Assam. One of those approaches was to develop the state into an all-seasoned tourism destination. Though the idea of an all-seasoned destination sounds fascinating, a few immediate steps have to be taken to develop the same in another 5 – 10 years. The proposal for all-seasoned tourism was coined in 2017, and yet even after four years, there has not been any significant development in the same. Monsoon tourism and pilgrimage tourism were a part of this vision, and developing these fields of tourism may certainly help the state to attract domestic as well as international tourists.

**2. Developing Community-based tourism:** Community-based tourism has always been the key to the development of many tourism destinations in the world. Community-based tourism is terminology when the tourist gets involved with the host community of the place and experiences their tradition and culture directly. Since the host community is involved directly in these types of tourism, there are possibilities of gaining financial stability, better education, and a better standard of living among the host community as well. With the continuous inflow of tourists, the host community and the concerned tourism destination will see a rise in the income level of individual families, education and health infrastructure, etc. As the income of the local population grows, so will the prices of land, housing, and demand for other goods and services. These economic growths will ultimately help the government to see an upward growth in revenue generation for the state. Examples of community-based tourism would be, rural tourism, tea tourism, river tourism, etc.

**3. Awareness Programs:** Awareness programs on various community-based tourism for both the host community as well as the various travel and tour operators are required. The more they know about the financial benefits, the more they will be encouraged to get involved with the process. Roadshows, conferences, and public meetings can be organized in the district and block-wise to draw attention at the grassroots level.

**4. Developing River Tourism:** As shown in both advertisements, the rivers of the state may turn out to be the game changer in terms of tourism. Being one of the

largest rivers in the country, the mighty Brahmaputra has the highest potential in this regard. River cruise lines and modern Ferry services can attract tourists and add additional colour to the tourism map of the state.

**5. Developing Model Villages:** Model villages are not a very new concept in India, and many of the states have already adopted this idea, such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh. Model villages are demonstrative villages where with the help of a certain community a village is developed, where the travellers can visit and experience their way of living. Daily local folk dances, music, and other related tasks are shown to the tourists and the tourists may get involved with the process too.

Both the commercials showed various indigenous tribes and their culture, which perfectly managed to grab the attention of the audience. However, the state till now has no provision to showcase its tribes and culture to tourists in a holistic way. Hence, the concept of developing such model villages may be very useful. Though Assam has few experimental model villages in a few of its districts, however, due to the lack of interest from both the local community as well as the tourism stakeholders, the concept of model villages has not been able to rise to its potentiality. Hence, it becomes very crucial for both the government and the host community to understand its importance and develop such villages, not only for the tourists but for themselves too.

#### **Conclusion**

Assam, as a tourist destination, has tremendous possibilities, and the same was positively shown in all the TV commercials. The commercial showed the zeal of the tourism board to become a major tourist destination, and if planned and executed well, there is no denying that Assam can become an all-seasoned tourist destination attracting tourists from all around the world. Using TV advertisements as a mode of promotion can boost the in-flow of tourists to the destination, however, the same also must be kept in mind that the advertisements do not mislead the tourist which eventually turns out to be a disappointment for the tourist and affects the goodwill of the tourism image of the state.

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