

BRANDING ODISHA AS A RURAL TOURISM DESTINATION: AN ALTERNATE APPROACH

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Abstract : Branding is considered as one of the most efficient tool for marketers promoting destinations. In the contemporary era of cutthroat competition, marketers strive hard to position their products such that they meet the expectations of a niche market that no other brand is serving. In this regard, a brand is considered as something that distinguishes a destination from the rest by positive image building. It has also been considered as a parallel weapon for image (re)positioning building of image and finally its reconstruction. Odisha, the soul of Incredible India is mostly considered as a cultural or heritage tourism destination. But many other states of India such as Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh etc. are promoting their destinations under the same branding umbrella of Culture and Heritage. So, there is a definite need to acquire an alternate branding approach to sustain the interests of the tourists for the state of Odisha. At the same time, 83.13% of the total population of Odisha resides in the rural areas. This study is an attempt to unfold the true potentials of Odisha Tourism to be alternatively branded as a Rural Tourism destination and its consequent favorable impacts.

Index Terms - Rural Tourism, Alternate Branding, Odisha Tourism, Destination Branding.

I. INTRODUCTION

The eastern state of India, Odisha is blessed with nature's unblemished and immaculate beauty. Its location is between 17°49'N to 22°34'N latitudes and 81°27'E to 87°29'E longitudes. The state is one of the few states which have kept its ethnic rural life intact. The state is home to different rare tribes, different folk arts, ethnic cuisine and handicrafts etc. However, the state suffers a lot owing to its poverty and low standard of living. In the recent past the Government has adopted tourism as an agent for economic upliftment. But as such it has not taken substantial efforts to promote its crux i.e. its villages. It has adopted a branding mechanism that differentiates its destinations based on its archeological and heritage grounds. But promoting only heritage or archaeological sites won't be enough. So there is a need to adopt alternate branding whereby it can also be branded as a rural tourism destination.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study revolves around three main objectives which have been mentioned below;

1. To underscore the facets of rural tourism in Odisha.
2. To envisage pragmatic ways of ingraining the rural tourism manifests and symbols to the prevailing brand campaign.
3. To examine the role of rural tourism stakeholders of Odisha in the branding exercise..

III. METHODOLOGY

The study "*Branding Odisha as a Rural Tourism Destination: an Alternate Approach*" will be an exploratory study. Though a lot of studies have been conducted in this area of Branding and Rural Tourism, there seems to be shortage of literature linking both the areas. The scope of the study will be limited to the rural tourism destinations of Odisha only. Research Articles, Journals, Books, Periodicals, official records and district Gazettes have been collected as a source of secondary data. The data will be interpreted linking with the secondary information. Both qualitative and quantitative tools will be used in the study.

IV. NEED FOR THE STUDY

Odisha, the soul of Incredible India has been commonly considered as a cultural (Panigrahi, 2005) or heritage (Mohapatra, 2011) tourism destination. It's a state that will entertain a tourist with almost every kind of attraction. Blessed with 560 kilometers of coast line, exquisite monuments, pristine beaches, unspoiled wildlife and ethnic villages filled with prolific artists and scenic beauty, the state offers an experience of life time. However, the state hasn't been able to make a mark on the map of international tourist destinations. This can be well established from the fact that in the year of 2013, Odisha received only 66,675 number of foreign tourists (Odisha Statistical Bulletin, 2012) as compared to 4,92,322 number of foreign tourists received by the state of Goa (Goa tourism website). It means the smallest state of India receives more than 7 times of the foreign tourists than Odisha. This sorrowful state of tourism in Odisha can be attributed to lack of infrastructure, safety concerns, lack of hygiene and lack of awareness about tourism in the local community etc. But among all the reasons, lack of marketing has been considered as the most prolific reason for the low inflow of tourists to the state of Odisha.

Though Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India and State Tourism Board are taking necessary steps to market tourism destinations of Odisha through different campaigns, print, web and TV advertisements, the effects of the actions taken haven't ripped substantial

results. This study will spot the limelight on one of the most important aspect of marketing i.e. Branding and try to figure out the intrinsic dimensions and pitfalls the process of Branding the state of Odisha.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

The sporadic growth of tourism continues its upward movement while generating about US\$ 1.5 Trillion in export terms and by contributing close to 9% to the total GDP of the world (**UNWTO Report**). Tourism is often considered as an economic driver (**Rogerson & Lemon, 2002**) and a vital tool for poverty alleviation (**Muganda, Sahil & Smith, 2010**). One in eleven job holders owe their jobs to tourism. Hand in hand, the international tourist arrivals went up by 4.3% in 2014 reaching the massive number of 1133 million and similar situations prevailed in international tourism receipts which reached the figure of US\$ 1245 billion worldwide in 2014, an increase of 3.7% from 2013 (**UNWTO Report**).

Destination Branding is defined as the process of selecting an appropriate mix of marketing elements to aid the destination with fair degree identification and distinction by the way of positive image building (**Cai 2002:722**). Considered as one of the mightiest weapon of contemporary destination marketers (**Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004**), branding has been believed to be the synonym of terms like destination image building (**Curtis, 2001**), positioning/repositioning (Gilmore 2002) and reconstruction of image (**Hall, 2002**).

Globalization has given marketing of tourist destination a whole new meaning as countries; regions and individual destination compete with one another to attract investment and visitors. A destination may be a town, city or place which has one or more tourism product or attractions may be in the form of scenic, sights, culture, leisure activities, shopping, rebates, food or excursion. A “brand” is ‘an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique *added values* which match their needs most closely (**Chernatony and McDonald, 2003, p.25**). “A brand can be defined as ‘a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them, which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (**Keller, 1993**). More than an identifier, a brand also represents the organization itself, its reputation and core values (**Gilmore, 2002**). The most frequently cited definition for destination image is: ‘the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination’ (**Crompton, 1979**). This involves an individual’s mental picture of a place based on their knowledge and other global impressions. Successful destination branding involves establishing a mutual relationship between destinations and tourists by satisfying tourists’ emotional (‘relaxing’, ‘pretty’) and basic needs (e.g. eating). In particular, branding of a destination helps to establish a link between destination image and consumer self-image. One of the important determinants of branding is the brand personality – this emphasizes the human side of the brand image. **Yoon, Ekinci & Oppewal (2002)** argued that brands would be perceived as personalities when they displayed three essential personality features: (1) behavior, (2) interaction with the environment and (3) consistency or stability of traits. **Morgan (2002)** says, “The battle for customers in tomorrow’s destination marketplace will be fought not over price but over hearts and mind.” In **Usakli’s (2011)** study, it was found that tourists attribute personality traits to destinations, just as they do to consumer products. Brand personality is “*the set of human characteristics associated with a brand*” (**Aaker, 1997**). It is a relevant concept because people are more likely to do things and purchase or recommend brands (or visit destinations) whose personality traits match their own self-concept (**Usakli, 2011**). Place branding arose to position abstract notions of image formation within a tighter framework which offered more guidance to destination managers. While different destinations make generalisation impossible, it is fair to say that many places (visited or not) generate an identity in the public’s mind. These may be positive, negative or neutral, exciting, romantic, violent, fuzzy, etc. They arise from many sources: e.g. arts, history and educational sources and contemporary events and media coverage, as well as word-of-mouth. A promotion from tourism suppliers also plays a part: however, impact may be low through the high volume of other sources and because it may arrive late in decision-making processes. It has been proven that positive brand images have helped several economies boost their exports, attract tourist and visitors, residents and investments. (**Julie, Vendhav, 2008**). The idea of branding a destination is a relatively new one and the academic investigation of such a process is still in its infancy (**Gnoth, 1998**). **Prebensen (2007)** discusses two paths a marketer could take with their branding decision. The first option is a meaningful (functional) brand name, one that conveys specific attributes or information about the destination. Oftentimes, the brand/ brand name are just based on the geographic location. The other way a marketer could go is with a non-meaningful or inspirational brand name.

The biggest challenge before every destination marketer of the current era is to differentiate their destination from the rest of the world (**Pride, 2004**). They thrive hard to accommodate themselves serving the needs of the niche segment of the market that no other brand is serving (**Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004**). While Arunachal Pradesh calls it as the ‘*land of rising sun*’, Chhattisgarh is ‘*full of surprises*’ and Kerala ‘*God’s own country*’. Malaysia is ‘*Truly Asia*’, Maldives is ‘*the sunny side of life*’, Taiwan is ‘*the heart of Asia*’ and Mexico is ‘*the place you thought you knew*’. Australia boasts it by calling ‘*there is nothing like Australia*’ and Zambia asks you ‘*let’s explore*’.

Alternative tourism is often regarded as the systematic contrast of hard tourism or mass tourism (**Smith, 1992**) which helps to promote a just form of travel across different communities with the aim to achieve mutual understanding and equality of both the tourist and the host community (**Holden, 1984:15**). In this kind of tourism, tourists are expected to use the resources and infrastructure of the local community and shouldn’t desire for substantial tourist facilities which is harmful to the environment (**Broggi, 1985**). Rural tourism is also a form of alternative tourism in which unlike the common recreations, the holiday should be carried out in village set up (**Falite Ireland, 2004**) with less than 1500 population (European Union). Rural tourism is one of the best approaches to balance both visitors’ interest and upliftment of the local community as it helps in sustaining the field of agriculture and local industries (**Gorman, 2005**). Many countries have successfully adopted the theme of rural tourism to attract

tourists who seek novelty or want to temporarily get lost in the scenic and unspoiled beauty of country side. Most specifically European countries like Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Scotland and to extent American countries like Canada and Mexico too are depending heavily on Rural Tourism to sustain their economy.

VI. RURAL TOURISM IN ODISHA: AN OVERVIEW

As per *Gannon*, Rural Tourism“ covers “a range of activities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their business.” **Odisha** or **Orissa** is one of the 29 states of India, located in the east of India. It is surrounded by the states of West Bengal to the north-east, Jharkhand to the north, Chhattisgarh to the west and north-west and Andhra Pradesh to the south. Odisha has 485 kilometres (301 mi) of coastline along the Bay of Bengal on its east, from Balasore to Ganjam. It is the 9th largest state by area, and the 11th largest by population. Odia (also known as *Oriya*) is the official and most widely spoken language, spoken by 33.2 million according to the 2001 Census. The development of a strong platform around the concept of rural tourism should be used for Odisha, where almost 74% of the population resides in its seven lakh villages. Odisha is a multi – destination state with a variety of tourism resources. its rich cultural heritage has created magnificent architectural buildings & monuments. Odisha is blessed with some of the finest beaches, flora and fauna and beautiful country side which provide an ample scope for promoting different type of tourism activities. On the other hand Union Tourism Ministry has given its assent to include four villages of the State under the Rural Tourism Promotion Project, official sources informed here on Saturday. The Ministry has included Hirapur near Bhubaneswar, Barapali of Bargarh district, Padmanavpur of Ganjam district and Angul's Deuljhari village under the unique scheme. The state has also a worldwide unique recognition for its works of Appliqué, Metal Crafts, Silver Filigree, Patta Chitra, Pipili Chandua, Sambalpuri Bastralaya as well as high attraction both in domestic and international markets for its exquisite Art and Crafts.

VII. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- Villages of Odisha have retained their identity within the mainstream of the broader cultural identity.
- The rural zones of Odisha are dotted with archeological treasures.
- There is numerous cover of historical importance in rural areas. They possess cane art and rock paintings. This necessitates responsible rural tourism.
- Pipli is a living heritage of an active tradition. It is renowned for the appliqué work.
- The traditional Ikat sarees are yet to be patronized and supported.
- The traditional figured saree from southern Odisha – the Bomkai saree from christened after the villages where the crafts practiced.
- The Koraput sarees, scarves and fabric are very attractive. They need to be marketed and the weavers have to be brought to the crux of tourism.
- Horn craft is an established rural art of Odisha.
- The rural areas are resplendent with outstanding craftsmen who make jewelry boxes, table mats, kalash, diyas, animal figures, figure of Gods and Goddesses, flower pots, toys like rajarani, pen stand, wall hangings, folk paintings, dhokra casting, coir toys, brass and bell metal cane and bamboo craft and pictorial sarees. The terracotta items also entice tourists.
- Tourism is instrumental in pegging up rural Odia outfits.
- The age-old institutions having reforming values need to be revived through tourism. E.g.- Bhagabata Tungis.
- The intensity and scope of Odiya rural rituals can fuel tourism. E.g.- Napara Sankirtana. Tourism can bring about reassurance of rural Odisha.
- Unique customs such as Grama Devi, Nyaya Panchayat, Chakulia Panda, Pala and Daskathias can prop up rural tourism in the state.
- The Paika Nrutya in Paika villages of Khurda and Puri and other folk arts like Daskathia, Naga Dance, Samprada Dance, Medha Nacha, Pala, Kela Keluni, Kandhei Nacha, Jhoomar Dance, Ghoomar Dance, Chaiti Ghoda Nacha, Ghanta Patua, Danda Nata, Dalkhai Dance, Paraja Dance, Kharpa Dance etc. are exquisite rural cultural expressions.
- Odisha is endowed with an exemplary culinary heritage.
- The diverse choice of sea food is a value-add to the rural tourism in Odisha.
- Odisha rural marketing can be designed as sub brand of Incredible India.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS

- Planners must lay due focus on all round development of rural areas.
- E-marketing of rural zones is a good opportunity.
- A constructive and economically viable approach can give facelift to rural tourism in the state of Odisha.
- Disaster management is an important aspect for stable rural tourism branding.
- Destination branding of rural Odisha commences with works on organic and induced images of the villages. These images are central to branding exercises.
- Creative advertisements can be roped in for brand promotion.
- Introduction of marketing activities and programmes is highly required.
- Measuring and interpreting brand performance can go a long way in strengthening the brand campaign.
- Initiatives for enhancing the brand value such as village walks, fairs, souvenir outlets etc. are the need of the hour and they need to be incepted.

- Segmentation and identification of target market along with the defining brand content and positioning statement helps the brand proposition.

IX. MODEL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM VENTURES IN ODISHA

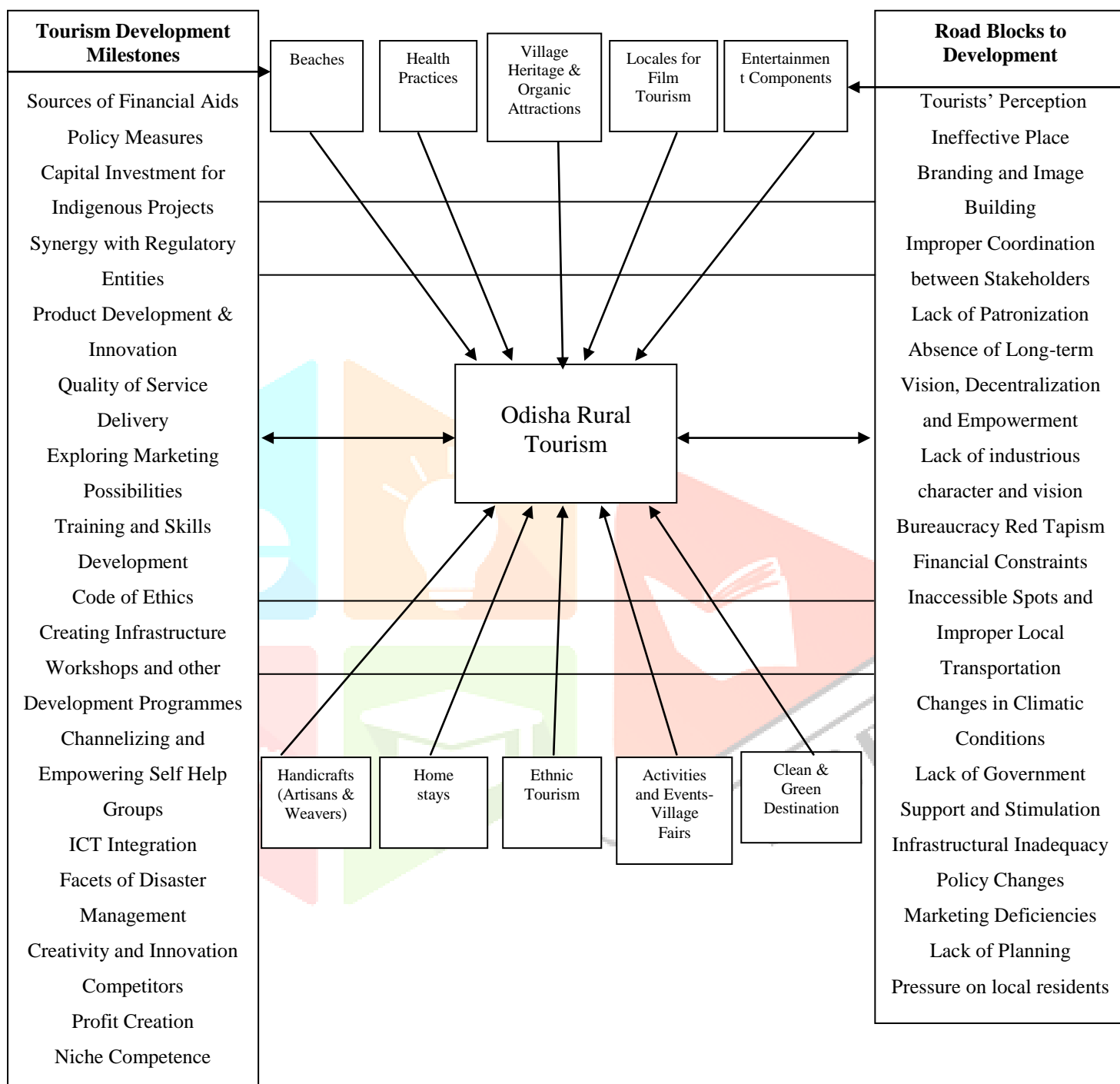


Figure shown above provides a conceptual frame work/model for Rural Tourism ventures in Odisha. Odisha often called as the “Odisha: The Essence of Incredible India!” & “Soul of Incredible India!”. From the tourism marketing perspective Odisha is often Puchlined as *Scenic, Serene and Sublime*. Odisha is a state which has many things to offer to its tourist from Heritage, Architecture, Flora & Fauna, Beaches, Villages, Tribal Wealth, Rural Tourism and Temples which makes Odisha unique among other states. Rural Tourism being one of the major components of tourism today has been taken in to reflection in a bigger way in Odisha. On the other hand Union Tourism Ministry in Odisha, had identified eight villages where rural tourism projects were to be developed by the respective district administrations. These are Raghurajpur and Pipili in Puri, Kiching in Mayurbhanj, Barpali in Bargarh, Hirapur in Khurda, Padmanavpur in Ganjam, Deulajhari in Angul and Konark Natya Mandap. The present model has been subdivided in to two important heading namely Tourism Development Milestones and Tourism Road Blocks for Development. The model clearly brings out the opportunity that Odisha tourism has for rural tourism development for the state and some of the bottle necks that the state is facing for rural tourism development. Some of the important tourism development mile stones for rural tourism in Odisha are Sources of Financial Aids, Policy Measures, Capital Investment for Indigenous Projects, Synergy with

Regulatory Entities, Product Development & Innovation, Quality of Service Delivery, Exploring Marketing Possibilities, Training and Skills Development, Code of Ethics, Creating Infrastructure, Workshops and other Development Programmes, Channelizing and Empowering Self Help Groups, ICT Integration, Facets of Disaster Management, Creativity and Innovation Competitors, Profit Creation. On the other hand the model also highlights some of the important hurdles that acts as a negative pull factor for the growth of rural tourism in Odisha Tourists' Perception, Ineffective Place Branding and Image Building, Improper Coordination between Stakeholders, Lack of Patronization, Absence of Long-term Vision, Decentralization and Empowerment, Lack of industrious character and vision, Bureaucracy Red Tapism, Financial Constraints, Inaccessible Spots and Improper Local Transportation, Changes in Climatic Conditions, Lack of Government Support and Stimulation ,Infrastructural Inadequacy, Policy Changes, Marketing Deficiencies, Lack of Planning, Pressure on local residents. Finally the model has tried to highlight some of the important positive activities that can be developed due to promotion of rural tourism in Odisha like Beaches, Health Practices, Village Heritage and Organic Attractions, Locals for Film Tourism, Entertainment Components, Handicrafts (Artisians & Weavers), Home stays, Ethnic Tourism, Activities and Events, Village Fairs, Clean & Green Destination.

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Unique social and cultural fabric of villages in Odisha. • The progressive team of Tourism Department. • The spectacular indigenous rituals and customs of villages. • The mélange of ceremonies and festivals. • The exquisite village art. • Wax process, wall paintings, floral designs, wood carving, metal works, cane and bamboo basketry. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weakness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of niche rural tourism projects like heritage centers, souvenir outlets etc. • Insufficiency in special packages to rural areas. • Special Events like village fairs are not prominent. • No viability studies conducted. • Rural Infrastructure bottlenecks. • Accreditation for rural sites.
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newer initiatives like village walks. • Enamoring media coverage.. • Mobilizing funds for rural upliftment. • Rope-in brand ambassodors. • Joint Promotions. • Circuit Tourism. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyclones and natural calamities. • Monumental neglect by planners. • Ignoring rural artifacts. • Cultural dilution. • Excessive commercialization.. • Demonstration effects.

X. CONCLUSION

Rural tourism in Odisha is having numerous opportunities and potentials. The organic and induced images of the state need to be revived through proper marketing efforts. Alternate branding will help differentiate the destinations of the state and make a niche market for itself. In this line, the model provided by the authors can provide a framework for branding process. The SWOT analysis provide a clear picture on push and pull factors and some of the important bottlenecks that stand hurdle for rural tourism promotion in Odisha. If marketed and branded properly rural tourism can be an elementary weapon for economic upliftment and higher standard of living especially among the poor sects of the state. The concept of rural Tourism is definitely helpful & effective for a state like *Odisha* where a sizeable population lives in villages.

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