TOWARDS POSITIONING A TOURIST DESTINATION:
A STUDY OF NORTH EAST INDIA

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The first step towards positioning of a tourist destination is to determine the most
important variables tourists consider while evaluating a destination. Looking at the
preferences of visitors on these variables, and then by matching these with their per-
ception on the destination, the preferred position for a destination can be arrived at.
The process of determining the preferred position for North East India is discussed in
the paper. To start with two principal factors namely, infrastructure and external
influence are derived from a set of 21 variables in order to calculate the preferences
of the tourists. The perceptive scores on these two factors are also determined. As the
next step gaps between the preferential and perceptual scores are studied and thus
the ideal position for the region with respect to the two principal factors is arrived at.
Three segments are also identified for targeting.

Preference, perception, positioning, infrastructure, external influence, tourist
segment

It is well established that every product generates images among the target customers.
In simple terms, this image is known as position of the particular product. The position
enjoyed by the same product may be different for different customer groups. Tourist
destinations being one of the major products associated with the tourism industry are
also no exceptions. Destinations may develop image(s) without conscious efforts of the
marketers due to the fact that these forms of products are widely discussed, debated and
visited by the customers.

Destination positioning, which is a process of building and maintaining images for a
destination helps in developing and implementing particular strategies of the marketer.
However, extant positions may not be desirable from the point of view of the concerned
marketers; or such position(s) may not be sufficient to achieve desired marketing goals.
This necessitates a detailed scientific study on the level of preference and perception of
particular group(s) (Payne, 1996) of tourists. These preferences can then be promoted
for the destination in question and if needed a new and profitable position may be
developed as a result.

The Caribbean Island of Jamaica offers a classic example of positioning of a
destination. Jamaica took full advantage of the position Hawaii had already created
among the tourists. Therefore, Jamaican authority positioned the island as “the Hawaii
of the Caribbean”. This saved considerable amount of promotional time and resources.
as the tourists readily accepted the new position of Jamaica. Positioning like this may reduce the risk element for the prospects, who are visiting a destination for the first time (Karma, 1997). Belgium was positioned as the “Beautiful Country” (Ries & Trout, 1986) to the seasoned European travelers. However, this positioning did not last long, as the promotional campaign launched did not get necessary long-term approval from the marketer. In another example Ries and Trout beautifully described the need for positioning Stowe (Vermont, USA) as a skiing resort.

The concept of positioning of tourist destinations may be successfully used for some other tasks as well. Repositioning may help in lengthening the maturity phase or initiating rejuvenation of the destination life cycle (Butler, 1980; Gilbert, 1990). Repositioning may also help switching the target group(s) and thus a new breed of tourists may be attracted to the destination (Baum, 1998). Positioning might also give the desired impetus to a destination, as the prevailing word of mouth may not supply the market with “the material to talk about” (Ries & Trout, 1986). This may facilitate more meaningful and directed promotion and advertising. Image (positioning) is also playing a critical element influencing prospects’ choice of destination (Karma, 1997).

Though the concept of positioning is by now more than two decades old and quite popular among manufactured goods and other services marketers, it is yet to be used as a successful marketing strategy in promoting considerable number of tourist destinations. Murphy (1999) has cited some studies (Reilly, 1990; Goodrich, 1978; Woodside & Jacobs, 1985) which have identified the “image” of a destination as very important as far as promotion is concerned. According to Reilly, all these studies are aimed at tourism marketing through positioning. Murphy also concluded that such studies tried to match the needs of one or more market segment(s) with those actually present in the destination by promotional campaign.

Morgan (1996) used a tripodal method while positioning Splashdown Leisure pool. He cited a three pronged strategy for positioning. Firstly, the key benefits sought by the customers (tourists) were derived, second, the product was designed as per the customer preferences, and finally, the product features were communicated to the target market through promotional campaigns. Recently Chen and Uysal (2002) reported a “plethora” of studies dealing with image of destinations. They cited Gunn (1972) who first talked about “organic image”, which deals with the tourists’ image of a destination without physically visiting the place and “induced image”, which is forged through exposure to promotional campaign and modified by actual visitation. As cited by Chen & Uysal (2002), Fakeye & Crompton (1991) have modified Gunn’s theory to include three concepts: “organic, induced, and complex”. The organic facet exists in the mind of the tourists prior to exposure to any promotional material. Induced part deals with the image after being exposed to external communication from the destination marketer, while the complex image incorporates the actual perception of the destination after visiting the place. Chen & Uysal (2002) also reported that most empirical image studies have used two different sets of attributes: designative and evaluative. As the names suggest designative pertains to certain cognitive component, while the latter deals with affective factors.

North East India is situated in the eastern most corner of India surrounded by the Himalayas, the plains of Bangladesh and the hill ranges of Myanmar. The region is triangular in shape and is a conglomerate of six small states, each representing different
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unique ethnic heritage and culture. In fact, the region houses a large number of tribes rich in their unique culture, heritage and rituals, and with a huge number of dialects (RCILTS, 2002) unique to the tribes. It is a mosaic of different cultures and heritages developed through centuries of migration from the neighbouring regions, namely western India, Myanmar, and China (Gait, 1926). The region is fed by two main river systems, which give rise to two distinct valleys: The Brahmaputra and the Barak valleys. The civilization by and large flourished along the two basins.

The entire region is full of scenic beauty, which can attract tourists of almost any taste. The region boasts of the biggest river island in the world, which is recently declared a world heritage site besides two other world heritage National Parks of the region. Moreover, the north and eastern most part of the region is regarded as one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots in the world (Myers, 2001). The lush green semi-tropical forests of the region house, besides others, the famous one-horned Asiatic rhino, wild buffalo, and elephants. Many other endangered species of flora (including a wide variety of orchids) and fauna are also found in the forests of the region.

It has widely been reasoned that the hitherto underdeveloped and politically disturbed local economy can be flourished only through grass-root level developments like those are possible through tourism. However, unfortunately, the region has been attracting a negligible number of leisure tourists. Only about 0.15% of the foreign tourists visiting India is coming to this region (Sarma, 2002). The inflow of domestic tourists is also poor and not enough to sustain the tourism industry of its own, and hence the industry is heavily dependent on the public sector participation, which comes along with its bane.

Under these circumstances a study was initiated, which was ultimately to lead to sustainable positioning of the region in the light of tourists’ preferences and perceptions. In this article a discussion is offered on the process of defining the preference levels of the prospective tourists and measuring their perceptions on the region as a tourist destination.

METHODOLOGY

Based on extant literature, specially on the tripodal method used by Morgan (1996), a methodology was adopted for positioning the North Eastern part of India as a tourist destination, which is described below. Here the cognitive approach or the induced facet has been taken as the base for the study.

Therefore, the study revolves around determination of the desirable position of the destination based on preference levels of tourists and comparison of these with their perception on North East India.

While doing this, the variables tourists think most important at the time of evaluating a destination are identified from among a host of variables through a survey. Then the respondents’ preferences on the identified variables are elicited. These variables are then boiled down to a few broad clusters with the help of factor analysis so that the clusters can be promoted while packaging a destination. Level of importance tourists offer on these broad factors are determined and suitable positioned are determined for North East India after comparisons are made between preferences and perceptions. The survey was conducted among 505 tourists in India (of Indian and foreign origins).
interviews were conducted in different locations of India, including three highly tourist frequenting destinations – Shimla, Manali and Goa.

**VARIABLES MEASURED**

Tourism essentially includes three phases. A dynamic phase, a static one, and the consequential phase (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Thus tourism industry consists of [A] Transportation (Dynamic phase), [B] The Destination (Static phase), and [C] Range of facilities in the destination like accommodation and services of guide etc. (a combination of Dynamic and Static phases). All the three factors individually and collectively affect the satisfaction level of the visitors. At the same time, it must be noted that it is possible to exploit each of these factors for marketing a destination. In other words, these three elements may be regarded as the broad product mix of a destination as it is possible to modify and improvise these elements and thereby implement a particular marketing strategy. The factors mentioned in B and C above, in many cases can be sold as one. These two elements affect each other to a great extent. As the World Tourism Organization (1997) forecasts a major role of marketing in overall tourist accessibility to a destination during the coming decades, both the elements will play important roles in destination selection. These elements can also affect the overall image and desirability of the destination. The constituents of both the elements like safety, pleasure, facilities available etc. can also individually influence the tourist’s desirability of the destination. It must be pointed out here that tourism being a service, the amount of information or knowledge the traveler is going to gather is very crucial; which might even influence the whole decision making process (Zeithaml, 1981). The prospective visitor might have limited information (on comparable destinations that would constitute the primary choice set) at his/her disposal, which means that the traveler is going to decide about a destination without having full or reasonable information.

Gartner (1993), Echtner & Reitchie (1991), Hunt (1975), and Phelps (1986) used structured attributes for measurement of images of destinations. Ross (1993) used a bi-polar scale to measure Australia’s image to certain segments of tourists. The structured list used by Phelps consisted of scenic beauty (of Menorca - the Spanish island, British resorts etc.), climate, and cultural/historical attributes. Gartner (1993) again described the roles of different components like traditional advertising, information from professional tour operators, and earlier visitors’ recommendation in his study of image formation process of a destination. At a later date Murphy (1999) used few other variables like safety, travel cost, and local people to measure tourists’ perception regarding Australia. Lai & Graefe (2000) used variables like accessibility, attractions, range of facilities, safety etc. for developing possible destination choice criteria while studying Taiwanese overseas travelers. Considering the available literature and the suitability of the studied components to the region under question, 21 variables were measured in 10-point scales. Echtner & Reitchie’s (1991) observation that the destinations are perceived both in terms of individual level and at a holistic approach is also noticed while selecting the variables. The variables are mentioned in Table 1. In the first column of the Table the broad components from which the variables are derived are shown.

**THE ANALYSIS**

The importance attached to each of these 21 variables was measured in an interview
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with the samples. A box plot of the responses shows that the spread for some of the variables are quite short indicating that the responses are concentrated. However, the variables Area of Interest (I) and Recommendation of Tour Operators (P) are having spreads up to score 0, which indicate that at least 25% of the respondents have scored between 3 and 0, and 4 and 0 respectively for I and P. For all variables responses exist in the outliers.

Table 1
Variables for Measurement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Components</th>
<th>Measuring Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consequential Affect</td>
<td>Recommendations of Earlier Visitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Destination</td>
<td>Number of Tourists Visiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basic Nature of the Destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Destination—Safety</td>
<td>Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Destination—Scenic beauty</td>
<td>Surrounding Places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Destination—People / culture</td>
<td>Local People / Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Destination—Climate</td>
<td>Weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Attribute of the Tourist</td>
<td>Chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area of Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distance from Origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proximity to a Place Visited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional Affect</td>
<td>Recommendation of Tour Operators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Facilities</td>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Facilities—Travel Cost</td>
<td>Availability of Suitable Accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Facilities—Destination</td>
<td>Cost of Accommodation and Transportation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Drinking Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transport to the Destination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transport within Destination.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Echtner & Reitchie (1991)

EXTRACTION OF PRINCIPAL FACTORS

In order to study the interrelationship among the above variables, factor analysis is used. The new factors to be derived using factor analysis would help in ascertaining the tourists’ preferences on a smaller number of variables, and thus it would become easier to evaluate and design the positioning strategy for a particular destination. This analysis would also open up ideas about the variables to be highlighted while preparing a destination for positioning to a segment of tourists. While conducting the analysis eigen values of more than 1 are taken as valid for extracting the factors. SPSS 8.0 is used for the analysis. After the tests, it is found that the 3 factors thus extracted are able to offer reasonable explanation in terms of variance associated with the process. The final load table is extracted offering 5 iterations of the initial findings on the basis of correlation analysis. Generalized Least Square method with correlation is used as the method of extraction. The iterations are performed by the Varimax method with Kaiser
normalization. The missing values are treated by the exclude cases pair-wise method.

Table 2 shows the new principal factors and the variables assigned to them. The loading of Area of Interest is very low (only 0.297), and hence this variable is discarded from further analysis and, therefore, is not included in Factor 2. The total variance explained by the new factors is 60.27, which is considered to be a good fit to the data under study (Boyd et al., 1985). The Cronbach’s alpha for reliability of scales for the respective factors are also within acceptable limit.

### Table 2
New Principal Factors and Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1: External Influence</th>
<th>Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drinking Water (0.581)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Tourist Attraction (0.536)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance (0.644)</td>
<td>*0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local People / Culture (0.579)</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Tourists Visiting (0.735)</td>
<td>*0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Origin (0.629)</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation of Earlier Visitors (0.568)</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation of Tour Operators (0.966)</td>
<td>*1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather (0.557)</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to a Place Visited (0.666)</td>
<td>*0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Nature (0.527)</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s Alpha 0.9335

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 2: Infrastructure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport to the Destination (0.632)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport within Destination (0.536)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Suitable Accommodation (0.702)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Accommodation and Transportation (0.580)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety (0.638)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of Interest *** (0.297)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure (0.600)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrounding Places (0.669)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time (0.593)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s Alpha 0.8543

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 3: Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Reasons (0.999)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Variance Explained: 60.27

* The Rotated Component Matrix is arrived at after completing 5 iterations using varimax method.
* Figures within brackets indicate respective loading of the variable.
* * Indicates very high communality
* *** Discarded from further analysis due to low loading

Source: Authors’ calculations.
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The new factor *External Influence* predominantly includes the variables on which external influence works most of the time. These variables, in fact, create pressure from outside (the destination) on the tourist to make or not to make a visit. This domain is, therefore, named as *External Influence*. The domain 2, which is named *Infrastructure*, includes 9 variables. All the variables included in this domain are related to the facility available in the destination. The variable *Other Reasons* cannot be clubbed with any other variable and hence this factor is kept separately with just one variable. Also, this variable is not quantifiable as "other reasons" may be vague in many instances, and cannot be generalized. Hence the factor *Other Reasons* is excluded from further analysis.

In Table 2 the communalities marked with ‘*’ indicate that the respective variables can explain the variances to a good extent. Thus it is seen that the extracted components can explain the variance in the variables well.

**IMPORTANCE OF PRINCIPAL FACTORS**

Having extracted the principal factors (domains) it has become easier to measure the importance assigned by the respondents on various components while evaluating a destination. This score will quantify the preference of the respondents towards the new factors. The following formula (formula 1) can be used to measure the importance assigned to each of the extracted principal factors.

\[
\text{Importance PC}_j = \frac{\sum ((\text{loading } V_{ji})^2 \times \text{Average } V_{ji})}{\sum (\text{loading } V_{ji})^2} \ldots \ldots (1)
\]

Where,

- \(\text{Importance PC}_j\) = Weighted mean of the means of the variables that constitute the factor \(j\), which can explain the importance assigned by the respondents on factor \(j\);
- \(\text{Loading } V_{ji}\) = Loading of the variable \(i\) under Factor \(j\), where \(i\) is a component of set \(j\);
- \(\text{Average } V_{ji}\) = Mean of the scores assigned in the 10-point scale by all the respondents against the variable \(i\) of factor \(j\).

This formula will facilitate conversion of the mean scores from all the responding samples, into a comprehensive score. The new comprehensive score should be able to give proper weight age to the initial variables, as the loading is nothing but the correlation of that particular basic variable with the principal factor, to which the variable is assigned. Therefore, the square of loading offers an explanation as to what extent the raw variable is related to the principal factor. Thus this can be used as a weight to the variable. The remaining part of the equation is just the formula for calculation of weighted average.

The respondents were also asked to offer their perception on the variables mentioned above. The comprehensive perceptive scores have also been derived using formula (1). The comparison of these perceptive scores with preference levels is offered below using various segmenting variables.
CONTRASTING PREFERENTIAL AND PERCEPTUAL SCORES

Putting the values of means of scores (for the \(i^{th}\) variable) offered by the respondents and the loading of variables against the new factor, to which it is assigned to (the \(ji^{th}\) variable) in formula (1), Table 3 is constituted. The Table depicts the preference assigned by the respondents along with the comprehensive perceptive scores on North East against the two factors under consideration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Components</th>
<th>Importance (Preferential Scores)</th>
<th>Perceptive Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External influence</td>
<td>6.466</td>
<td>5.709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>6.853</td>
<td>4.415</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors' calculations.

Alarmingly, it is seen from the Table 3 that the perceptive scores for the factor infrastructure are lower than the preferential ones by a huge margin, even when the preferential scores for that factor are higher than the other. This shows a clear negative perception about the region on infrastructure. However, all are not lost. A segment-wise comparison might offer some light as to which segment(s) has got minimum difference on perception and preference. A positioning map can be constituted if the statistics from Table 3 are put in a two-dimensional plane.

DISCUSSION

In the next part of the paper an effort is made to look into various segments of respondents based on classification data to determine whether their perception and preference match (or at least tend to match) with each other. The segments for which the gaps between the perceptual and preferential scores are not much, should be targeted by the marketers of North East India. Eventually, the region should be positioned at such a level that the targeted segments could easily be attracted. Such findings against major segments of tourists based on origin, frequency of travel, and general benefit sought from vacation are reported in the following section.

ORIGIN

In order to study the effects of origin, if any, on the tourists’ level of preference, and their perception on North East India the respondents are segmented into Domestic (Indian) and Foreign origins. The scores offered by each respondent from both the segments are put in formula 1 and the preferential and perceptual scores are derived. These are shown in Table 4.

The results summarized in the Table indicate the foreign respondents' preferential scores for both the factors are higher than those of the domestic respondents. Simply put the foreign tourists look for higher level of infrastructure and external influence in a destination. However, the perceptual scores differ widely for both the segments. As
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Figure 1 shows the gap is more in case of foreign travelers. For a change, the gap for the domestic (Indian) travelers against external influence is minimal and thus the domestic travelers may be the candidate segment for targeting.

Table No. 4
Comparison based on Levels on Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Domestic Respondents</th>
<th>Foreign Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preference</td>
<td>Perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Influence</td>
<td>6.132</td>
<td>5.729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>6.657</td>
<td>4.444</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors' calculations

![Figure 1](image)

The Figure 1 contrasts the level of preference shown by the domestic respondents to foreign respondents on both the factors.

EXPERIENCE OF TRAVELERS

Tourists may have different outlooks based on their level of exposure to various destinations. They become more learned and understanding as exposure level goes up and thus may behave differently. Based on level of exposure the tourists are divided into 5 categories for the purpose of this research. In Table 5 the comprehensive scores extracted using formula (1) on this classification criteria are shown. It is seen from the Table that for the first four groups the preferential scores against both the factors are increasing steadily. Interestingly, the scores come down for the group with most experienced travelers. This might imply the existence of a learning curve for tourists with a plateau. However, the same trend is not seen for the perceptual scores. The
highly traveled persons are offering very low perceptive scores and thereby creating wide gaps in regards to preferential scores and, therefore, the two top groups may be left alone. On the other hand, interestingly enough, the naive travelers (up to 7 traveled places) offer higher perceptual scores against external influence than respective preferential scores. That provides a distinct advantage for the region to start with, even though their perceptual scores on infrastructure is well below the desired level. Figure 2 offers a two dimensional graphical representation of the scores from Table 5. It is evident from the Figure that the black square, showing the group with experience level “Up to 3 Places”, representing the most naive travelers, has scored moderate preference for both the factors. The preference level is increasing almost in a linear form up to the white diamond representing the group having exposed to “13 to 20 Places”. However, the trend is reversed for the group with the black diamond representing the most experienced travelers. Thus the suspected plateau may be at the level of “13 to 20 places”.

Table 5
Preferential and Perceptual Scores Based on Experience of Travel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Exposure</th>
<th>Up to 3 Places</th>
<th>4 to 7 Places</th>
<th>8 to 12 Places</th>
<th>13 to 20 Places</th>
<th>21 Places and More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PREF.</td>
<td>PERC.</td>
<td>PREF.</td>
<td>PERC.</td>
<td>PREF.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PREF. : Preferential Scores  PERC. : Perceptual Scores  Min. Score: 0  Max. Score: 9

Figure 2
Contrasting Perception with Preference-Experience wise
(Source : Authors’ calculations)

The bubbles and the triangle of different shades indicate the two dimensional perceptual scores. It is evident from the Figure that the gaps for the groups with moderately traveled persons are narrower than those consisting of highly traveled persons. Thus it is logical to target the groups with black square, dark and gray diamonds. These are indicated with arrows in Figure 2. If North East India can be positioned in the vicinity
of the targeted segments, it will be easier to attract tourists from these groups.

**BENEFIT SOUGHT FROM VACATION**

Benefit segmentation is more commonly used to profile the tourists. Many researchers (Crompton, 1979; Matheison & Wall, 1982; Pearce, 1982; Frochot & Morrison, 2000 to name a few) have successfully segmented the tourist market based on the benefits they look for. Benefit(s) tourists seek from a vacation may significantly affect the selection of a destination for visit. Based on their philosophy and purpose of tour, the travelers are divided into 6 distinct groups. The segmentation is done with the help of criteria adopted by Matheison and Wall, and Pearce. The segments of tourists thus defined are Missionary, Mass Tourist, Conservationist, Explorer, Adventurer, and Holidaymaker. Missionaries like to stroll into the nature in solitude; Mass Tourists go with the crowd and visit a well-known attraction, while Conservationists are characterized by their relaxing attitude during the tour. Tourists with basic motive of discovering different places are grouped into Explorer, and those who come out just to enjoy and have fun are termed as Holidaymaker. For determining the respective segments the respondents were asked to offer their individual perception on leisure travel on six different choices representing each of the segments.

**Table 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segments</th>
<th>Missionary</th>
<th>Mass Tourists</th>
<th>Conservationist</th>
<th>Explorer</th>
<th>Adventurer</th>
<th>Holidaymaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PREF</td>
<td>PERC</td>
<td>PREF</td>
<td>PERC</td>
<td>PREF</td>
<td>PERC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PREF.: Preferential Scores  PERC.: Perceptual Scores  Min. Score: 0  Max. Score: 9

**Figure 3**

**Perception and Preference - Benefit Segment wise**

(Source: Authors’ calculations)
The preferences and perceptions calculated from the means of the scores offered by the respondents are shown in Table 6 and depicted in Figure 3.

It is clear from Figure 3 that the groups “Missionary” and “Mass Tourist” attach moderate preference to the principal factors. The preferential scores for infrastructure are more than the scores for external influence for both the segments. Interestingly, the perceptual scores of these two segments are higher than the preferential scores against external influence. Therefore, these two segments are easy candidates for targeting. On the other hand, the preference levels of the other groups, specially those of the “Holidaymaker”, “Adventurer”, and “Conservationist” are almost same and of a higher magnitude. The groups “Explorer” and “Adventurer”, which are denoted by black diamond, and white square respectively, are the most sensitive. The perceptual scores of the segment “Adventurer” is just nearby. And as the gap (between preference and perception) for “Adventurer” is not much it might not be difficult to target this segment as well. The gaps for other segments are comparatively huge and therefore, these may not be ideal as target markets.

If the targeted tourist segments, which are also candidate positions for North East India are superimposed in a two dimensional plane, having external influence in the X-axis and infrastructure in the Y-axis, an ideal position as depicted in Figure 4 might be arrived at. It may be noted that excepting the benefit segment “Adventurer”, all other targeted tourist segments will fit into the new position.

Likewise, other psychographic characteristics may be adopted to segment the respondents and the preferred position for each of the new segments can be determined with the help of the methodology discussed above. Accordingly, the destinations may
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target the particular segment by positioning itself in the desired area. The positions thus arrived at more or less fulfill the conditions offered by Kotler (1996) for meaningful differentiation of a product. According to Kotler while promoting a destination, the distinctive features may be emphasized to distinguish the destination from others. This should be possible in this case also, as the positions are communicable to the market, and thus can be shown as unique to the destination. However, accurate promotional campaign(s) must be formulated to convey the position to the targeted segments. Also, it is to be ensured that once a position is considered and adopted, the physical attributes related to the factors under infrastructure must be present in the destination.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The positioning done through this model emphasizes on a cluster of components as a whole, rather than a singular selling factor. This is essential from the point of view of gauging the preference of the prospects, so that these can be met by putting the destination at a particular position. This position may not be as unique as adopting one or two Unique Selling Proposition(s) (USPs) as the position. However, intelligent promotional measures can take care of this problem, since the destination is sure to meet the expectations of the visitors.

Quantification of the preference level of the respondents may not be accurate, as the responses may suffer from high level of non-sampling errors. The measurement of the factors is done at a point of time, which might not cast light on the deviation pattern. Continuous feedback from the market may help in overcoming this problem.

CONCLUSION

An image with moderate levels of infrastructure and external influence is the ideal position NE India should look for. The principal factors could be manipulated by managing the basic variables and treating them with the respective weights. The triad method followed here also suggested that a few segments might be targeted as initial market. The segments are “moderately traveled persons” (based on exposure segmentation), “Missionary” and “Holidaymaker” (based on benefit segmentation). Domestic travelers, in general, are also identified as the target market for the North East India.

It is seen that the preference level of an average tourist for infrastructure is more than external influence. However, for certain segments the perceptual scores on external influence are more than that of infrastructure.

The deliberation in this paper may be used as a model for positioning a tourist destination. In such a case the basic variables may change as per the nature of the concerned destination.

The promotional efforts and actual quantification of the principal factors will be crucial for successful implementation of this positioning strategy. Therefore, concerted efforts from all concerned are the prerequisite for success of such a marketing effort endeavor.

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