

TOROOTS: MARKETING AND PROMOTING THE EXPERIENTIAL TRAVEL AND TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

With the extensive influx of start-ups in the already cluttered Indian travel and tourism sector; it was increasingly becoming challenging for experiential tourism players to carve a niche for themselves. Mr. Naveen, founder of ToRoots Explorers Pvt. Ltd., a start-up company in Pune (India) offering "experiential tourism" realised that travellers were not only demanding conventional sightseeing tours but preferably looking for meaningful, memorable and transformative tourism experiences. Customers were spoilt for choices in terms of wide array of travel and tourism packages and experiences available.

Since its launch in June 2016, the start-up firm faced challenges in terms of amplifying the user experience (UX) in order to enhance overall customer experience and engagement (CX). Navin was contemplating to sustainably enhance the client engagement pre and post journey, increase revenue and scale-up the business. One of the challenges was to engage customers with the experiential tourism service brand. Hence, it was of paramount importance to devise an effective digital strategy that would help ToRoots to convey the "value proposition"- of its curated travel and tourism experiences - in the most convincing and creative way possible.

***Keywords:** Experiential tourism, Slow Travel, Customer Engagement, Digital Strategy, and Business Model etc.*

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Introduction -

Mr. Naveen, Founder of ToRoots Explorers Pvt. Ltd, a funded travel and tourism start-up was facing some challenges in terms of customer acquisition and engagement. Being a community-driven platform for experiential travel; Toroots.com was one of the platforms where experts of the travel domain like travel bloggers, content creators, photographers and others, would interact with individuals who were inclined to experience centric tourism. Objective of ToRoots was to curate and offer an experience, which is unique by virtue of its content.

According to Naveen, it had almost been two years now since ToRoots was started. There was handsome flow of bookings and tourist-travellers were looking for the exotic places and experiences. However, ToRoots was still struggling with revenue. Profitability and overall customer engagement. The company was going through a dilemma. The idea of offering "experiential tourism" was novice in the market and there was a impasse of offering a new concept vis-a-vis the existing traditional options/packages. And if chosen the experiential tourism, how to market the experiential tourism service brand that would resonate with the target audience?

Navin found that in past few years, if one would go through any trend forecast for tourism industry, it could be found that travellers were drifting towards experiential, non-itinerary based slow travel. More and more people were travelling the world to discover new experiences. Community-oriented sustainability and transformative experiences were highly preferred. Above all, travellers were embracing the explorer's mind-set with inclination towards knowledge and skills enhancement.

Indian Tourism Industry-A Panoramic View –

Travel and tourism sector in India that was estimated to be USD 250 billion have been a crucial contributor to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with its 9 per cent (Approx.) share (including indirect contributions). The eco-system contains different players like tourism boards, tour operators, travel corporations and neighbourhood agents, big-ticket online travel agents (OTA), tourist transporters, forex dealers, hotels, restaurants and aggregating players etc. Hence, it has been a significant source of foreign exchange, despite few headwinds inflicted by the demonetisation, economic slowdown, the added cost of tax collected at source (TCS) and disruption due to initial hiccups during the launch of Goods and Service Tax (GST), among others. Besides all these challenges, The Economic Survey 2019-20 regarded the tourism industry as "a key engine of growth". (James, 2020)

There were different categories of tourism like adventure, wellness and medical, coastal tourism, country border tourism, spiritual tourism, rural tourism and historical-heritage tourism etc. Naveen decided to position his travel company as "experiential tourism" provider. He was focusing on elements like nature, culture & tradition for creating curated immersive experiences. In order to build this brand image, Naveen adopted various marketing strategies like giving the advertisements in the luxury and lifestyle travel and tourism oriented magazines, events, exhibitions etc. ToRoots used to convey the brand promise through all these marketing efforts, which consisted of pledge regarding total curation and customization (Chaudhary & Pandey, 2021).

India has always been a destination that attracts experience-seeking travellers because of its geographic and cultural diversity (Udawat, 2007). Naveen found that the craze for adventure tourism, cultural and cuisine exploration, border tourism, spiritual tourism, wildlife and birding tours, and deep water sports in natural environment etc. was snowballing. Navin also observed that luxury-indulgent activities like wine tours, yacht tours, yoga-meditation tourism, luxury train journeys etc. were also attracting a good number of travellers. These were the segments in which ToRoots gradually wanted to expand into and target its digital marketing efforts towards.

Macro-Environmental Factors and the Enabling Policies –

Travel & Tourism sector outpaced the global economic growth for the eighth consecutive year in 2018 and grew at 3.9% during the year, which was higher than the global GDP growth of 3.2%. Government of India (GoI) rationalised GST rates and reduced e-visa fees on hotel room bookings to boost inbound tourism and opened almost 120 new peaks for mountaineering. With all similar kind of efforts, India's rank in Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) of the World Economic Forum (WEF) was moved to 34th rank in 2019 from 65th in 2013.

The sector managed to be an integral component and lever of India's growth story, accounting for almost 9 per cent of India's GDP. Similarly, India achieved the growth of 7.4 per cent in foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) during the January-November 2019. The sector has been extensively contributing towards socio-economic progress through infrastructure development, cultural exchanges, employment generation, and foreign exchange earnings etc. The major driving factors have been the income growth, rapid urbanization, increasing nuclearisation of family, attitudinal shift towards "perceived quality of experiences", burgeoning propensity towards spending, augmented aspirations and greater than before propensity towards indulging in experiential and leisurely travelling and tourism, among others. ("Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India Rose 3% in Jan-Nov 2019," 2020)

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and one of the fastest growing service industry. It has always been a significant source of foreign exchange for many countries and also contributes in creating direct and indirect jobs. Sector's best prospects for growth were in focusing overseas revenue coming from foreigner tourists. Diverse portfolio of tourism offerings including traditional and emerging themes of tourism, including nature-trail, adventure, spiritual, yoga and wellness tourism, spiritual tourism, medical tourism, heritage and cultural, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibition Events), corporate travel segments and famous grand and fat Indian weddings etc. have been the major attraction for domestic and foreign tourists (Narang, 2006).

The development of thematic circuits and corridors, infrastructure development and upgradation, opening of new peaks for mountaineering, emergence of new destinations and niche tourism offerings etc., were fuelling the inbound tourism. These factors were being strongly supported by rising domestic demand and economic growth, price competitive offerings, and reduction in e-visa fees and GST rates on hotel room bookings, among others. The Tourism Policy of GoI has been focused on achieving a better regional spread of domestic and foreign tourists. Besides that Governments across the world were also musing on vaccine passports and adoption of digital documentation. All these developments brought a renewed scope and momentum for businesses in travel and tourism sector.

Inbound Stream of Foreigner Tourists –

According to the reports published by the Tourism Ministry, the Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) during the period from January-August 2019 stood at 6,882,940 as compared to 6,743,819 during the same period in 2018, registering a growth of 2.1 per cent. According this report, Bangladesh (31.33 per cent), US (10.33 per cent), UK (8.01 per cent) were among the top 15 source countries for India (Goyal & Dhall, 2019). The arrival of tourists from the US to India has been increasing gradually over the years with India gaining popularity among overseas travellers. Resultantly, foreign tourist arrivals grew by 3.23 per cent January-November 2019. The number of foreign tourist arrivals increased from 8.8 million in 2016 to 10.04 million in 2017 and 10.56 million in 2018. India witnessed substantial CAGR of around 7 present in foreign tourist arrivals from 2005 and the trend was expected to be continued till 2025. This led to rise in foreign exchange earnings during these three years. Forex

earnings through tourism increased from \$22.92 billion in 2016 to \$27.31 billion in 2017 and \$28.58 billion in 2018. (Strategic Government Advisory (SGA) & YES BANK, 2019)

Tourists from The US accounted for the second highest number of foreign tourists in the last three years. The number of visitors from the US increased from 1.27 million in 2016 to 1.37 million in 2017 and 2.25 million on 2018. The United Kingdom was third on the list. The Exhibit No. 1 gives the country-wise break-up of foreign tourist arrivals for the top 60 countries for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Exhibit 1 - The country-wise break-up of foreign tourist arrivals for the year 2016, 2017 and 2018

Name of the Country	2016	Name of the Country	2017	Name of the Country	2018
Bangladesh	1,380,409	Bangladesh	2,156,557	Bangladesh	2,256,675
United States	1,296,939	United States	1,376,919	United States	1,456,678
United Kingdom	941,883	United Kingdom	986,269	United Kingdom	1,029,757
Canada	317,239	Canada	335,439	Sri Lanka	353,684
Malaysia	301,361	Australia	324,243	Canada	351,040
Sri Lanka	297,418	Malaysia	322,126	Australia	346,486
Australia	293,625	Sri Lanka	303,590	Malaysia	319,172
Germany	265,928	Russia	278,904	China	281,768
China	251,313	Germany	269,380	Germany	274,087
France	238,707	France	249,620	Russia	262,309

Source - Lok Sabha answer; Data visualisation: A J Vinayak (The Hindu Business Line, Published on November 21, 2019 (Vinayak, 2019)

Stay At Home – Stay Safe –

However, all these trends were suddenly disrupted by Covid-19 pandemic with an apocalyptic blow. The travel, tourism and hospitality industry was among the first sectors that were affected by this pandemic. “Stay at home and Stay Safe” regime grounded travel and tourism plans the world over. This essentially created existential crisis for the multibillion-dollar tourism sector across the world, which has been a growth engine in many economies for several decades, after the upsurge of globalisation.

Prior to this, the sector had faced many crisis but it was never this bad. Customers could always travel for an urgent reason, even if they have had limited travelling options or to pay exorbitant prices. During this darkest hour, businesses in this eco-system were struggling to comprehend the magnitude of the situation that caught them off-guard. This sector has always been a maze of multiple, interconnected and allied business entities and individuals. It flourishes on the antithesis of what the Covid-19 pandemic underlined - Stay at home - stay safe.

Nevertheless, the pandemic not only brought challenges for the sector but few opportunities as well, categorically for the experiential tourism. This was attributed to change in consumer behaviour, taste, priorities and preferences towards experiential travel and tourism services. There was significant rise in the customers’ preference and inclination for experience driven slow tourism.

Consumer Preferences and Opportunities for Experiential Tourism –

Experiential travel consists of activity based and localized experiences, and there has been a significant growth in this sub-category of travel only in last ten to fifteen years. Naveen realized that today's consumers have been evolved as "experience-seeking travellers", rather than just remaining "fun-time tourists". The tourists have been evolving in the kind of expectations they have from a destination. They were preferring to have activity-based travel experiences revolving around social and cultural exploration and exploring the hidden gems of a place (Goyal & Dhall, 2019).

However, in the post-pandemic era it is expected to evolve from indulging experiences to transformational experiences (Ryde, 2019). There has been a shift towards consciousness and priority for physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. With immunity becoming the buzzword; travel, tourism and hospitality players were mulling to tap into the opportunity and giving confidence to tourists through safety protocols and bio-bubbles (Khetan, 2021).

Navin further reiterated that there was a need to make sure that the experience is unique, exhilarating, leisurely and story-driven. The experience should be immersive and curated well to provide the right balance between guidance and autonomy as appropriate. Hence it was essential to precisely reach to the target audience and be well cognizant of the emotional requirements of different customer segments.

Focusing On Target Audience and Fulfilling the Expectations –

The name of the game here was providing authentic and transformative experiences. Travellers and tourists have been fed up of plain sightseeing tours. They were increasingly inclined towards earning "meaningful experiences and fond memories". The millennials (those in the 18-34 age group) and international/inbound travellers were among the most valuable target segment for ToRoots.

The millennial tourist and traveller did not prefer to stick to the engraved itineraries. They were tend to be unconventional and for them the journey is often more exciting than the destination. This segment was unaffected by budget constraints (ready to spend more) and geared up to go extra mile when choosing the right offerings, packages and exceptional experiences etc. This was because of the growing number of double-income couples having rising disposable income.

For instance, the nature tour or say wildlife tour consists of jungle safari, staying inside the natural caves with a bonfire alongside, hanging-out in spectacularly secluded locations and relishing on the food obtained from the woods, learning about language, history and culture, experiencing life at a tea-coffee estate or spending a vacation on a farm etc. People also loved to be experimental about food and local cuisine. One of the major reasons behind attracting the foreign tourist was the niche travel and tourism experiences which India have had to offer that include cruises, cuisines, adventure, Tranquillity Zones, medical-wellness, Yoga, eco-tourism, art, culture and film, rural and spiritual tourism (refer to Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, Ramayana Corridor, Kartarpur Corridor, Buddhist Corridor Ramayana Circuit, and Ayodhya Dipostava, among others) and other forms of slow travel.

ToRoots was looking at tapping the growing demand for "Personalized" experiences sought and appreciated by consumers, specifically millennials who earn and burn rapidly. This customer base was always in quest for making long-lasting meaningful memories. Experience seeking travellers also wanted to savour on and indulge into the culture, food and lifestyle of the places they visit. These customers were now looking for more "holistic experiences" rather than just rushing for visiting destinations (Gale & Arsenault, 2004).

Swift Rise of “Slow Travel” –

Recently, the slow travel has been emerged as a growing phenomenon is about taking slow pace to enjoy the journey. This involves exploring the authenticity of the destination, indulging into curated experiences and activities, enjoying the unique landscapes and terrains and real engagement with people and culture across the expedition. Slow travel entails delving deep into the culture and social aspects through history, heritage, language, music, cuisine, and nature etc. These are also the value proposition and key ingredient to be marketed and promoted. The pilgrimage tours, the exploratory expeditions (nature, geography, or history among others) romantic tours, border tourism, cruise tours and spiritual journeys etc. were essentially the antecedents of the slow travel. In the backdrop of the sedentary lifestyle, slow travel is perceived as an antidote to a faster and unsustainable pace of life. (Glusac, 2020; Kowalski, 2020; Lough Derg - Visitor Experience Development Plan (2020-2024), 2020; Nagpal, 2021)

The experience tourism enthusiasts were highly inclined towards exploring various adventure, activities and experiences unique adventure sport offerings such as skydiving, river rafting, bungee jumping, self-drive tours, camping sky walk, off the road biking and exploring the majestic terrains and water trails formed by the iconic rivers of India. Solo and slow travel was also in a trend that was catching up in this segment and visitors were becoming more experiential and often looking to explore new terrains as opposed to mere sightseeing. Hence, it was also included working with local communities along the route to developing the trail into a natural and cultural buffet. The whole idea was to focus on enabling communities to curate off-road expeditions and developing corridors by strengthening strategic linkages among legacy sites, activity locations, accommodation facilities, tranquillity zones and experience trails etc.

In this context, to achieve the scalability and reduce the cost Navin was mulling to design the packages, set up processes and curate experiences by optimizing and rationalizing the directly hired workforce. In order to execute this strategy, ToRoots have on-boarded travel bloggers as they were domain experts and could influence the target audience. ToRoots first trained them well and then they were deployed behalf to set things up on the ground. The brand propagators were offered these experience for free in exchange of the opportunity to create unique content for their readers, which was a Win-win deal. On the other side, ToRoots was also training the villagers to manage the tours, serve the tourists and provide curated experiences in the most appealing way (Chaudhary & Pandey, 2021). ToRoots wanted to target the experience seeking travellers through demographic and financial profiles. They were traditionally defined as affluent, married couples with double incomes, business owners, high-net worth income individuals, aspirational millennials coming from higher-middle class families and other similar segments having high disposable income. Refer to **Exhibit No. 2**.

Exhibit 2 - Toroots's Business Model

Key partners and Tourism Masterplan	Key activities	Unique value proposition	Target Customers
Focus on developing curated clusters of experiences (Experience Development Plan)	Experiential and curated travel and tourism offerings/ itineraries	Towns and Villages, Forests, Hinterlands, monastic settlements. Lake	Escapers seeking authentic and personalized travel experiences

<p>Destination development with the help of local resident Influencers</p> <p>Celebratory Travelers or celebrity chefs</p> <p>Travel Agents, experts and curators</p> <p>Traffic generating blogs and branded content</p> <p>Optimal digital strategy with SEO (Search Engine Optimization)</p>	<p>Recreation Plan</p> <p>Easily accessible experiences</p> <p>Active togetherness in nature</p> <p>Great local and authentic cuisine</p> <p>local stories/ anecdotes</p> <p>Well-rounded views of the places</p> <p>History and culture</p> <p>Curated unique experiences</p>	<p>waters, architectural marvels, heritage sites and Landscape</p> <p>Authentic and personalized experiences,</p> <p>Unique and immersive destinations (distinctive towns and villages)</p> <p>Unique Accommodation Options</p> <p>Activities in nature</p> <p>Opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge</p> <p>Focus on Hygiene well-being</p>	<p>Culturally Curious</p> <p>Footloose</p> <p>Socializers</p> <p>Adventure seeking</p> <p>Fun loving families with inclination towards off the road and slow travel</p> <p>Enjoy self-guided food and foraging walks and trails</p> <p>Travelers who look for beyond sightseeing trips</p>
<p>Cost structure</p>	<p>Systems and resources</p>	<p>Revenue streams</p>	<p>The human resources for curating the experiences</p>
<p>Technology cost (Website & apps development & maintenance)</p> <p>Marketing Cost</p> <p>Material and equipment cost and maintenance</p> <p>Vendor commission</p> <p>Property and infrastructure</p> <p>Curator commission</p> <p>Salaries of staff</p>	<p>Website and App</p> <p>Partnerships - To support marketing activities</p> <p>Imagery and video content creation</p> <p>Service providers (tour operators & individuals)</p> <p>Curators</p> <p>Influencers/ travel bloggers)</p> <p>Employees</p> <p>Website & Apps</p>	<p>Commission on sales of trips</p> <p>Commission on supplementary service sales from partners e.g. flights, cabs, buses etc. via MMT, Zoom Car, RedBus</p>	<p>Employees of the company</p> <p>Villagers and local guides/ experts</p> <p>Research partners</p> <p>Cuisine experts</p> <p>Travel bloggers and content creators</p> <p>Travel agents</p> <p>Influencers</p> <p>Transport partners</p>

Source: Designed and proposed by the authors of the case

Creating the Relevant and Resonating Customer Experience –

In order to curate and create the relevant and resonating customer experience for the target audience; ToRoots adapted the bottom-up organization approach. It started working with the native villagers on the grass-root level to create sustainable tourism ecosystem. ToRoots started to visit these villages, invest in refurbishing houses of these villagers to make them more comfortable and hygienic without compromising on traditional look, feel and aesthetics. ToRoots averted from constructing new modern houses and continued with the original mud house and huts, nevertheless modernized them by setting up new clean beddings and other furniture and furnishings.

ToRoots also trained villagers to host the travelers that would come to their village as tourists. The tourism start-up appointed and trained some locals to be the native coordinators. Now the travelers were being hosted by the villagers providing them with the authentic experiences. In case of foreign tourist, the company representatives were acting as guides to overcome the language barriers (i.e. French, Spanish, and German etc.) hence making the interaction between travelers and villagers easy. According to Navin, 60-75% of the booking amount of the experience was being directly distributed among these villagers, and that left a socio-economic impact on their lives.

Deep Metamorphism – Marketing the “Transformational Tourism Experiences”

The travel and tourism sector in India and across the world was in the midst of a deep metamorphosis. There are many mitigating factors but the new technological solutions coming about are some of the main actors. According to the reports, digital advertising was set to occupy the biggest portion of advertisement spend for all global travel marketers in 2018, which was pegged at 47 per cent and it was poised to increase further with exponential growth rate (Manoukian, 2019). This growth was mainly attributed to the faster adoption of digital channels in the buying process when it comes to travel and tourism offerings. Going further, marketers were assured of the adoption of technologies and tools like augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), data analytics, machine learning, Internet of Things (IoT) and smart speakers or virtual assistants, which were likely to disrupt travel marketing, post pandemic. The Covid-19 Pandemic led to the rise of unconventional tourism experiences, such as video sightseeing and virtual reality tours around world-famous destinations (Bagaria, 2021; Digitium Team, 2021; Vidal, 2019).

Marching With Micro-Influencers –

ToRoots was mainly using digital marketing channels to promote the offerings and create desired positioning of the brand in the marketplace. The major digital marketing tools and techniques like social media marketing through portals like Meta (facebook), Instagram, and YouTube etc., email marketing, content marketing, blogging, and influencer marketing etc. However, most of the brands have been shaping their digital strategies to involve micro-influencers, and it was going beyond the conventional twitter, facebook, whatsapp, Instagram to other platforms such as YouTube. There has been a visible shift in the influencer marketing strategy of brands across categories — from beauty to tourism to food. Brands were now deploying an authentic and serious army of content creators, who broadcast more authentic, fresh, relevant and relatable content. Micro influencers have been the key drivers in scaling-up influencer-led campaigns precisely, especially for reaching out to the target audience and communities and engage with them at emotional level (Gandhi et al., 2022).



Image 1 - Digital media promotion of ToRoots
Source - company documents

Challenges Faced By Toroots In Terms Of Customer Engagement –

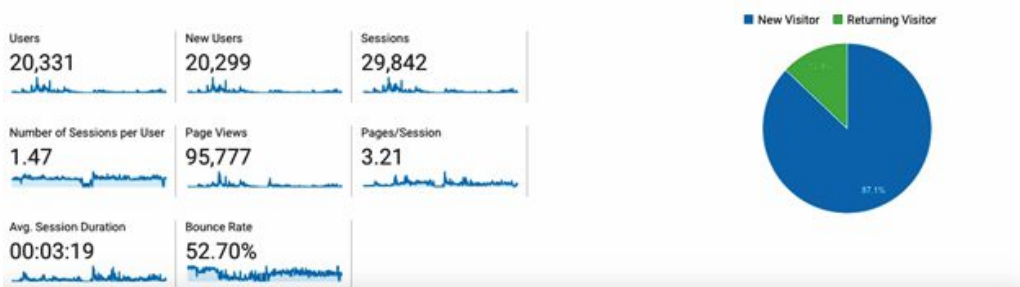
The travellers were writing good reviews and offering testimonials about ToRoots but market was yet to be evolved, the concept of experiential travel was not so popular and the user engagement on the website of ToRoots was also quite low.

The bounce rate of international visitors was significantly high and the average session duration was quite low. These two factors were essentially regarded as the measures of customer engagement. Calculated by Google analytics, the bounce rate was essentially a metric that shows the percentage of visitors who visited the website but did nothing on the page they entered. High bounce rate implies that the visitors’ engagement with the website or portal was very low.

The users or visitors were said to be bounced if they end with a single-page visit and there has been no engagement with the landing page or website. Hence, the bounce rate often acts as a metric that indicates the quality of a webpage in terms of its content and whether it fits with the expectations and purpose of the audience.

One of the crucial observations was that, out of total visitors only 12.9 per cent were returning visitors. Over and above that, the bounce rate was 52.70 per cent and the average session duration was 3 minutes and 19 seconds. Refer to Exhibit No. 3.

Exhibit 3 - Analysis of the users with average session duration and bounce rate



Source: Company Web report.

From the data of default channel grouping of Google analytics, it was observed that the majority of traffic used to come either directly or through social media. The other significant channels of traffic were organic search and referrals. It was interesting to note that the bounce rate of users coming through paid search and E-mail was significantly low (Refer to Exhibit No. 4.).

Exhibit 4 – Analysis of the channels that are bringing the traffic online

Default Channel Grouping	Acquisition			Behaviour		
	Users ↓	New Users	Sessions	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration
	0 % of Total: 0.00% (0)	20,321 % of Total: 100.11% (20,299)	29,842 % of Total: 100.00% (29,842)	52.70% Avg for View: 52.70% (0.00%)	3.21 Avg for View: 3.21 (0.00%)	00:03:19 Avg for View: 00:03:19 (0.00%)
1. (Other)	0 (0.00%)	2,061 (10.14%)	2,976 (9.97%)	45.23%	2.83	00:02:18
2. Direct	0 (0.00%)	6,373 (31.36%)	9,111 (30.53%)	49.15%	3.58	00:03:34
3. Email	0 (0.00%)	24 (0.12%)	57 (0.19%)	5.26%	3.82	00:02:44
4. Organic Search	0 (0.00%)	3,644 (17.93%)	5,890 (19.74%)	42.19%	3.81	00:03:55
5. Paid Search	0 (0.00%)	30 (0.15%)	46 (0.15%)	10.87%	5.17	00:05:09
6. Referral	0 (0.00%)	1,062 (5.23%)	1,446 (4.85%)	55.33%	3.32	00:03:02
7. Social	0 (0.00%)	7,127 (35.07%)	10,316 (34.57%)	64.08%	2.61	00:03:06

Source: Company Web report.

The data analytics reports showed that the traffic was predominantly coming through devices like desktop and mobile (Refer to Exhibit No. 5.).

Exhibit 5 – Analysis of the device used by the online visitors for browsing and searching information

Device Category	Acquisition			Behaviour			Conversions		
	Users ↓	New Users	Sessions	Bounce Rate	Pages/Session	Avg. Session Duration	Transactions	Revenue	E-commerce Conversion Rate
	0 % of Total: 0.00% (0)	20,321 % of Total: 100.11% (20,299)	29,842 % of Total: 100.00% (29,842)	52.70% Avg for View: 52.70% (0.00%)	3.21 Avg for View: 3.21 (0.00%)	00:03:19 Avg for View: 00:03:19 (0.00%)	0 % of Total: 0.00% (0)	US\$0.00 % of Total: 0.00% (US\$0.00)	0.00% Avg for View: 0.00% (0.00%)
1. desktop	0 (0.00%)	10,582 (52.07%)	17,175 (57.55%)	49.68%	3.76	00:04:44	0 (0.00%)	US\$0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
2. mobile	0 (0.00%)	9,278 (45.66%)	12,074 (40.46%)	57.17%	2.45	00:01:24	0 (0.00%)	US\$0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%
3. tablet	0 (0.00%)	461 (2.27%)	593 (1.99%)	49.24%	2.72	00:01:38	0 (0.00%)	US\$0.00 (0.00%)	0.00%

Source: Company Web report.

Hence, Navin found that there is need for devising optimal digital strategy, which would enhance the customer engagement to a desired level. A digital strategy typically involves the coordination and collaboration among the factors like digital marketing, online presence, social media marketing, online bookings, customer interaction, customer relationship management, security features, travelling and tourism partner interface, and mobile-based solution etc. ToRoots will have to find effective and efficient ways to drive more engagement on the platform through content based on customers' browsing history and tourism preferences.

Getting Into the Gravity of the Consumer Psyche –

Today the refining the travel and tourism experience - categorically in regards to the experiential tourism category – goes beyond refining the itineraries and packages. It focuses on creating experiences tailored to tourist's intrinsic motivations. It entails understanding traveller psyche and curating the tourist experience that gratifies the emotional and intellectual aspirations of the traveller, with hygiene and safety. Experiential travel and Tourism engages visitors in a variety of genuine, emotionally touching, memorable travel activities. Such activities and experiences connect with the senses, are essentially personal and resonate on an emotional, sensual, cerebral, divine, or sociocultural level. Ideally, the experiential tourism not only connects the tourists with the people and the culture of that place but also enriches them with an experience of a lifetime.

For instance, in India, it was said that the culture, food, tradition, language, livelihood etc. changes, after every 30 to 40 Km. Apparently, there was no dearth of potentially immersive travel options that too with a case that all of them will be unique. However, ToRoots was facing challenges in finding bookable options when they were searching for such destinations and curate an immersive experience as per the expectations of travellers. Navin was intending to target the people who are inclined to go off the trodden path and beaten track, who like to try out exotic places and destinations, interact with the locals and have strong desire to get under the skin of the destination through all possible aspects.

Majority of these places and destinations have the potential to attract the tourist and travellers seeking experiential tourism. However, the locals seldom have any expertise to create and deliver curated experiences. ToRoots needed to re-align its business model to tap these opportunities and unleash the potential of such exotic experiences. The target audience of ToRoots have been highly inclined towards discovering the legacy of the destination, connect with socio-cultural attributes, delve into culinary treasures, obtaining the holistic insights and savouring on local music, food, taste, therapies etc.

While "Experiential tourism" has always been about personalization, long-lasting memories, authenticity of experiences and transformative excursions etc., which would never change. However, what was changed is the medium through which consumers can be reached effectively. Therefore, the other challenge that was faced by management was to figure out the right digital marketing strategy in order to make the offerings of the company resonate with new age travellers, especially the millennials. The next task is to design right marketing-mix and choose right channels to convey the value proposition of ToRoots. Hence, it was all about creating a holistic picture and impression in the minds of the tourists about the experiences that they are going to indulge into during the voyage and cherish for after the journey. This entailed devising an effective and robust marketing strategy that would lead to higher customer engagement before, during and even after the tour.

Besides that, involving or say collaborating with different stakeholders, including the tourists, in designing and managing the entire tour and providing their value orientation and expected experience have been the decisive factors in accomplishing sustainability of experiential tourism.

Since, experience oriented tourists expect high emotional and intellectual involvement at every point of the journey; it is imperative that the experiential tourism provider collaborate with the partners and all relevant stakeholders and ensure that the experience is delivered seamlessly and flawlessly. Other important factors being fully compliant with all legal, health & safety, insurance and other requirements associated with the experience. (Chaudhary & Pandey, 2021)

Embracing the Right Business Model –

In totality, the major challenges that Navin facing was creation of an efficient B2C business model and effective digital strategy, which would contain the ongoing cash burning. One of the reasons behind this cash burning was off-course the low customer engagement and so the conversion rate.

One of the strategic options ToRoots mulling over was to take a different approach and initially adopt B2B model. In this case, TooRoots can go for forging partnership with different travel companies in India and abroad, who were setting longer travel itineraries to inbound travelers. This partnership could be leveraged to infuse ToRoots's offerings in their itineraries.

This would also help ToRoots to increase brand awareness and customer engagement, since the traveler would get to know about ToRoots and its core offerings. Here, the right digital strategy needs to be designed in such way that it would further help ToRoots to position the brand as the thought leader in the domain of experiential travel and tourism.

At this juncture, Navin needed to re-design and refine business model with commiserating digital strategy that will create the desired positioning in the minds of target audience, higher consumer engagement and so the improved conversion.

Once ToRoots achieves higher customer engagement and good brand equity, the experiential travel firm can further look for commencing its B2C model. This Strategy sets out the overall approach to marketing and branding of experiential tourism offering and subsequently entail devising a detailed action plan for curating clusters of experiences by developing cohesive destinations. Nevertheless, other options can also be worked out, which would depend on the contemporary market scenario.

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