

Comparative Study of Tourism Websites in India – With special reference to South India

Dr. Kavita Chavali and Dr. Subrat Sahu***

Introduction

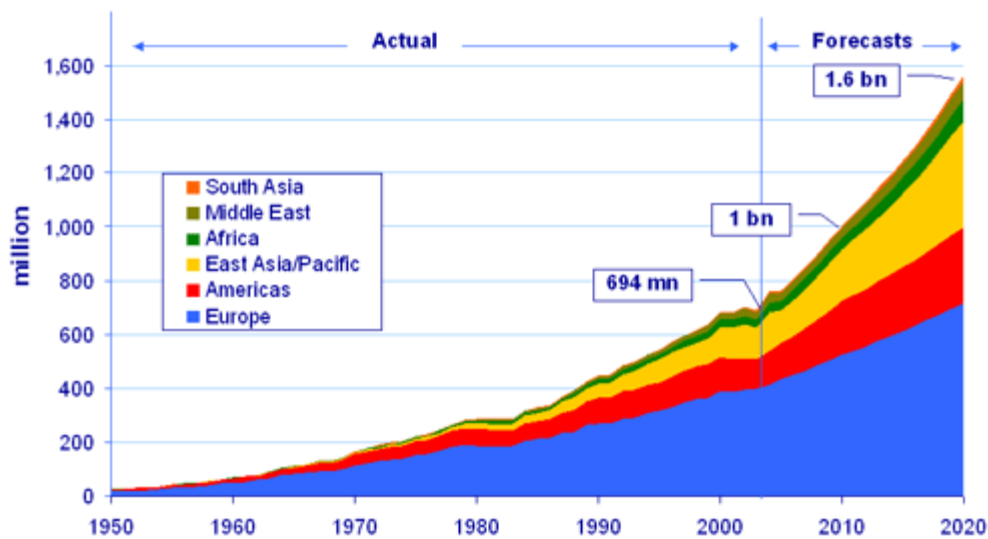
Tourism industry is making tremendous contribution to global economy. This substantial growth of the tourism makes it one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomena of the century. The movement of number of tourists all over the world shows an evolution from a mere 25 million in 1950 to 806 million in 2005, corresponding to an average annual growth rate of 6.5%. Eleven percent of the global GDP comes from tourism and 6% of the total population are employed in this industry.

Demand for tourism depends on the economic conditions of a country. Tourism has a very strong linkage with socio-economic progress of the country and has a multiplier effect on the economy. When economies grow, levels of disposable income will rise and relatively a large part of discretionary income will be spent on tourism, especially in the case of emerging economies and vice versa i.e., tightening of the economic situation will result in a decrease in tourism spending.

Tourism-Global scenario

Tourism 2020 Vision of World Tourism Organization gave forecasts till 2020, with 1995 as the base year. WTO sees no significant change in the trends of forecast. The experience and studies in the past shows short term, periods of faster growth (1995, 1996, 2000) alternate with periods of slow growth (2001 to 2003). The pace of growth till 2000 actually exceeded the Tourism 2020 Vision forecast and is expected to grow in the future.

	Base Year	Forecasts		Market share (%)		Average annual growth rate (%)
	1995	2010	2020	1995	2020	1995-2020
	(Million)			1995-2020		
World	565	1006	1561	100	100	4.1
Africa	20	47	77	3.6	5.0	5.5
Americas	110	190	282	19.3	18.1	3.8
East Asia and the Pacific	81	195	397	14.4	25.4	6.5
Europe	336	527	717	59.8	45.9	3.1
Middle East	14	36	69	2.2	4.4	6.7
South Asia	4	11	19	0.7	1.2	6.2



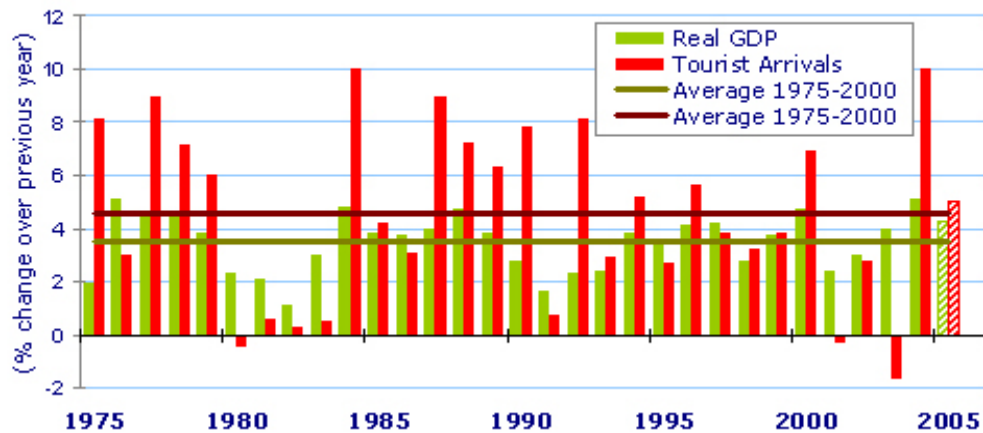
Source: World Tourism Organization; International Monetary Fund

*Associate Professor, Alliance Business School, Bangalore. kavita.chavali@gmail.com

**Associate Professor, Institute of Petroleum Management, Gandhinagar, Gujarat. prof.subratsahu@gmail.com

Tourism worldwide will grow faster, at 5.4 per cent per year over the period 1995-2020 and intraregional travel, at 3.8 per cent. Consequently the ratio between intraregional and long-haul travel will shift from around 82:18 in 1995 to close to 76:24 in 2020. The growth of international tourism arrivals results in growth of economic output as measured in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). When world economic growth exceeds 4 per cent, the growth of tourism volume tends to be higher. When GDP growth falls below 2 per cent, tourism growth tends to be even lower. Tourism grew on average 1.3 times faster than GDP. Travel & Tourism industry is expected to grow at a level of 4.0 % per year over the next ten years, creating an opportunity for every country in the world to be part of this process and to share the benefits.

Economic Growth (GDP) & International Tourist Arrivals



Source: World Tourism Organization; International Monetary Fund

Rapid market growth and competition are the buzz words in the context of global tourism. The development of E commerce has led to many changes in the tourism industry. It threw open a new set of challenges and opportunities to marketing of destinations around the globe. Products and services are offered directly on line to customers which help the customers reduce service costs and attract customers. Building a website to market destinations which once was an option has become a necessity now in the tourism industry. According to the World Tourism Organization the key to internet success lies in the swift identification of customer needs and the establishment of direct contact with consumers, offering them comprehensive, personalized and up-to-date information. The rapid development of internet provides unprecedented and affordable opportunities for global representation and marketing of tourism said Buhalis in 1998. Tourism has a significant responsibility and role to play, not only in global scenario, but also in the Indian scenario.

Indian Tourism

India is a country with rich culture and heritage and a large visitor attractions to boast of. India's cultural heritage and eco-tourism potential are the major consumer preferences of the tourists, visiting India. Its diversity attracts tourists both foreigners as well as its' own citizens, to explore scenic beauty that it has to offer the world. There is no other country in the world which offers such wide choice of destinations like India. These include history tourism, adventure tourism, medical tourism (Ayurveda and other forms of Indian medications), spiritual tourism, beach tourism (India has the longest coastline in the East). According to a research, conducted by Europe's leading travel magazine " Conde Nast Traveller" the top three tourist destinations of the world are Italy, Australia and France. India has been ranked ninth by this study report.

Tourism is the third largest net earner of foreign exchange for the country and one of the sectors which employs the largest number of manpower. It is estimated that tourism in India will contribute to 8.5 crore to GDP by 2020. The overall fund allotment for the Tourism Industry in the 10th Five year plan was Rs.2900 crores as against Rs.750.00 crores in the 9th Five year plan period. The Government of India is heavily promoting tourism, focusing primarily on its resources and strengths and innovative plans and strategies. With these boom in economies and thrust on tourism it has become a priority sector in the

states especially the southern part of India which is globally known for exotic places which is reflected in higher budget allocations and vibrant and vigorous promotion efforts

Motivation of the study

Over 15 years of history, internet has gained widespread acceptance as a communication medium and information source. According to Internet usage and mobile association of India, internet users in India as on 2007 are 4.7 crore which is 3.7% of the total population. There are large number of people who decide on their travel plans by searching online. Internet can provide direct contact making it easier to create customized packages by linking with several company's website. The factors contributing to the success of travel website are lower distribution costs, higher revenues and larger market share. It also complements other traditionally used information sources such as travel agencies. The tourism development corporations of states are spending a lot of resources developing and continuously improving their websites for making them attractive and user friendly. It is seen as a fast moving sector influenced by individual choices about what to visit and where to stay. So it is very important to evaluate the websites to improve the experience of visitors visiting the site by overall value addition. There is research done by individuals and organizations on improving the effectiveness of the websites which markets destinations all over the globe.

Tourism Website Evaluation – Review of select past research

There are abundance of studies in the past on role of ecommerce in tourism industry.

Tourism as a system with four components namely destination, marketing, demand and travel, argued Mill and Morrison (2002) characterized the destination component as consisting of attractions and events, facilities, infrastructure, transportation and hospitality resources. The internet can be applied for all elements of destination mix, but the author feels that most research has been focused on online marketing by travel agents and hotels.

Cano and Prentice (1998) proposed a communication concept for design and management of websites for tourism businesses and presented tourism websites developed in Scotland.

The levels of planning and strategies used by Australian travel agencies investigating the use of the web and the functionality of travel agencies websites, marketing models used and types of information provided by websites is explained by Standing and Vasudavan (2000). The characteristics of pleasure travelers were identified on the basis of internet use Bonn (1998). People who use internet to seek travel information were college educated and under the age of 45. They stayed in commercial establishments and spent more money traveling. The author suggests that it is almost impossible to overlook internet because of its advantages like accessibility, convenience in updating, real time information service, interactive communication and unique customization capabilities.

The destinations should be appealing to travelers who are likely to have greatest economic impact and the internet has the potential of being a viable tool to access these market segments as suggested by Uysal (1994). Page design, managerial issues and information content are the three main points in website development Hanna and Miller (1997). The websites must be 'technically sound, effective in their marketing principles and customer friendly as stated by Ismail (2002).

A study was conducted on understanding the user requirements, behavior and attitude in visiting the tourism websites and user satisfaction levels and identified problems for current tourism website development in China Jie Lu and Zi Lu (2004). In their study they have identified that there is no much correlation between number of tourism websites and the number of tourists visiting that place. The authors argue that the number of tourists visiting a particular destination is dependent on factors such as reputation of landscapes, transport and real services rather than only on web promotion. In their study they concluded that promoting tourism through website as an promotional tool only partially contributes to the customer attraction in the tourism industry.

Tourism websites in China were classified by the type of website provider and the level of online service Woodroof & Kasper (1998). Based on China's situation the type of website provider were identified as government tourism administrative department, tourism agent, accommodation, tourist destination (attraction) organizations, personal and IT network company. The type of online service includes single type service by tourism supplier (such as hotel website only), intermediary service (such as tourism agency website), and regional comprehensive websites (such as city website).

Website evaluation research results can be categorized into four classes. They are Application functionality evaluation ; Cost benefit analysis; Customer (user) satisfaction assessment and Success factors identification. The websites functionality evaluation focuses on online service functions provided by E-commerce websites. Most such evaluation frameworks and models are from a customer perspective to investigate the extent, scope and comprehensiveness of the online offering. Cost benefit analysis is one of the popular methods to evaluate an information system. E-commerce application is a kind of information systems, many researches have attempted to identify main cost benefit factors and conduct cost benefit analysis for E-commerce applications such as Lu (2001) and Brown (2002). The core cost factors identified in Lu (2001) include the expense of setting up E-commerce, maintaining E-commerce, Internet connection, hardware/software and rapid technology changes. The core benefit factors include accessing a greater customer base, broadening market reach, lowering of entry barrier to new markets, alternative communication channel, increasing services, enhancing perceived company image and gaining competitive advantages. Customer satisfaction (user satisfaction) is an important aspect to evaluate websites has prompted to explore how to measure and model it. Customer satisfaction is positively related to the provision of customer needs (Woodroof and Kasper, 1998).

A set of criteria to assess customer satisfaction as a part of website evaluation, including information content satisfaction, usability satisfaction, security satisfaction, convenience satisfaction, efficiency satisfaction and flexibility satisfaction was proposed by Lu and Zhang (2002) . Usability satisfaction involves user satisfaction in information up-to-date, clear language style and links to appropriate resources. E-service website format design, facilitated browsing, search engine provided, accessing speed and customer control of a transaction process are considered as sub-criteria for convenience satisfaction. Customer satisfaction has become one of the dominant factors for the success of an E-commerce application.

Liu and Arnett (2000) proposed a framework to identify website success factors.

Four factors that are critical to website success were identified : information and service quality, system use, playfulness and system design quality. In similar lines Al-Mashari and Al-Sanad (2002) listed a number of critical success factors for E-commerce through analyzing several reported case studies of successful E-commerce applications. These factors include user-friendly web interface, top management support, maintaining strong links with customers and suppliers, powering website with strong search engine, ensuring customer acceptance, and providing up-to-date information. Except a handful of papers related to tourism , online destination marketing and comparative study on tourism related websites have received insufficient attention.

Objectives & Scope of Study

The objective of the study is to make a comparative analysis of tourism websites in South India restricted to a few like Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC), Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (KSTDC), Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) and Tamilnadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) using few select parameters explored from earlier studies and offer select strategic marketing interventions. The study also explores into the type of information that the visitors use and the parameters which influence and increase the usability & functionality of websites. The evaluation is an effort by the authors to improve websites into effective destination marketing tools.

Study design

Website evaluation methods are an important tool to gather information for the development and design of websites to ensure acceptance by the users. Keeping this in mind exploratory research is conducted to find out what type of information is looked for by visitors and the parameters which influence and motivate them to visit the destination. A function is developed to evaluate the effectiveness of a website and is used as a basis to evaluate select websites of south India.

Effectiveness of a website is a function of Information content, Interaction and Interchange functions, Customer oriented webpage design, Advertising products and services, Ease of use, Technical Quality, Website registration with user id and Promotional direction of the website are the important parameters on the basis of which website is evaluated (Jie Lu and Zi Lu, 2004)

Information content is the assessment of information provided on the website. Information plays a key role in tourism purchase decision by making the offer tangible, helping in mental imagery and reducing risk. Hanna J.R P and Millar R.J (1997). Providing trustworthy, dependable and reliable information should be the prime motto of tourism websites. Jie Lu and Zi Lu (2004) identifies lack of trust as one of the main barriers for visitors not accepting online services because of a negative past online experiences. Information dissemination has three sub factors like presentation, sharing and supporting. Presentation of information includes information of attractions in and around the place, tourism related news, policies and having a count of number of visitors visiting the site. Sharing of information consists of options given to visitors to share ideas, experiences and information and take part in online chats, consultation and email facilities. Allowing users to email requests and replying questions on time is an effective way to attract online customers. The option of language translation would be an added advantage. Support services includes online queries, surveys, maps, directions regarding reaching destinations and call for advertisements.

More and more tourists are utilizing internet and online resources for their information needs regarding visiting places (Gursoy and Mc Cleary, 2004). Once the tourist selects a destination, based on the information obtained from a variety of sources including websites, it helps the tourist in tailoring a holiday to his or her particular needs. The quality and quantity of information obtained during the decision making process has a positive impact on destination satisfaction (Peterson, 1997; Szymanski and Hise, 2000).

A tourism destination is always a feel good factor. The tourists depend on both internal (past experience and knowledge) and external information (internet being one among them) to take a decision. When the internal search provides sufficient information for making a decision, external search is not necessary. Tourists with previous experience of the destination, the effect of internet or website may have on destination will be small as the latter will be determined by the previous knowledge of destination. Visitors with no previous destination experience, external sources of information will be the ones providing the information the tourist needs (Peterson, 1997)

The greatest challenge to the website developers in case of tourist seeking destination information is the amount of information overload which occurs in internet users because of low cost of information search which leads the user to undertake a more intensive search for information.(Biswas, 2004). The user suffering from information overload becomes very selective with respect to the information taken into consideration in the decision making process and the end result is the drop in the quality of decision taken. Ease of use will be instrumental in averting the threat of information overload from the internet using tourists.

Interaction and Interchange functions: Interactivity is the uniqueness with online marketing. Bender (1997) defined interactivity helps the viewers of the website to “interact” with the information that has been placed there. Users can control their viewing experience within the limitations of available information. Information relevant to tourism is presented such as train timetables, hotels and souvenir information, supporting information such as maps and product catalogues need to be provided. Users are provided email addresses in the website to allow them to make enquiries about products and services by providing contact email. Online exchanging experience would be a great enticing and motivating factor for visitors to visit the website on a regular basis. E mail booking allows customers to make bookings via email but the payment is still carried out using a conventional method or making online payment with credit cards.

Webpage design: Visitors often find tourist websites via search engines, it is important to grab their attention before they search for alternative websites and the use of photography is a good first step toward this objective. Fantom (1999) suggested a personal, relevant and appealing design of a site is the way to create a positive user experience. According to Bender (1997) attractiveness in art and friendliness in function are essential in webpage design. Although most information the viewers seek comes from the text, it is known that beautiful and striking layouts and images are helpful to capture attention and generate interest. Features providing information ranging from simple photographs to interactive video presentations will make the website more attractive, interesting and realistic to visitors. Use of voice and animation helps to make the information more informative and tangible. Website search features and email connections improve functional value and interactivity by adding personalization to the information gathering process.

Advertising products and services: It involves publishing information about products and services about the destination without price. It talks about the tourism activity in the place or destination, information

about special local products and services available in that destination and tourism guide. Advertising product / information with price information which provide information regarding transportation , hotel, tourism packages, ticket prices. This gives a understanding to the visitor about the place i.e how expensive the place is. Advertisements are the life line of marketing travel and tourism related products on the website.

Ease of use: It is an important component in website design and an effective way to attract online customers. The users in India especially south India are not so internet savvy it should be easy to navigate and get the information they are searching for. It should be user friendly and should guide visitors where to go, where to stay, what to do and how to get there. The best way to quickly draw tourists attention is to have clear categories that easily leads to the information they want. When visiting a destination website, visitors want as quickly as possible, to see if something interests them. Past studies says that drop-down menu would be more comfortable to get information. Information available in the websites if made available in bilingual formats the website would be very useful to meet the needs and interests of an individual user. A tourism destination website should link users to access relevant external products and services like transportation, accommodation, shops and events.

Technical Quality: It directly influences the performance by not only retaining the characteristics of traditional tools but also taking full advantage of the mediums unique characteristics. The browser compatibility checks how well the webpage is displayed when viewed with different browsers. The readiness check shows whether the search engines and directories can index the web page correctly. Load time checks how fast a page loads under different modem speeds. Dallert and Kahn (1999) found that long load times leading to long waiting times can negatively influence the viewers evaluation of a website. Dead links checks show if a page has a dead link. Users can be frustrated by lists of resources which look promising, but turn out to simply dead links or when a keyword search on a destination website returns either no results or listings that are unrelated to their search

Website registration with user id: Visitors if provided with simple registration facilities with an account ID and a password to enable direct purchase. If this provides with more personalized services would encourage more and more visitors to become a registered member. Registration should not be a tedious process sharing lots of details and information. Another added feature could be linking up the website with the email of the visitor and getting regular updates about events in that place, answers to queries asked directed to website directly and the online booking status information if used any

Promotional direction: The choice of vacation destination is a high involvement decision. According to Bonn (1998) “internet marketing is a well suited marketing approach for distinctive high price high involvement, well differentiated characteristics of tourism products and services”. Websites should apply the key marketing principles like segmentation, targeting, positioning, partnership and relationship marketing. Positioning approaches like the use of positioning statements , logos need to be used. Relationship marketing is recognized as being a very useful marketing concept for developing closer customer relationships and a very powerful tool in contemporary marketing. . It can be implemented by developing an enquiry or feedback form or guest book or online surveys. On the other hand Burke and Gitelson (1990) suggest in their study that destination marketing or tourism websites merely enhance the individuals knowledge about the place rather than influence their decision to visit the place. The findings of their study clearly demonstrates that websites do influence visitors choices about what to do and where to stay but did not increase the likelihood of visiting the destination.

Findings

The parameters discussed at length above would be used to evaluate the websites of Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC), Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (KSTDC), Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) and Tamilnadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC).

Information content provided by the website is an important factor for evaluating the effectiveness of a website. Selecting a tourist destination is a high involvement decision.

When a visitor visits a website they want and expect the website to offer extensive information. If the website is rich in content, the visitors would like to get back to the website as many times as possible. But as a contrary, studies in the past say that too much of information on the home page is not appreciated by viewers as it results in lot of clutter and confusion. So the website developers need to strike a balance between the two and provide rich information and avoid clutter also. The primary feature visitors are

drawn to are deals and packages offered to them and visitors feel they get value for money. They should be prominently displayed on the home page of the website which is predominantly done by Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu websites and not by Karnataka tourism website.

Information requirements differ from individual to individual. Internet users fall into categories of surfers and shoppers. The former use the internet for recreation and the latter use internet for a purpose. Surfers might enjoy general information about the destination while shoppers want more detailed information about hotels, restaurants, attractions, transportation, car rentals and travel agents. The objective of the website should be to satisfy both of them by giving them rich relevant information.

Care should be taken that the language used in the website should not be flowery which is a distraction to the consumer. Simple and straightforward text is preferred that tells them about the attractions in destinations without too much of a “sell.” Information regarding all the facilities and conveniences need to be provided. Option of bilingual languages is an added advantage which is provided by Kerala tourism website only.

Tourism activity involves six basic elements food, accommodation, traveling, wandering, relaxation and shopping. Visitors would like to get information for the six elements from the destination website before they plan for vacation. Websites which offers links to other relevant websites would be successful in attracting visitors to the website. All the four websites have been adequately linked up to the other information which the visitors look for like accommodation, shopping, emergency list of hospitals etc. As a part of it tourist attractions and information regarding attractions need to be clearly specified. Kerala tourism website and Andhra Pradesh has done it on the home page itself. Karnataka website gives a list of all the destinations in the place and not focus on promoting specific places as attractions. Tamilnadu tourism website has also done it but it is not on the home page but with few links. The option of number of visitors visiting the website talks about how popular a website is and care is taken by Kerala and Tamil Nadu websites to display it on their homepage. It does influence the decision of the visitor but definitely is a feel good factor.

Interaction and Interchange functions: It helps the visitors of the website to “interact” with the information that has been placed on the website. This is possible with online chats available on the websites. Any information and queries the tourists have, the answers should be immediately available. This is lacking in all the four websites. The website of Andhra Pradesh tourism has a 24 hour help desk as a feature on the website but which does not work. These would discourage the visitors from visiting the website. Calendars on home pages such as the one used by Kerala tourism website make the visitor stay longer. It also helps the visitor to know the events planned on a specific date which helps the tourist to plan their travel.

Webpage design: Tourism industry is a visual industry. “Seeing is believing” so tourist websites need to offer visual treat to visitors visiting their site which has a tremendous impact on visitors interest in the site. It increases their probability of visiting the destination. The website designers should focus on how the site can ‘up sell’ and get new visitors to visit the destination. The role of these tourism websites is also to encourage those who have already decided to visit to stay longer, include more attractions and take more trips. As far as visual treat is concerned Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh tourism websites stand above others which has videos and pictures which demonstrate scenic beauty and richness of the destinations right on their home page.

Advertising products and services: Advertisements earn revenue to the ministry of tourism and state governments who maintain the websites. Studies say that visitors are turned down and put off by related ads on the home page. There is a risk that the credibility of the website is lost by usage to many advertisements on the website, so proper care needs to be taken by the concerned authorities to select the right few advertisements on the website. In all the four websites Tamilnadu tourism website has more of display of advertisements about related activities on their website especially the home page. The objective of the site is lost if a website is used more to advertise products and services than to provide information regarding the destination. The website should provide the attractions of the place in terms of products and services offered. The website developers of Kerala and Karnataka tourism are commendable in promoting their uniqueness of the products and services in the place like unique medicinal practices like ayurveda. The details about packages and combinations available to the visitor is given but specifically the price factor is not mentioned in none of the sites. The reason could be because of the fluctuations in prices in a tourist destination the website provider need to update it on a regular basis, if not the credibility of the site and information provided is lost.

Technical Quality: Search for information is generally done using search engines like google by typing the key words. Efforts should be taken by the website developers to link the website to as many key words as possible to avoid frustration to the visitor. If the web addresses are listed, it frustrates users that there are no direct links to the websites. Users do not want to open another browser and type the address of the attraction they are viewing. They expect a direct link to open another browser automatically. The websites have internal links which when navigated should land up in home page. Of all the technicalities waiting time is the time taken for the webpage to load has the greatest influence on the visitor visiting the website. The website also has external related links with airline bookings and hotel bookings which directly takes the visitor to the home page of the service provider. This feature is taken care in designing Andhra Pradesh tourism website and Kerala tourism website.

Website registration with user id: Studies done in the past say visitors like being able to search for information without sharing any personal information like email addresses. It should not be mandatory pre condition for accessing a website and getting information. All the four websites have an option of being in touch with the website by providing email address and the visitor receives news letter on a regular basis. This would help the visitor to come back to the website more often and visit the destination.

Promotional direction: Places and destinations are uniquely positioned to be identified globally and website should help in creating this unique appeal among its target audience. The states should create tourism out of its natural and traditional strengths that successfully meet international quality expectations and compete with international destinations in marketing. It is important for a tourism website to reflect the personality of the destination and highlight the unique selling proposition and attributes of the destination. Kerala and Tamil Nadu tourist websites were successful in their effort to promote themselves uniquely. The destination has to create a niche for itself. Tamil Nadu presents itself as a place rich in temples and tradition. Kerala tourism website promotes itself as a destination for traditional medicine and breathtaking scenic beauty. Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka has promoted themselves as a destination with a blend of entertainment and tradition and culture. The way the website is designed and the visuals and information highlighted in the website positions a destination as a dream destination. So the website plays an important role in this.

On evaluating the websites using the parameters formulated it is understood that Kerala tourism website stands out in all respects either be richness in information or the way it has positioned itself through the website as a dream destination followed by Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu. According to the statistics provided by the tourism ministry, Government of India, 2006 (source: www.tourism.gov.in) Andhra Pradesh had largest chunk of inbound tourists with 24.2% followed by Tamilnadu with 12.7%, Karnataka 7.8% and Kerala with 4.5%. The statistics of foreign tourists entering these states were little different with Tamilnadu standing in the first place with 9.1%, Andhra Pradesh with 5.9%, Karnataka with 4.4% and Kerala with 3.3%. It can be said that though websites play a very important role in marketing destinations it may not be the only factor which influences the travel plan of a tourist which is already proved in the studies in the past. This gives us scope to further research. The same may be further researched using primary data and the factors influencing visitors to choose a particular destination can be explored.

Strategic marketing interventions

Marketing destinations online has become the major focus area all over the world and India especially south of India is not an exception. Tourism in today's world is no more a luxury. This is made possible by the technological developments in transportation and information technology. The emphasis is gradually shifting from sight seeing to experiencing different cultures, life styles and environments. This brought about innovations in tourism marketing. Lots of funds are pumped into development of tourism by the Ministry of Tourism and the respective state governments. In this situation the researcher felt the relevance to study the effectiveness of tourism websites in promoting destinations. To understand what role these websites have and how far are these helpful in influencing the visitor to visit the destinations. An effort is made also to understand the parameters from the studies done in the past and applying it to some select south India websites. Some of the marketing interventions are:

User requirements: The authors feel that the first step in designing any website and to make it rich, tourist requirements should be determined and all the functions which they are looking for needs to be incorporated. Providing a large amount of update and attractive information followed by ease of use is what majority of the visitors like which is already discussed in the few research studies which is lacking in these websites.

Richness in information and content: Care needs to be taken by the website providers to improve the attractiveness of the websites and also in terms of information and value added services like availability, status of accommodation or transport at a particular place

Interactivity: Online booking and payments need to be encouraged and protection needs to be given to visitors like user id and password. The websites need to be customer centric. Even though feed back forms are available now on websites it should be taken more seriously by the website designers.

Positioning: Websites related to tourism needs to be positioned in a unique way. The authors feel that there is a need to provide more orientation information like a statement of scope and purpose of the site. It should also be appealing in terms of the products and services it markets which speaks about the destination.

Customization: Websites should be as customized and user friendly as possible. It should have the ability to advice visitors on the places to visit and also come out with tentative options of packages and cost involved with it. If the online website can plan the tour for tourists if budget is specified like a traditional tourist agent the visitors would get the value for money and their involvement would be higher. With these online facilities being cost effective it can also be a threat to the traditional tourist agencies.

Linkages: The website should have as many linkages as possible both with search engines and with the other six related elements of tourism like food, accommodation, traveling, wandering, relaxation and shopping which would increase the usability of an online website marketing destination.

Conclusion

This study supports the importance of website as an information source in the promotion of tourism destinations which in particular attracts new visitors. It is important to understand the ways to improve the visitors experience and adding value to the websites. It is also immensely important to understand whether the visitors use these sites to arrive at a decision of a place to visit or whether the visitor had already made a decision and looking for information that excites and motivates them to visit the place. The authors has made an effort to understand what type of information one is specifically looking for in a website. Is it the visual appeal, the content or the ease of navigation or user friendliness which makes the visitor come back to the website in turn the destination. This study says that though the websites play an important role in promoting tourism but it is not the only influencing factor which influence the decision of the tourist. There is a lot of scope for further research in this area of comparing tourism websites and the role played by websites in the decision making process and attitude change needs to be researched to get the value of money spent by Government and State tourism corporations at large. Similar study using primary data can be undertaken. The greatest limitation of the study is that it is purely exploratory based on secondary data and the same study can be taken further using primary data.

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