

USE OF GOVERNMENT TOURISM WEBSITES AS A TOOL FOR PROMOTING TOURISM

Nitesh Goyal*, Sanjeev K. Sharma**

Abstract *It is important to have sophisticated and advanced technology to attain an exponential growth in travel industry so as to manage the quality and increasing volume of traffic in tourism. Previous studies have shown that travelers today demand high quality of travel services, information, products and complete value for their hard earned money. The evolution of innovative tourism services and products along with an exponential increase in tourism demand, has helped businesses adopt IT at a wide-scale and internet as an electronic intermediary. In simple words, the Internet medium acts as a new communication and distribution medium for travelers and providers of travel services and products. Advent of the technology of internet has enabled tourism and travel businesses to further improve their efficiency, competitiveness, productivity and performance. Now we know tourism as an industry is almost worth 1000 billion USD. This study of mine focuses on evaluation of Internet marketing techniques used by Travel companies, Tour operators, Ministry of tourism of various countries and states, Leisure/Entertainment business owners who depend on tourism, Hotels, Resorts/Home stays and other businesses whose bread and butter depends tourism.*

Keywords: E-Commerce, Online Marketing, Online Promotion

INTRODUCTION

It is important to have sophisticated and advanced technology to attain an exponential growth in travel industry so as to manage the quality and increasing volume of traffic in tourism. Previous studies have shown that travelers today demand high quality of travel services, information, products and complete value for their hard earned money. The evolution of innovative tourism services and products along with an exponential increase in tourism demand, has helped businesses adopt IT at a wide-scale and internet as an electronic intermediary. In simple words, the Internet medium acts as a new communication and distribution medium for travelers and providers of travel services and products. Advent of the technology of internet has enabled tourism and travel businesses to further improve their efficiency, competitiveness, productivity and performance. Now we know tourism as an industry is almost worth 1000 billion USD. This study of mine focuses on evaluation of Internet marketing techniques used by Travel companies, Tour operators, Ministry of tourism of various countries and states, Leisure/Entertainment business owners who depend

on tourism, Hotels, Resorts/Home stays and other businesses whose bread and butter depends tourism.

E-COMMERCE & ONLINE MARKETING

E-Commerce can be defined as buying, selling along with marketing of goods and services on the Internet. With the help of E-Commerce, businesses are now able to sell and buy goods and services to consumers across the world helping in generation of business transactions and further improving the ordering and payment mechanism. Now, E-Commerce, is used everywhere for everything across the entire world and can be defined in several ways. E-Commerce entails the ability to deliver products and services; and perform business transactions via networks on the internet. Also, E-Commerce is over a worldwide network that offers companies a global store front at their home and work place via web. Finally, E-Commerce offers the possibility of establishing B2B processes, like supply chain management, or B2C process as merchandise delivery.

The expansion of Internet and the increasing rate of adoption of IT across the world have affected a great proportion of

* Assistant Professor, UIHMT, Panjab University, Chandigarh, ngoyal84@gmail.com

** Director and Professor, UIAMS, Panjab University, Chandigarh, sksharma@pu.ac.in

industries like tourism. It is only in the last few decades that IT has deeply affected the way business is done and the ways that the businesses compete with each other. Internet is a powerful tool which has shifted entirely the traditional way in which travel and tourism products were distributed. Tourism and travel service providers have taken the advantage of the new opportunities and latest E-Commerce applications by allowing users to access their products directly. The fast growth of online users and the increasing rate of online transactions provide clear proof of the popularity of the technologies adopted and implemented. Today, the understanding of behavior of travel information seekers on the Internet is important for the purpose of designing the Internet-based technology and make it more useful.

The advent of Internet in business has altogether revolutionized the entire system of performing business and new ways of business promotion have also come up. In the tourism industry, possessing a web portal or a website has become the basic for promoting the tourism products and services. There is growing reliance on the Internet and Web portals for promotion of tourism. Currently many potential travellers seek a lot of information and may also change their destination and product by just a single click of mouse. This signifies the underlying requirement of some high quality and interactive website to promote such destinations and tourism products. What information do consumers look for and to what extent they should be involved? The road map of customer purchasing this service should be apprehended and value they assign to their priorities should be taken into account. All brands recognize the need of having a loyal online community which can assist to exploit user behaviour and understand their purchasing process better. More work is required to be done to understand consumer behaviour and their purchase actions for tourism using social media. Travellers are becoming increasingly confident researching and booking their holidays online. Therefore, it is almost essential for travel and tourism companies to have an online presence. If the customers can't find the company online, there's a good chance they'll go elsewhere. Beyond the website and other online listings, travellers will also be looking for testimonials and references from other travellers that are now freely available online, through the company website, or from social networking websites and online travel forums.

It is said that more than two third of all the travellers look for some kind of reviews that are available online before they go for final decision on booking. The comments, review and recommendations posted by other travellers have a big influence on decisions for some prospective travellers. Thus, operators need to be aware of social networks and what is being said about their organisation online. The use of Internet has given a new shape to the promotion of tourism

products and their respective demands. Properly designed user friendly websites help improve business promotion as they can attract more tourist visitors. Actually, many factors are affecting website success. A lot is available in the literature about the designing of the websites and numerous web design checklists been developed for the purpose of identifying design and evaluation criteria (Zhang & Dran, 2000). It is important to mention here that Law and Bai (2006) reviewed the published articles on website development and evaluations in ENTER Conference Proceedings from 2000 to 2005 and the Journal "Information Technology & Tourism" from 2000 to 2004. Characteristics of a successful website include richness in information, clear information paths, regular updating, interactivity, and timely responsiveness to the users' feedback. Tourism is a key element of modern societies. It has contributed to local and regional economic development. Probably no other technological development has affected people's behaviour. Use of Internet has grown 146.2% between 2000 and 2005 around the world. Several regions of the world have grown even faster. For example, the number of Internet users in Latin American and the Caribbean Countries grew 211.2%. By 2011, the number of worldwide Internet users was reached nearly two billion out of a population of approximately 6.93 billion. So noticeably in such a short period the way the Internet has. In 2005, approximately 61% of the US population consisted of Internet users. The application of the Internet is also found to be high in other countries, such as South Korea: 66%, Australia: 60%, Japan: 57%), Canada: 56%, UK: 53, and Germany: 50%. Distribution becomes one of the most critical factors for competitiveness in tourism business. Internet has helped the businesses strengthen the importance of such electronic intermediaries Online systems assist tourists to access the information.

The manner that potential tourist search for already evaluated travel and destination information is presently changing with the increasing popularity of tourism websites that contain content submitted by some real travellers (e.g., TripAdvisor, Lonely Planet, MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube) This is possible now using Web 2.0, which refers to the second generation of web-based services letting people collaborate and share information online in more sophisticated ways. Web 2 enables any individual to post their own content, opinions, videos, audio, or imagery on the web for other users to see and respond to. Also, Web 2.0 is changing the way that consumers engage with information presented via the Internet.

The number of tourism businesses utilizing websites is increasing daily to compete in tourism market at local, regional and global levels. This is not a one way or one sided decision but a strategy that is focused on to develop new forms of searching the information by potential travellers. Compared to traditional media, the Internet medium is

much cheaper and time saver. It provides a medium to share information with travellers and potential travellers in the form of interactive sessions. Internet also helps the tourism businesses in identifying the different target markets and in then matching the target market's demands. Hence, websites benefit enterprise–consumer relationships, help increase brand value, and allow the creation of a tourist image.

Online Promotion

Traditional media were just used to be the deliverer of the content. Earlier it used to be like that the potential travellers had to physically approach to a store to make a purchase. However, online stores combine advertising and purchasing both, hence enabling travellers to make a purchase instantly. Thus, the websites helps increase impulsive purchasing compared to traditional media. As a result successful tourist websites draw customers into purchasing and viewing the product in a more favourable way. This is important as recall rate becomes higher when customers are exposed to a continuous visual stimulus that a tourist website may have to offer to the potential travellers. Existing studies illustrate that 85% of marketing, advertising, and sales organisations believe in online advertising; aims to increase the online traffic to the websites promoted. Viewing a banner over a website can send a message. Thus, regardless of whether the traveller clicks a certain page or not, just viewing a banner will increase the chances of a purchase. Online promotional sites content includes variables such as: web interface, background colours, pictures, and sound effects, textual content and dynamic techniques that also contribute highly to advertisements' results. It is now proved that consumers are able to recall advertisements more effectively if they display images and texts. On the contrary, confusing website designs pose a negative effect on the perception about the tourist products and services, and further defect a consumer and decrease purchases generated by the website. Furthermore, users may always remember different animations on the websites. Information communication technologies have been applied in tourism since the early adoption of Computer Reservation Systems in airlines in 1950s. Due to the extensive use of the Internet as an important tool of seeking information, many tourism businesses have shifted from printed form of information leaflets to the Internet during the last decade either entirely or partially. By using the means of Internet, tourism businesses can now customize information and further increase the speed of transmission of information to potential tourists. Today, millions of travellers use the Internet to make travel plans such as getting information on destinations or checking prices and schedules. The Internet is widely used as a means to deliver up to-date content. As a result, it has created the conditions for the emergence of a wide range of new tourism intermediaries. Most Internet

users are from the western world (e.g. European and North American countries) and most visited tourist destinations are present in developing and under-developed nations.

Developed nations like The United States, Europe, and Japan account for almost 81% of the world's total Internet population, adding up to 41% of foreign tourism expenditure. A normal internet user visits around 25 websites in a week, spending as little as 48 seconds on an average on each website. Hence, this kind of short span of time means that alternative tourist destinations are designed specifically to attract the hurried user (Holman, 2011). However, the study carried out by Pan & Fesenmaier (2006) established that the information seeker travellers can also stay for a longer period on each website, if the website contains the relevant content that a potential tourist is looking for, and thus making the information search process more efficient and satisfactory.

Review of Literature

Basu (2004) opined that E-governance is more than just a government website on the Internet. This paper examined the legal and infrastructural issues that relate to e-governance from the perspective of a developing country. The objective of e-governance is to simplify and support governance for all involved, i.e. citizens, government and business. The use of ICTs can connect all three parties and support processes and activities. Therefore, the objectives of e-governance coincide with the objectives of that of good governance. Good governance can also be considered as an exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority so as to manage affairs of a country in a better way at all the levels. It is easier for people in developed countries to better understand a situation in which all types of communication with government can be done through one counter which is 24 x 7, without wasting time and effort waiting in lines. However, to achieve this high level of flexibility and efficiency in underdeveloped and developing countries would not be a cake's walk. The experiences in developed countries reveal that it is actually possible only if the governments are willing to decentralize its responsibilities and processes.

Law et al (2004) investigated the perceptions of travellers on disintermediation of the traditional tourism channel in the context of Hong Kong. The study chose sampling method and finders of the study revealed that at Hong Kong, those who come for travelling to visit their relative purchases less online than those who travel for vacation/ leisure, business/ meeting and to visit friends. Study disclosed that for tourists, travel & tourism agencies were performing better than that of travel websites in terms of the personalised services and human touch involved. The respondents to this study felt that online travel agencies have a good potential to be a popular channel for providing travel services and they

remove intermediation (i.e. travel agencies). Travel Industry Association of America (1998) had also stated that travellers still like to rely on only those travel agencies who provide the human touch and better service quality. Researchers gave the statement that both are supplement to each other to serve the travellers to their greatest satisfaction.

Iliachenko (2006) measured the electronic service quality (e-sq) in tourism and development of a scale for the assessment of e-sq of tourism websites. The study adopted sampling methodology and Iliachenko revealed that customer demographics can significantly affect the way that customers perceive the quality of a tourism website. The results showed differences in perceptions of electronic service quality in age and gender groups. Study revealed that younger population was found to be more perceptive of technological advances as compared to the population in the middle age group (36-50 years). The study also informs us that tourism websites are not very satisfactory and lack in various areas, namely: information, technical, transactions, communication and the visual design. Thus, the failure in any of these or all of these area can cause serious customer defection.

O'Toole et al (2007) observed the ICT usage by SMEs in tourism sector. The researchers revealed that the Irish Small & Medium sized Tourism Enterprises have lately used the internet facility because of a lack of awareness of the value of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) to their businesses, lack of IT and online marketing skills within Small & Medium sized Tourism Enterprises. The study showed that the Irish SMEs were unfamiliar with the language of IT and were dependent on external experts. Internet has been disruptive force in marketing Irish tourism online for the past decade. There is a need to build awareness ICT amongst the tourism representative bodies in order to promote Ireland Tourism. Also the state funds for e-business, e-marketing awareness and training resources for SMEs are needed for the Irish tourism online promotion.

Banday et al (2008) evaluated the web portal for Kashmir Tourism Industry and to search for better design guidelines. The study used sampling method. The researchers found that the ICT has a significant towards the Tourism industry in Kashmir. The researchers have put forward the issues pertaining to web portal development in terms of its architecture, design, strategy, structure, facilities and implementation technologies in order to suggest necessary guidelines so as to make the Kashmir tourism website more useful and successful. And as a result, Kashmir web portal has been identified as the best web portal which has been following the best design guidelines in order to promote the tourism in Kashmir. ICT is being fully used by the Kashmir web portals to attract the maximum number of visitors.

Burgess et al (2009) discussed a study with an objective of studying the use of the web by regional tourism organisations (RTOs) in Australia. The study chose a sample methodology and finding showed that in past studies, Australian government provided funding to RTOs to develop websites to market regions during the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Web technology adopted by RTOs enabled them to market their products and services at a greatly reduced cost. It was found that MICA (The model of internet commerce adoption) was applied to the government sector and tourism industry resulting in its enhancement as an extended e-MICA. The researchers stated that number of RTO sites fluctuated due to the variation in the allocation of funds by governments and during that time period, new RTOs were formed. With the gradual improvements in the website, it became more effective as comparative to the past few years. New RTOs formed were using e-MICA model and doing well through new web techniques to promote tourism in Australia.

Al-Rousan et al (2010) evaluated the role of online marketing for the Jordan tourism promotion. The study chosen was based on sampling method and researchers have used secondary and primary data both. Finders of the study revealed that Jordanian tourism uses online marketing to build personal relationships between marketers and targeted groups by adapting the elements of online promotion mix (i.e. Advertising, Public Relation and Publicity, Personal Selling, Direct Marketing, Sales Promotion). Jordanian travel and tourism companies have more interest in using the four out of six elements of online promotion mix (i.e. Advertising, Public Relation, Personal Selling and announcement) but direct selling and Sales promotion was missing in the strategy of online promotion of Jordian tourism.

Valčić & Domšić (2012) identified the usage of Information Technology for Management and Promotion of Sustainable Cultural Tourism. The study used sampling methodology. The study revealed that there is a requirement for developing cultural heritage as a possible economic sector. In order to generate and increase in economy destinations have to incorporate the online Destination Management System (DMS) that can improve promotion and management. Researchers found that UNESCO sites are the main points of heritage tourism in Croatia but in Croatia there are no DMSs at the national level or for the particular destinations, and cultural tourism in Croatia. It has not yet started to widely use IC and multimedia technologies. They are present at other web sites of special interests that provide limited information but don't have their own web pages. Researchers have recommended that there needs to be such a web portal that would integrate all destinations at one single place and offer a complete set of information. Collaborative networking should be established between all stakeholders raise awareness of e-tourism through training and education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Statement of Problem

The information-intensive nature of the tourism and travel industry suggests an important role for Web technology in the promotion and marketing of tourist destinations. The rapid development of the Internet is also having profound impacts on the industry. In fact, travel and tourism has become the single largest category of products sold over the Internet.

The problem here is to evaluate that how much effort is being put by North Indian Tourism Official Websites in this area of promoting tourism in their regions. A study with a special reference to the Chandigarh tourism official website is needed.

Objectives of the study

1. Identify services provided on the tourism official websites
2. Study of services provided by the tourism official websites of north Indian states with special reference to Chandigarh.
3. Service quality of the Chandigarh Tourism Official Website.

The purpose of the current study is to track the evolution of north Indian states tourism official Web sites, providing a tourist point view of the adoption and use of Web technologies by tourism officials. Chandigarh tourism official website is used as the population of this study. The sample was drawn from various sources, including search engines (for example, Google and Yahoo) utilising keyword searches using the names of each region; North Indian State Tourism official websites. 147 tourists were interviewed and got the questionnaires filled by them who has visited the tourism official website. Secondary data has also been referred which is presented in form of review of literature.

RESULTS

Review of Sampled official websites as per methodology

Review of official websites for promoting the regions were from a tourist point of view. This research revealed the presence of the north Indian states' official websites in the online environment and that they are all promoted via Internet.

This study was conducted with a goal to research a wide range of practices that are applied for building and using different official websites for promotion of tourism in India. According to John Simms (2005), there are several reasons why websites are a necessity, Internet Marketer for Eiledon Solutions, a web design and website development company in Cape Town:

1. Websites are more efficient from the point of view of costs than the classical informative methods (brochures, folders, TV or radio commercials).
2. The expansion on various geographical markets can be made easily thanks to the fact that the potential client has unlimited access to the pieces of information which can determine the client to make a purchase decision.
3. Sites are the best approach to increase the sources of income through paid commercials by other companies which see a certain website as a marketing channel.
4. The potential client has access to information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year.
5. Sites are a comfortable way of accessing, almost immediately, the information that consumers may need.
6. Improving the credibility by offering the customer the possibility to visually analyze what he is going to purchase (through photos or videos).
7. The possibility of timely feedback and
8. doing market researches with a minimum budget (from customer feedback review questionnaires) which will help improve performance and ensure adaptability to the clients' needs.

Profile of respondents

The above table shows the profile of the sample of the study. It shows that majority of the respondents will well educated and the income was less than 50000 p.m.

An effort was made to chose respondents who are very frequent internet users, which we were able to do, as the data revealed that almost 77 percent of total respondents use internet atleast once a day. During the study it was made sure that the respondent must have visited the chandigarh tourism website. This was ensured as a tablet was carried during the data collection to make the website available to the respondent at the place of data collection itself. It was astonishing to find that almost 87 ercent of the respondents had already visited the website.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

The above table shows the mean values and the standard deviation of the various variables that were included in

Table 1. Profile of respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Marital Status	Married	16	34.0
	Single	31	66.0
Educational level	below matriculation	1	2.1
	matriculate	3	6.4
	Graduate	23	48.9
	post graduate	16	34.0
	above post graduate	3	6.4
	others (specify)	1	2.1
Occupation	Govt. Service	1	2.1
	Private Service	8	17.0
	Businessman	7	14.9
	Student	26	55.3
	Others (specify)	5	10.6
Monthly Family Income	upto INR 25,000	10	21.3
	INR 25,001-50,000	11	23.4
	INR 50,000-75,000	9	19.1
	INR 75,001-1,00,000	5	10.6
	Above 1,00,000	12	25.5

the questionnaire to be asked to the respondents. The data revealed a mix bag of responses. The table shows that respondents were satisfied with some of the services while not satisfied with some. If we have an overall look the respondents were not satisfied with the services provided on the website.

Findings

The findings of the study are summarised as below

1. The finding about Chandigarh tourism official website reveal that 96% of the respondents didn't find any broken links/wrong links on the Chandigarh tourism official website, 85% respondents say that website is being updated frequently, 80% say that the online payment option is available, 98% of respondents say that online booking service is available on the website, 98% respondents agreed that contact information is available on the website, 81% of the respondents disagreed on the availability of different language on the website. This shows that technicalities about the website are well dealt with.
2. It was found that that 91% of the respondent disagreed on the availability of online chatting box, 98% respondents say that helpline number is available on the website, 96% say that website contains details of Tourist Information Centre (TIC). 79% respondents are in agreement of currency converter being available on the website. 72% respondents agreed that option of inviting online suggestions is available, 75% respondents disagree on website sending newsletters through emails, and 89% respondents agreed that website has travel tips, 98% respondents agreed upon availability of location maps, 100% respondents agreed upon the availability of photo gallery. 51% says that website takes feedback. It shows that some kind of interactivity is required over the websites.
3. The supports the previous studies in terms of the complaints of the tourists regarding regular updation of the websites. Other common problems like, absence of the information on prices, problems with information search, and lack of the adequate information in English still exists. The proper utilisation of Internet as an instrument for advertising travel destinations and effective highlighting is necessary for travel-related services for the ease of travellers' decision- making processes.
4. Out of the websites of north India, web portal of Jammu and Kashmir tourism has been identified as the best web portal which has been following the best design guidelines in order to promote the tourism in Kashmir. ICT is being fully used by the Kashmir web portals to attract the maximum number of visitors. At Hong Kong, those who come for travelling to visit their relative purchases less online than those who

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Did you find any broken links	1.9574	.20403
Do you find that the website is being updated frequently	1.8511	.35987
Payment option is available on the website	1.8085	.39773
Online booking service is available	1.9787	.14586
Contact information is available on the website	1.9787	.14586
Website in different language is available	1.1915	.39773
Online chatting box is available on the website	1.0851	.28206
Helpline number is available on the website	1.9787	.14586
Details about Tourism Information Centre is available on the website	1.9574	.20403
Currency converter tool is available on the website	1.7872	.41369
Does the website have an option of inviting online suggestions	1.7234	.45215
Do the website send yo newsletter on your email	1.2553	.44075
Does the website have travel tips	1.8936	.31166
Does the website have location maps	2.4255	2.91730
Does the website have photo gallery	2.0000	.00000
Does the website take feedback	1.4894	.50529
I am satisfied with the time taken by webpage to open	4.3617	.91901
I am satisfied with the richness in information on website	4.1064	.63362
I am satisfied with the location of the information available on the website	4.1702	.76098
I am satisfied with details of information about the services available on the website	4.1702	.70152
I am satisfied with corrected ness of content information available on the website	4.1277	.76944
I am satisfied with the time taken by webmaster to solve my queries	3.5106	.71846
I am satisfied with the attractiveness of the website	4.2766	.71329
I am satisfied with the reliability of the website	3.8511	.69089
I would like to recommend the website to others too	3.9362	.70416

travel for vacation, business or to visit friends. In Bahamas, IC card system helped the travel and tourism companies to gathers information such as number of arrivals, departures data, general visitor information travel booking, trip purposes and accommodation.

5. Similarly a study about the South Pacific showed that South Pacific tourism organization's website has less effectiveness and an underscored internet marketing strategy. The internet awareness was missing amongst the local operators.
6. The study showed that the Irish SMEs were unfamiliar with the language of IT and were dependent on external experts. Internet has been disruptive force in marketing Irish tourism online for the past decade. It was found that Greek tourism agents count for up to 5% only of their reservations through internet bookings. Lack of knowledge on how to manage and market the website was identified as the limitation.

Recommendations

Since facts and figures have shown a mix bag of results about Chandigarh tourism official websites, still there were tourists who find that website is simple and needs some more efforts to attract more tourists to the destination and fill the gaps to make it more effective.

- For the various famous sites at the destinations researchers recommend that there has to be a portal that would unite all destinations in one place and offer a complete information and experience as a base of those particular destinations.
- Collaborative networking should be established between all stakeholders raise awareness of e-tourism through training and education.
- There is a need to build awareness ICT amongst the tourism representative bodies in order to promote Ireland Tourism.

- Some lessons need to be taken from the counterparts like that of Jammu and Kashmir.

CONCLUSIONS

As per Bonn, Furr and Susskind, (1998) today, “a critical prerequisite for formulating effective travel marketing strategies must include the understanding of the influence exerted through Internet. The growing presence of Internet as a tool for advertising the tourism products and travel destinations highlights its importance as a factor in decision making processes of travellers”. The growing rate of transactions that are done online and the rapid growth of number of online users provide clear evidence of the attractiveness of the technology. In conclusion, it is quite evident that an enterprise that is customer oriented and information intensive are now extensively adopting the different e-business models and strategies via online media. At present, the understanding the behaviour of information seekers for travel purpose on the Internet is also very essential to design the Internet based technology and make it more effective and useful. And at the end we can say that “Internet with current and emerging multimedia features provides strong opportunities of attracting tourists”.

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