
Destination Based Web-Marketing: an Analysis by Service providers

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Abstract: Web marketing is a new way of performing the task of marketing, made feasible by the advent of new technology namely the Internet. It is a form of direct marketing. Michael E. Porter (2001) has defined the Internet as an enabling technology, a powerful set of tools that can be used, wisely or unwisely, in almost any industry and as part of any strategy. In addition to physical goods, services are increasingly offered through the internet. Electronic services have already changed whole industries, such as banking, health, education, etc., changing the economics behind services offered by streamlining the business and service processes. Tourism industry is no exception to that. Information and communication technology in tourism sector is of special significance. This is due to its special product behavior. Accordingly, various high tech information and communication technologies are in use in the tourism sector around the world. They are used for tourism product development, marketing, distribution and training to tourism sector personnel. Mature tourist destinations are usually highly controlled by the operators. The introduction of the internet as a commercial tool has proved the supply side with an alternative channel for Communication, Marketing and Distribution, which may prove capable of side stepping these middlemen. In the present research, the role to the internet among hotel, travel agencies and airline companies in Jammu is analyzed. Primary survey was conducted among these companies in order to find out the extent of the use of internet in developing Jammu as a destination. With this backdrop, the present study aims to study the role of destination based tourism websites in promoting Jammu as a destination by various Service providers viz. Hotels, Travel Agencies and Airlines in terms of the parameters taken in the study and accordingly to suggest ways and means to improve the websites for better Tourism Destination Marketing. The findings of the study suggest that the websites are scoring above average values on the all the five factors under study namely Functionality, Convenience, Website Layout, Convenience and Content but, however, their performance can still be improved. The Service providers who use these websites, are completely satisfied with the speed of information downloads, transaction processing speed, website designs, logical organization of the website etc.

Key words: Web marketing, Destinations, Service providers

Introduction

Information and communication technologies are gaining importance in different industries. In the media, not a day goes by where themes like new economy, e-business, or e-commerce are not discussed. The tourism industry is also following the trend to take advantage of new technologies. Destination management organizations (DMO) use the World Wide Web (WWW) for the commercialization of destinations and to promote

products and services that are associated with each destination. On the whole, however, the big challenge for the destination marketing is establishing new value-added scenarios based on the new potentials of information and communication technologies (Buhalis, 1997, 1998; Sheldon, 1997). The information society becomes real, due to the fact that changes in consumer behavior reflect new possibilities of communication via online services, in particular the Internet.

Tourism comprises the activities of person traveling to and staying places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes (Bardgett L, 2000). In order to travel to a particular area there must be a reason. For example a person may travel for leisure, business visiting friends and relatives, health, education etc. He/she chooses a destination from one or the other reason. Transport is necessary to travel and accommodation to stay at the destination. So, tourism as an industry has three major components: Attraction, Accommodation and Transport

The structure of the tourism market is described very comprehensively by the books of Poon (1993), Sheldon (1998) and Holloway (1994). Holloway provides a basic understanding of the nature, structure and organization of the tourist industry Schertler (1994) describes in his book that the travel and tourism products are perishable. They must be sold within a certain period of time or they become worthless. The book provides a very good and complete overview about the strategic implications of ICT on the strategy of destinations.



Figure 1. The product creation in the tourism industry

[Source : Markus, Gratzner; Werner, Winiwarter; Hannes, Werthner (2002)]

The Internet/ web is especially relevant to tourism since it enables knowledge about the consumer or tourist to be gathered, as well as vice versa. In particular, information technology- especially the internet is assuming greater importance for the tourism industry. Tourism is already the largest category of products and services sold over the internet, and the web is also widely-used resource for researching and planning travel. Readily available information on destinations and products empowers tourists to compare offerings, put together their own holidays and make direct bookings. The role of travel agents and distribution intermediaries is thus decreasing while new business models, such as low-cost airline carriers, are emerging.

Many industry observers predict that the Internet’s impact on tourism is poised to increase even further. It is felt that these industry observers need to become “information brokers”, providing targeted market intelligence, e-marketing, and operational excellence to the tourism industry. This includes the application of customer relationship

management (CRM) destination marketing and better branding to stimulate website visits and transactions. Online technologies within the tourism industry have significantly impacted on communications, transactions and relationships between the various industry operators (Galloway, Mochrie & Deakins 2004; Sharma, Carson & De Lacy 2000; Sheldon 1998; Werthuner & Klein 1999a; World Tourism Organization 1999). Some of the impacts of and benefits from the internet are outlined elsewhere (Clayton & Criscuolo 2002; Dogac, Laleci, Kirbas, Yildiz & Gurcan, 2004).

The benefits from IT, particularly the internet, for tourism are substantial. These benefits are no longer dependent on proprietary information systems as has been the past experience, since the internet is a commonly available technology. The internet, Dogac, et al (2004) argues, enhances the level of collaboration between tourist operators and brings about greater levels of interoperability with internal and external applications, previously available to tier 1 players via proprietary systems.

Increasingly business network behavior is becoming more prominent in research and is of interest to the tourism industry. A sharing of information, either in a centralized or more collaborative way, would assist in maximization of the value of information and knowledge. Scholars have identified the need for greater collaboration in the industry (Joo 2002; Palmer & Mc Cole 2000; Picoli 2004; Werthner & Klein 1999), recognizing the need to exploit technologies to become more responsive to the market.

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 in 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 the destinations all over the globe.

Review of literature

Tourism is fundamental to the world economy. The World Travel and Tourism Council (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2004) reports travel and tourism is expected to increase to 10.9% in 2014. Tourism is service-oriented industry, which is offered by small and medium sized enterprises and directed, by tourist industry, with help from government and the international community [UNCTAD, 2004]. Tourism is the one of the most important fragmented industry and the source of foreign earnings. The level of

tourism development depends from country to country and region to region. This is influenced by many factors, such as natural or manmade scenes/ social situations, environmental aspect, market competitions etc.

In recent years there have been many uses of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in tourist industries. Some authors have given the term 'E-tourism' for the use of ICT to tourist industries. This mainly includes the e-commerce applications for managing tourism business with the held of information systems. E-tourism is the innovative concept of the tourism development. According to Buhalis e-tourism is a single bundle of three distinctive disciplines as shown in Figure 2 (Buhalis. D., 2003). It comprises business, Information Technology/ system and tourism functions. The development of these three sectors is prerequisites for the e-tourism development. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has initiated e-tourism development and mainly it is concentrating on development of e-tourism marketing.

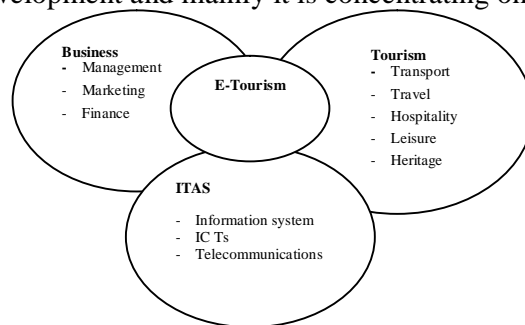


Figure 2. Combination of e-tourism factors [source: Buhalis. D (2003)].

Our society is changing into an information knowledge society. Many companies and organizations in the tourism industry are already using new information technologies today. It is not simply a computer or a network that is used by a company like a hotel. It is a whole system, the networks of computer and communication technologies, which are used by the whole industry. All players have to become users to ensure their own survival and competitiveness.

The web is the tool for change, providing the opportunity for unprecedented flexibility, collaboration, and speed. It is a perfect platform for the travel and tourism industry to bring information about their products to the customers all over the world, in a direct, cost minimizing, and the time effective way. As many authors have claimed: Tourism must be treated as an information intensive industry (Schertler, 1995; Poon 1993; Sheldon, 1997; Inkpen, 1998).

The web, as such an ICT, influences every part of the tourism network; it enables each player and also new one to go into contact with others of the value chain and especially, with the consumer. This will affect the whole industry, its value change, and the way, the companies do their business in the system. The most important changes will be in these sectors: the web is a possible instrument to close the gap between local suppliers and the demand side (Werthner 1996; Werthner 1999).

There is general agreement that information technology and especially the 'WWW' is extremely important pool of knowledge to find the destination information and almost every frequent tourist knows how to exploit the internet in order to choose or even purchase a desired destination. The website of a tourist organization becomes a very important extension of the organization which might very well be used to portray the image of the organization (Maswera, Dawson & Edwards, 2005).

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 (Standing and Vasudavan, 2000). The characteristics of pleasure travelers were identified on the basis of internet (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 (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 (Ismail, 2002).

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.

It is a known fact that, our country i.e. India, which promises to be a great touristic destination with its rich culture, heritage, scenic beauty, breathtaking sea beaches, wonderful hill-stations, and monuments, with all its diversity, is unable to generate the traffic flow of tourists, both foreign and domestic. India gets only 0.67 % of global tourist

market. In spite of tourism given the industry status and all measures taken to promote tourism, it still leaves a lot to be desired. At present we need to revolutionize the whole Tourism and Hospitality industry, and what better tool than Internet to do it; by adopting the concept of e-tourism. Online tourism in India would be a platform that enables direct booking, easy payment for end-user, and business-to-business trading for product providers, travel agents and resellers. All those websites and portals launched by government as well as private organizations would offer a wide range of tourism products and services like airlines, hotels, restaurants, camp-sites, tours, activity centers, concerts, festivities, shopping and many more with choicest of assortments of services. The travellers would be able to make online reservation, bookings and receive immediate confirmation, this would remove a lot of obstacles which are faced by a tourist in India generally, and would give a great boost to tourist arrival in India. Specially, hotels and travel agencies have already adapted to the Internet may be using it for doing far better business. From buying of raw material to auctioning off surplus rooms in a property, the World Wide Web has presented to the industry a tremendous and easy way of bundling up more profits. But all said, the very vastness of the World Wide Web has made it improbable for the business to tap to the fullest (IMCHTAN, 2001).

Finally, e-tourism is a great leveller, and very democratic, it promotes both brands and niche providers equally well. For those looking for a mainstream purchase, whether of room-nights or F & B supplies, the explosion of choices means that users increasingly find reassurance in dealing with a good and known brand names with good range of product and proven reliability, credibility and service. On the other hand, if one is looking for something out of the ordinary, niche providers can be found just as quickly and easily; and ordering it and paying for it are equally simple for everyone. And this is possible if the websites are easy to access too. Therefore a need is to make the web pages easier in terms of its layout, content, convenience, its serviceability, etc. Thus based on this, an attempt has been made to evaluate the perception of service providers about the role of tourist websites in promoting Jammu as a tourist destination.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to study the role of destination based tourism websites in promoting Jammu as a destination by various Service providers viz. Hotels, Travel Agencies and Airlines in terms of the parameters taken in the study.

Hypothesis

With this background, the Present study aims at the following Hypotheses:-

H1: There is no significant difference between the responses from various categories of tourism organizations in terms of selected parameters viz. Functionality, Convenience, Website Layout, Content and Serviceability.

H2: There is no significant difference in the factors across the selected organizations viz. Hotels, Travel Agencies and Airlines.

Research Methodology

Choice of the Sample: The Present Study aims to evaluate the role of destination based tourism websites in promoting Jammu as a destination. And this evaluation is been done by the Service Providers i.e Airlines, Hotels and Travel Agencies. For this purpose, all

the 7 airlines operating from Jammu Airport i.e Air Deccan, Indian Airlines, Sahara Air, Jet Airways, Kingfisher, Go Air and Spice Jet has been taken; all the A-class Private hotels of Jammu (been categorized by Dept. of Tourism, J&K) i.e Hotel Asia, Jehlum Resorts, K.C Residency, Hari Niwas and Fortune Inn Ravera; and finally the IATO recognized Travel Agencies in Jammu i.e Nidheesh, Gauri Travels, Masters Tours and Travels, Radhika Travels and Alpine Travels are been taken for the study. So in all, respondents from these 17 organizations have been taken. All the three hierarchical levels are been taken into account i.e from each hierarchical level i.e Managerial, Supervisory and Operational, one respondent is taken so that the even number of responses from all the levels in the organizations can be collected. Therefore total of 51 responses were eventually collected.

Table 1. representing Sample Design

Type of Organisation	No. of Organisations	No. of Respondents			Total no. of Respondents
		Mng.	Sup.	Oper.	
Travel Agencies	5	5	5	5	15
Hotels	5	5	5	5	15
Airlines	7	7	7	7	21
Total no. of Respondents					51

Survey Instrument: The respondents were given the self-structured questionnaire entitled “Destination based Web marketing: An Analysis by Service Providers”. They were to give their responses on the 5- point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The Survey Instrument is taken from the study by Mehta & Broca (2008) and was a two part Questionnaire. The questions in the first part are about the demographic profile of the respondents and the second part is based on five factors viz. functionality, convenience, website layout, content and serviceability to study the perception of service providers of the website based on the 7 C’s Framework which has been given for the Design of User Interface for the virtual firms (Mohd., Fisher. Et.al., 2002). Compelling sites communicate the core value proposition of the organizations and provide a rationale for creating an impact to visit the destination on the user. On the basis of this 7 C’s framework, five factors have been worked out for the purpose of the present study to evaluate the effectiveness of the web. (Figure.3)

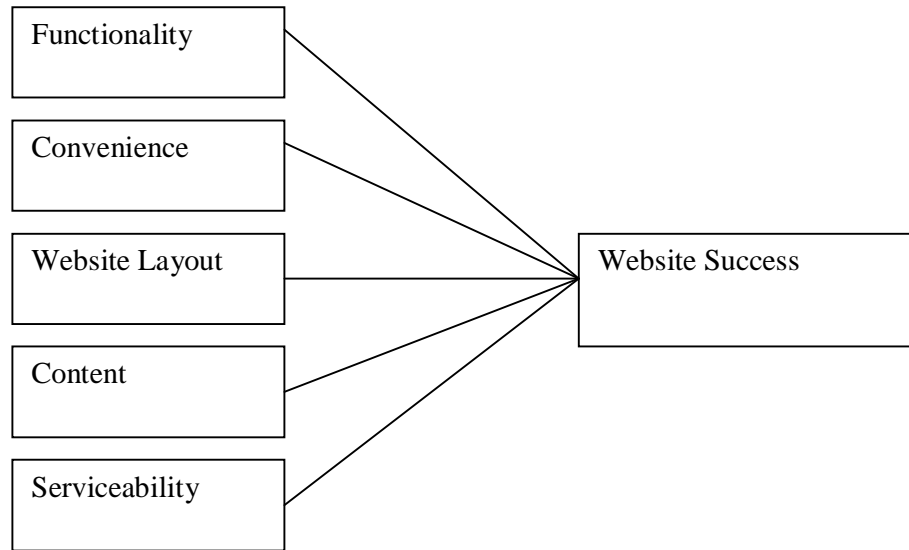


Figure 3. Factors affecting tourism Website success (Based on the model by Mohd., Fisher et. Al., 2002) (Source: Mehta & Broca, 2008)

Data Analysis: For the analysis of the data, various statistical tools like average, mean, ANOVA, percentage and pie-charts have been used. Average is used to find out the perception of service providers towards web effectiveness. Percentage is used to evaluate the demographic profile of the respondents. And two-way ANOVA is applied to compare Travel Agencies/ Tour Operators, Airlines and Hotels in terms of various parameters under study i.e functionality, convenience, website layout, content and serviceability.

Data Analysis

Section A: Demographic Profile

The Demographic profile of the respondents chosen for the purpose of the study is given as under:

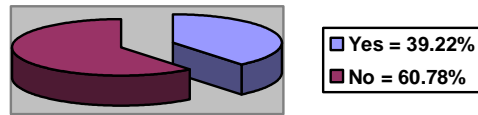
Table 2: Demographic profile of the respondents

		N= 51	
S.NO.	DESCRIPTION	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	%AGE OF RESPONDENTS
1.	GENDER		
	(a) Male	36	70.59
	(b) Female	15	29.41

2.	ORGANISATION		
	(a) Hotels	16	31.37
	(b) Travel Agency	14	27.45
	(c) Airline	21	41.18
3.	AGE GROUP (in yrs)		
	(a) 18-24	12	23.53
	(b) 25-34	28	54.90
	(c) 35-44	7	13.73
	(d) 45-54	2	3.92
	(e) 55-64	2	3.92
	(f) 65 & above	0	0

Section B: Average scores been given to the categories

Experience of marketing / promotion



When the respondents were been asked about their experience of marketing / promotion, only 39.22% subscribed to this view point while as the majority of them i.e 60.78% did not agree to this.

Section C: Data Analysis

The data collected from all the organizations have been analyzed and mean score values have been found for all the five factors and the ranks are given below:

Finding of the Study

Perception towards Web Effectiveness – Responses by Hotels

It has been found out that in case of responses from Hotels that Content scores the highest ranking with mean score values of 3.83 followed by Serviceability and Website Layout with mean score values of 3.7 and 3.46 respectively. The minimum score has been attributed to the parameter Convenience (3.11) indicating that Convenience is the least rated factor by the respondents while determining the perception of the respondents about the website.

Table 3: Perception Towards Web Effectiveness by Hotels

Factors	Mean Score Values	Rank
Functionality	3.37	4
Convenience	3.11	5
Web-site layout	3.46	3
Content	3.83	1
Serviceability	3.70	2

Web effectiveness ----- Responses from Travel Agents

In case of the Travel Agents, the Serviceability as a parameter ranks highest with the mean score value of 4.01 followed by Content which has a relatively lower with the value of 3.77. The Travel Agents who are availing the services of websites of Jammu rank Convenience as third important parameter (3.76). Website Layout and Functionality however have scored low with their mean score values computed at 3.75 and 3.57 respectively.

Table 4: Perception Towards Web Effectiveness by Travel Agencies

Factors	Mean Score Values	Rank
Functionality	3.57	5
Convenience	3.76	3

Web-site layout	3.75	4
Content	3.77	2
Serviceability	4.01	1

Web effectiveness -----Perception of the Airlines

In the case of responses from Airlines, the Content has been ranked as the first important factor with mean score value of 3.85, which is followed by the Convenience (3.84). The next mean score value has been computed for Serviceability (3.79) which is slightly lower than obtained by the Convenience. The other factors like Functionality (3.60) and Website Layout (3.52) have been rated low.

Table 5: Perception Towards Web Effectiveness by Airlines

Factors	Mean Score Values	Rank
Functionality	3.60	4
Convenience	3.84	2
Web-site layout	3.52	5
Content	3.85	1
Serviceability	3.79	3

Table 6: Computation of F-Values

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degree of Freedom	Mean of Squares	F- ratio (calculated)	F Value from Table
Between Columns (between the type of Organisations)	0.024408	2	0.0122	0.948	4.459
Between Rows (between the Factors)	0.379272	4	0.0948	7.366	3.838
Residual Error	0.102983	8	0.0128		
Total	0.506664	14			

Findings of ANOVA

Table 6 shows that the calculated value of $F_{0.05}$ is less than that of table value in case of treatment between columns, so *Hypothesis: 1*, i.e. there is no significant difference between the responses from various categories of tourism organizations viz. hotels, travel agents and airlines in terms of selected parameters, is accepted where as in case of treatment between rows the calculated value of $F_{0.05}$ is more than that of the table value therefore, *Hypothesis: 2* which states that there is no significant difference in the factors across the selected websites, is rejected. This means that there is significant difference in the performance of the site as far as different parameters are concerned.

Conclusions and Future scope foe research

E-tourism is bringing together some of the most rapidly developing industries including information and communication technologies (software companies, telecommunication companies, service providers), the tourism and travel industry (destination organizations, hospitality, tour operators, transport) and different research institutions and areas. Internet and the tourism and travel industry can, or better, have to be seen as an interdisciplinary field. With the rapid penetration of the Internet, its use as a medium for communication and transaction is increasing. Also all the service providers viz Airlines, Travel agents and Hoteliers rely on the various websites while dealing their products which somewhat deals with the particular destination, and thus they somewhat promote the destination which is the outcome of the various destination websites. Therefore, the study attempted to determine the role of destination based tourism websites in promoting Jammu as a destination by Service providers.

The findings of the study suggest that the websites are scoring above average values on the all the five factors namely Functionality, Convenience, Website Layout, Convenience and Content but, however, their performance can still be improved. The Service providers who use these websites, are completely satisfied with the speed of information downloads, transaction processing speed, website designs, logical organization of the website etc. The management of the websites should devise strategies and think about enhancing the performance along these variables so that over all effectiveness of the site could be improved.

The findings of the study will contribute to enhance the performance of various websites based on the responses from the study. The organization needs to be more responsible for service provider's satisfaction with regards to these websites Thus the findings of the present study aims at addressing this issue and provides a base for future benchmarking initiatives.

A usable website promotes effective interaction. The factors i.e Functionality, Convenience, Content, Website Layout and Serviceability effect how visitors use and perceive web based systems and may explain that why some sites are promoting a destination more than the other.

Implications of the Study for Policy Formulation

It is suggested that the tourism businesses should try to enhance the level of websites so that the service providers are in the better position to enhance a destination image. The aim of the paper is to provide an overview of the present research, the available literature resources and the required research fields for future work. It also shows that the research in E-tourism is still at its beginnings and therefore growing and changing with every day. It is further suggested that the destination website management should also provide for more functionality so that the service providers are consistently aware of the new developments been taking place regarding the destination and accordingly they can move in on. Care must be taken that the service is extremely important in the Virtual context as well.

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