

INTERNET TOURISM MARKETING STRATEGIES OF LEADING INDIAN STATES: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Internet marketing is an indisputable element of destination marketing plan and DMOs are extensively engaging on with Internet. In this study, tourism policies of six important tourism states of India, namely Kerala, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat have been studied using content analysis. The findings revealed that policies are mainly focused on application of various digital media, technologies for information distribution and destination marketing and mobile apps. But, the area of budget & Human resource required for internet marketing and role of internet in market research are commonly overlooked. Comparative analysis on dichotomous scale observed that the state tourism policy of Uttar Pradesh has discussed strategies thoroughly which helps in policy implementation and assessment while tourism policy of Kerala needs urgent revision.

Keywords: *Indian State Tourism Policies, Internet Marketing, Content Analysis, Comparative Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Internet marketing or online marketing is the fastest growing and most exciting branch of marketing today (Jones, Malczyk, & Beneke, 2011) which includes use of the Internet to market and sell goods and services (Epstein & Yuthas, 2007). It has forced DMOs to change and update their structure and strategies (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, & Leary, 2006; Qi, Law, & Buhalis, 2008). As a result, Internet marketing is becoming an inseparable, often times a determining part of their overall marketing endeavor (Boes, Buhalis, & Inversini, 2013). It enables destinations to enhance their competitiveness (Buhalis, 2000).

Though the application of internet for destination marketing remains a key issue in the field of tourism academic research, enough literature is not found on the aspect of internet marketing planning; especially which is mentioned in the respective tourism policy. Adding to the point, literature on Indian tourism policies is meager.

In this vein, the present research study has performed the content analysis of tourism policies of six important tourism states of India, namely Kerala, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat. It has helped in investigating internet marketing planning of the above states. The analysis is given in detail along with observations and recommendations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

DMO and Tourism Policy

Destinations offer an amalgam of tourism products and services, which are consumed under the brand name of the destination (Buhalis, 2000). Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are non-profit entities, responsible for the marketing of destinations to generate tourist visitation for a given area (Elbe, Hallén, & Axelsson Björn, 2009; ETC & UNWTO, 2003; Gretzel et al., 2006; Pike, 2004). Bastida & Huan (2014) stated “DMOs officially represent the cities and have the most impact on visitors”. Therefore, it is the primary responsibility of DMO to develop and promote the destination by managing certain key activities, such as funding, strategic planning, marketing, decision making, and product development of the destination. For that it has to develop, formulate and implement their strategies with very systematic, coherent and consistent manner in order to achieve their goals (Soteriades, 2012). These goals are specifically defined in tourism policy of the region.

Pius (2014) defined tourism policy as a set of basic guidelines or framework to guide tourism development actions and it is a strategic declaration of intent within which tourism is expected to develop. Jenkins, Dredge, & Taplin (2011) described that the policy document sets the parameters for planning within which planning activities such as

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collaboration, consensus building and decision making are undertaken within and around destinations.

In this regard, Buhalis (2000) annotated that marketing is used as a mechanism to facilitate the achievement of tourism policy. Further, he added that marketing research assist and inform tourism policy by identifying target market, pre-visit and post-visit perceptions which ultimately help in destination brand creation. Thus the earlier research has shown strong relation between destination marketing and tourism policy, as marketing lends a hand to achieve strategic objectives of the policy.

Destination Marketing and Role of Internet

Morrison (2013) urged that Destination marketing is a fundamental role and high priority of DMOs, so the planning of destination marketing should be done professionally and thoroughly which require high level of creativity and innovation.

Li, Robinson, & Oriade (2017) in their research summarized the major changes occurred in tourism industry over the past twenty years, which include the emergence of the internet, the emergence of Web 2.0 and the impact of e-WOM. These phenomenon have drastically changed the way that companies design their marketing strategies (*Internet Marketing*, 2011). Moreover, it is observed that with the emergence of internet, DMOs are taking efforts to develop comprehensive internet marketing strategies for destination to target global market.

Chaffey, Chadwick, Johnston, & Mayer (2015) defined internet marketing as “the application of internet and related digital technologies in conjunction with traditional communications to achieve marketing objectives.” It comprises not only advertising that is shown on websites, but also other kinds of online activities like email and social networking (Sigala & Marinidis, 2012).

Internet marketing has rapidly become the most important form of marketing and the major information communication tool for DMOs around the world (Morrison, 2013). Global reach and affordability of the channel helped DMOs in overcoming their challenges of insufficient funds and global cut-throat competition.

With the increasing importance, the amount of research related to Internet marketing has grown rapidly (Corley, Jourdan, & Ingram, 2013). But many earlier studies on the topic of ‘evaluating the internet marketing strategies of DMOs’ have focused on studying official websites (Feng, Morrison, & Ismail, 2004; So & Morrison, 2004) and social media strategies of them. No sufficient literature is found on the topic of internet marketing planning and policy. Adding

to the point, no research is found on the area of internet marketing planning and policy of India.

Indian Tourism

Being well-positioned cultural tourism destination in the world, major tourist traffic in South Asia is driven by India (+5%) (UNWTO, 2016); receiving 24.71 million foreign tourists in the year 2016 (PIB GoI, 2017). Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT, GoI 2013) emphasized the role of technology in tourism promotion as the modern day panacea to attract and influence tourist choice and opinion of a particular destination. According to them, social media applications and web based information give ample scope for publicity and destination development within a short period of time. While explaining the importance of digital travel technologies for destinations at Digital Travel, Hospitality Innovation Summit organised by FICCI, Suman Billa (Joint Secretary, Tourism, Government of India) elucidated that India as a destination cannot move ahead without being fully digitally enabled (TBM Staff, 2017).

Nonetheless, research studies portray pity picture of the underutilization of the potential of internet marketing by Indian tourism. The action plan suggested by India Initiative of WTTC (2014) stressed the need of urgent revision of “Incredible India” campaign and to make it to be ready for a Version 2.0 to re-position India as a major tourist destination and to achieve its potential. The earlier study done by the researchers (Satghare and Sawant, 2017) demonstrated that DMOs of India failed to take optimum benefits of destination websites and suggested to look into location based & mobile empowered services.

More to the point, though the area of tourism is well researched in the context of Indian tourism industry, no visible literature is found in the field of Indian e-tourism, specifically on the topic of IT initiatives by DMOs (Satghare, Sawant, & Ragde, 2017).

In this vein, the present research is a sincere attempt to fill the gap successfully by investigating the internet marketing planning of the selected Indian DMOs. The paper aims to analyze the contents of tourism policies of six important tourism states of India, namely Kerala, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat. After in depth review of these policies, code was developed and comparison was performed by using QDA Miner Lite software.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

Top 15 Foreign tourist arrival (FTA) states of India were selected at initial stages of sampling of DMOs. It is

followed by the application of Factor loading technique of Benchmarking to finalize the top 6 DMOs which are effectively using internet marketing strategies for promotion of the state (Table 1).

It led to the selection of destination websites of DMOs of Kerala, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat for further analysis (Table 2).

Table 1: Criteria for the Selection of DMOs

Sr. No	Factor	Details	Factor Loading (Marks)
1.	Foreign Tourist Arrival	Ranking is done according to the data given by MoT, GoI (2015)	15
2.	Alexa global rank for the website	Ranking is done according to the global rank provided on the website of Alexa (http://www.alexa.com) (on 29th May 2017). Alexa Internet, Inc. is a California-based reputed globally well-known company that provides commercial web traffic data and analytics, wholly owned subsidiary of Amazon.com.	15
3.	No. of Hits/ website visits	No. of hits/ website visits provided on the website (on 29th May 2017). Websites which have not mentioned the hits failed to score under this factor.	15
4.	Preliminary review of Official website of State tourism	For the website, 3 sub-points were decided: Look & interface of the website, Information given on the site and overall experience of the website visit. Each sub-point has given 10 marks.	30
5.	Social media strategies	Social media marketing activities of the DMOs are observed. As Facebook, twitter and youtube are most commonly used social networking sites for destination marketing hence these 3 selected and 10 marks are allotted for the each site. For facebook, no. of likes, frequency of post, shares and comments on the post are observed. For twitter, frequency of tweets, followers are observed, while for youtube view, subscribers and frequency of the activities are viewed.	30
6.	Awards for use of IT in marketing or digital marketing	For International award:5 marks For National award:3 marks For State level or other recognition: 2 marks	10
7.	Other Internet marketing strategies of the state	Other innovative practices of internet marketing	5
8.	Total	120	

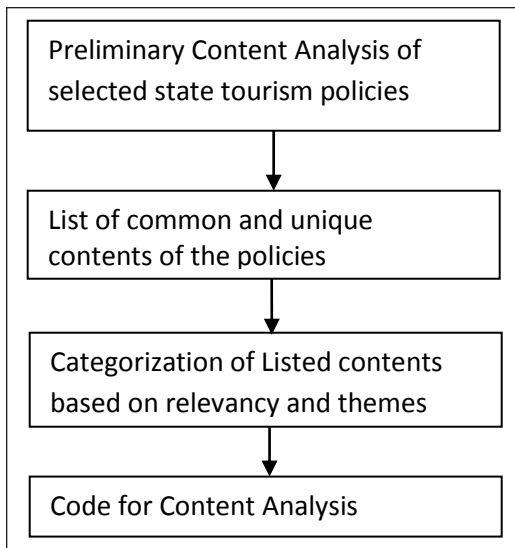
Table 2: Selected State for the Study

No	State	Obtained Marks
1.	Kerala	104
2.	Gujarat	81
3.	Uttar Pradesh	76
4.	Maharashtra	75
5.	Rajasthan	68
6.	Karnataka	51

Developing Content Categories

According to Prasad (2008) developing the category system to classify the body of text is the heart of content analysis. Content categories can be defined as compartments or “pigeon holes” with explicitly stated boundaries into which the units of content are coded for analysis.

As per the aim of the present study, the process was initiated by preliminary analysis of the state tourism policies of sample DMOs (Table 2), which was resulted into the extensive list of common and unique contents mentioned in all policies. Further researchers have added few contents after extensive review of literature which could enhance the internet marketing planning. After open coding, repeated contents were removed, similar contents were merged as single content and few broad categories were identified. Re-evaluation was done and more meaningful and detailed categories based on their relevancy to each other were structured, which resulted in to the formation of 10 major categories (target market, Media planning, official tourism website, marketing budget, mobile based services, engaging users through internet, market research and forecasting by using internet technologies, Destination marketing and promotion, human resources and role of internet in state branding). Under these categories 32 contents were coded.



Code Definition

- **Target Market:** Market segmentation and targeting is the important step of marketing planning (Kotler, Keller, Koshy, & Jha, 2013). Each sample policy talks about the market and commonly used contents to describe it which include “newer, existing, domestic and international”.
- **Media Planning:** Media planning which decides optimum spend across different media channels (Chaffey et al., 2015) has been emphasized by the policies. The discussion included digital media, social media and traditional media as sub-themes.
- **Official Tourism Website of State:** Morrison (2013) highlighted that one of the best way to effectively use the internet is through creation of interactive and informative website. It is reflected in the preliminary analysis of the selected policies. The policies have mentioned about the website for improving services for tourists, stakeholders and development of website collaterals / multiple websites and other.
- **Mobile based Services:** Smart phones and mobile apps are new ways for the tourism industry to connect with their visitors (Kennedy-eden & Gretzel, 2012). Internet marketing planning of DMOs highlighted the use of different mobile apps including location based services.
- **User Engagement:** Virtual tours, online competitions, campaigns are the modern ways to improve user engagement. The sample policies planned to take benefits of virtual tours, knowledge base games and online contests.

- **Market Research and Forecasting:** Market research and forecasting part of the policies has covered the Management Information system (MIS), data analytics, special assistance and PPP for market research.
- **Marketing and Promotion:** This section of the code covered the contents which were used by the policies to explain the way of marketing like innovative, aggressive, integrated, promotion of new destinations and events etc.
- **Human Resource:** To overcome the hurdle of inadequate manpower, sample state tourism policies have made two provisions: i. To train present manpower and ii. To empanel other agency.
- **Marketing Budget:** Financial resources are considered crucial in every planning process. Special budget for internet marketing and financial assistance to stakeholders were commonly discussed topics in state tourism policies.
- **Branding Using Digital Technologies:** The common themes observed in the policies related to branding of the state include strengthening/ modifying existing brand and introducing new brand.

Reliability of Content Analysis Code

Neuendorf (2002) mentioned that content analysis measures are meaningless without acceptable levels of reliability. He defined Reliability as the extent to which a measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials. The method is called as Inter-coder reliability test which measures the percentage of agreement between raters/ coders for the code.

Coefficient of reliability is calculated for inter-coder reliability by dividing the number of units placed in the same category by the number of units coded [Coefficient of reliability = Number of units in the same category / Total number of units coded] (Prasad, 2008; Stemler, 2001).

Five PhD scholars performed the reliability test for the developed code. They were briefed and trained about the code and research work before the coding. The test was executed on 20th May 2016 which took 2 hours for coding each element.

Few ambiguities about statements and contents were resolved after discussion and as per the necessity, coder revised their ratings. Finally, the ratings were compared to calculate coefficient of reliability. It showed high agreement rate of 89% hence the code was finalized and used for further research.

BRIEF DISCUSSION ON THE POLICIES

Tourism Policy of Maharashtra 2016

Maharashtra state which ranks second in foreign tourists arrivals (GoI, 2016) in the country recently published its new tourism policy. The policy aims at positioning the state as “Numero Uno” destination by integrating traditional media with digital and social media. It has put forward the five step approach for marketing which includes creation of world class website for Maharashtra tourism.

Action plan of the policy focused on improving use of short films/AVs, TV and internet ads. Further, it discussed about improving online presence and developing marketing collaterals for the Maharashtra tourism website. It also planned to provide separate online portal for information on locations for film tourism. Other digital initiatives include development of mobile apps for tourism related information and safety measures.

According to the policy, work of development and maintenance of internet marketing strategies would be given to the empanelled digital marketing agency. Marketing research, data collection, data analysis and publications would be looked after by Maharashtra Tourism Investor Facilitation Cell to increase investment in the region.

Tourism Policy of Kerala 2012

Marketing practices of Kerala tourism has been always awarded at national and international level. Unfortunately, the tourism policy of Kerala provided very short and brief plan for tourism marketing. It aims to market the state as a visible global brand in domestic and international market. It focused on increasing FTA by developing specialized marketing strategies for specific target market.

Key action areas of the policy talked about strengthening of internet enabled marketing strategies. The policy has planned to maximize use of Social networking tools for effective promotion. It is also evident in the current marketing practices of Kerala tourism.

Few notable provisions observed in the policy were: the plan to strengthen the market research and creation of task force on marketing to synergize private and public partnership. Further innovation in marketing strategies and promotion of new destinations were targeted.

Karnataka Tourism Policy 2015- 20

The tourism policy of Karnataka aim to support ICT based initiatives for providing timely and reliably information

services to tourist. Strategic frameworks and thrust areas of the policy include positioning of Karnataka as a preferred destination at state, national and international level. It suggested creating calendar of events.

The area of market research includes important plan of development of data/ information repository, MIS and other tools for enabling decision making at government level and attracting investment by private sector.

Further, implementation of integrated marketing approach was mentioned to ensure information distribution to target markets (which can be factored into downstream product development and inbound tour offering).

Tourism Policy of Uttar Pradesh – 2016

Very detailed tourism policy of Uttar Pradesh has come up with framework for traditional and modern marketing of the state. It intends to identify, develop and market new and niche tourism products and use innovative Branding and Marketing activities to showcase the unique tourism products of Uttar Pradesh. The Strategies to achieve these objectives put the accent on augmenting the Brand Image of the State through extensive promotional and marketing activities through print, electronic, digital and outdoor media.

The policy highlighted the strategies to optimize the use of ICT and Digital media. Social media marketing plan to maximize tourism publicity by enriching Facebook page and Twitter handle.

Utilization of Digital Marketing techniques for tourist information and education was intended to enhance State’s image and perception. Services that would be provided by using this medium include connecting tourists with the tourism authorities, receiving information, updates, online booking of UPSTDC units & Package tours, sharing experiences, providing suggestions and feedback etc. The need of urgent revamp of the official tourism website was provided to accommodate above services.

To succeed in online environment, user engagement was planned through Virtual Tours, contests and campaigns like photography contest, tour challenge, quiz on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, etc.

Further, the policy aspired to enhance mobile applications and knowledge based games to attract new generation of tourists. In the second phase, an “app” working entirely offline was planned. GIS/location feature/ SOS on the app can be utilized to develop various safety and tourist guidance features.

The area of Tourism information research and forecasts was suggested to make more effective to serve the needs of the

industry and government. It also takes into consideration the human resource required for marketing. The Department was suggested to strengthen its Marketing and Branding team and if required induct reputed marketing and branding agencies.

Tourism Policy of Gujarat 2015-20

The Mission of the tourism policy of Gujarat is to strengthen the promotion and branding of Gujarat as leading tourist destination in the world. The policy aimed to enhance the use of ICT in the sector and further improve quality of services by promoting ICT enabled technologies through mobile applications, social networking, big data analytics, blogs, virtual tourism, mobile based applications, and Wi-Fi services.

Proactive role of Government is also expected in Promotion of fairs and festivals, regular Market research including big data analytics, and IT initiative. Provision of financial assistance for promotion and marketing was made to support innovative tourism projects and research in tourism and hospitality.

Tourism Policy of Rajasthan 2001

The policy of Rajasthan state keeps eye on to promote the state as a premier tourism destination. To achieve the objective it planned for aggressive marketing through electronic, print and cyber media. Multipronged strategy (including traditional and new media) was designed for the same. It included special drive to publicize tourism highlights of Rajasthan in electronic media through email, internet and latest means of communication. The policy also focused on online reservation, ecommerce and interactive tourism information packages etc. Further it planned to come up with high quality literature in different languages.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE STATE TOURISM POLICIES

The content analysis of six tourism policies, performed by the researcher by using QDA Miner software, brought forward the general planning trends followed by the DMOs of India for planning of internet marketing. Further manual coding is done to understand the planning of each DMO (if the content is present in the policy then 1 else 0).

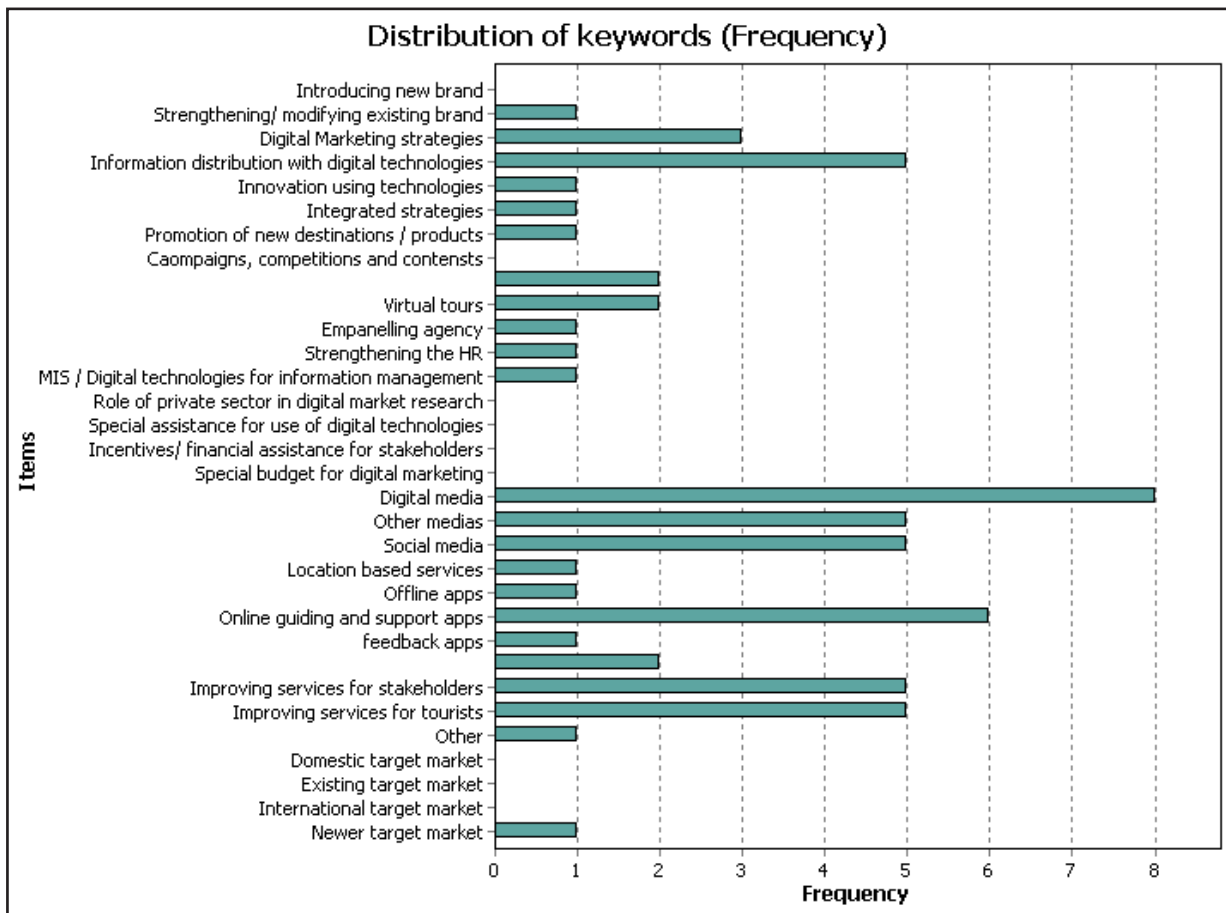


Fig. 1: Overall Content Analysis of State Tourism Policies of Six Indian DMOs

It is observed that these policies are talking about utilization of digital and social media for promotion, information distribution and improving services for tourist and stakeholders. Mobile based services and state tourism website are also highly recommended and well-discussed by each policy. In addition, DMOs are planning of virtual tours and online competition for increasing user engagement.

Thus from the overall content analysis of the policies it was observed that the selected state DMOs follow more or less analogous practices for planning internet marketing strategies. Unfortunately, there are few important areas of planning which were commonly overlooked. It includes role of internet in market research and branding, area of budget & Human resource required for internet marketing.

Table 3: Content Analysis of State Tourism Policies of Six Indian DMOs

Sr. NO	Element	MH	KL	KN	UP	GJ	RJ
	Target Markets						
1.	Newer	1	1	0	0	0	0
2.	Existing	1	1	0	0	0	0
3.	Domestic	1	1	0	0	0	0
4.	International	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Media						
5.	Digital	1	1	1	1	1	1
6.	Social media	1	1	0	1	1	0
7.	Other media	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Official tourism websites						
8.	Developing collaterals/ Multiple sites	1	0	0	0	0	0
9.	Improving services for Tourists	1	0	1	1	1	0
10.	Improving services for Stakeholders	0	1	0	1	0	0
11.	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Marketing Budget						
12.	Special budget for Digital marketing	0	0	0	0	1	0
13.	Incentives/ financial assistance to stakeholders	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Mobile based services						
14.	Online guiding and support apps	1	0	0	1	1	0
15.	Offline apps	0	0	0	1	0	0
16.	Feedback apps	0	0	0	1	0	0
17.	Location based services	0	0	0	1	1	0
	Engaging users through digital media						
18.	Virtual tours	0	0	0	1	1	0
19.	Knowledge-based games	0	0	0	1	0	0
20.	Campaign and contests	0	0	0	1	0	0
	Market research and forecasting						
21.	MIS/ Information management	0	0	1	1	1	0
22.	Special Assistance	0	0	0	0	1	0
23.	Data analytics	1	0	0	1	1	0
24.	PPP for marketing	1	1	0	0	1	0
	Marketing and promotion						
25.	Market research	1	1	0	1	1	0
26.	Marketing strategies	1	1	1	1	1	1
27.	Innovative	0	1	0	1	1	0
28.	Integrated	1	0	1	1	1	1
29.	Aggressive	0	0	0	0	0	1
30.	Promotion of new destinations	0	1	0	1	0	0

Sr. NO	Element	MH	KL	KN	UP	GJ	RJ
31.	Promotion of Events/ event calendar	0	0	1	0	1	1
	Human resources						
32.	Empanelling agencies	1	0	0	1	0	0
33.	Strengthening the present HR	0	0	0	1	0	0
	Branding using digital technologies						
34.	Strengthening / modifying existing brand	0	0	0	1	0	0
35.	Introducing new brand	0	0	0	0	0	0
		17	13	08	23	18	08

From in depth analysis and comparison of these state tourism policies it is revealed that, as compared to other states, the policy of UP tourism has discussed the strategies in detailed which helps in implementation and measuring of the policy success. The older policies of Kerala (recently new policy is proposed but not released yet) and Rajasthan tourism need urgent revision.

SUGGESTIONS

Sustainability of the tourism depends on the sound planning of the tourism development and the core and initial part of planning is policy making. Regrettably, the area of policy and planning has attracted much less attention relative to other aspects of tourism, such as tourist demand, behavior and experiences (Jenkins et al., 2011). Further, the research study on Indian tourism policy and planning is meager.

The investigation brought forward that more or less similar practices of marketing planning are present among the sample DMOs policies. Though policies have mentioned about many essential areas of internet marketing planning, the detail plan of action is required to support the implemetnation.

Successful marketing leads towards the brand creation. Online Branding or e-branding is emerging area in the field of branding which is based on utilization of internet. Globally DMOs are taking benefits of this emerging phenomenon through web 2.0 technology. But in respect of indian tourism industry, it is found that the tourism policies have not acknowledged this area. Therefore, DMOs must shift their focus and take benefits of online branding.

It is difficult to implement the marketing plan without sufficient resources. Hence, separate funds should be allocated for internet marketing. These policies should focus on enhancing technical skills of human resource who are involved in internet marketing so that they can keep pace with the fastest changing world of IT.

Further, it is estimated that only those destinations, which recognize the changes occurring in the marketplace and proactively respond to them, will continue to be successful in the future. For this, DMOs should emphasize on market research. Internet based services (specifically website and

social media channels) are acting as vehicle for collection of vast amount of data. Therefore, the DMO’s tourism policy should focus on optimum utilization of internet in understanding consumer behavior and preferences to improve tourism services through MIS, data analytics and artificial intelligence.

Innovative marketing led by research and using new technologies will be the only way to be in competition. Thus, DMOs should consistently work on innovation and creativity to take optimum benefits of internet and mobile technology.

Task of policy formulation, planning and development must continue to include research into how well such policies are performing. Hence periodic assessment of marketing planning and policy implementation is necessary. DMOs should continuously keep their eyes open in this rapidly changing competitive environment. New features should be continuously added and updated. Thus research oriented policies must be planned and implemented.

To sum up, the implementation of policies is a crucial matter for development. It must be supported by proper communication and coordination among local community, stakeholders, policy makers and experts.

FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

- Benchmarking these policies with global best practices can offer extremely valuable insights on marketing planning and policy making.
- Content analysis of interviews by marketing planners and policy makers can add more insights in to the study area.
- In addition, the study of evaluation of policy implementation and application can create more appropriate picture of current tourism marketing and future prospects.

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