

# Role of Smartphones in Destination Promotion and Its Impact on Travel Experience

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**Abstract** *Inevitably, the impact of mobile phone and internet on general society has been extensive at global level. Modern-day tourists see smartphones as their perfect travel partner. Mobile technology has made them more confident by reducing risk factor and making travel more flexible and quicker than ever before. Tourists use mobile technology at various stages of their decision process. This is the reason mobile technology can be perfectly used for destination promotion in travel and tourism industry. In addition to this, use of smartphones can significantly transform the travel experience by changing conventional methods of seeking information, selecting destination, exploring destination and post tour management. This study aims at developing an in-depth understanding of how smartphones can help in destination promotion and their impact on transforming travel experience. The results prove that smartphones can change tourists' behavior and emotional states by addressing a wide variety of information needed while selecting and exploring the destination, sharing experiences, and "storing" memories. The inferences of this study depict a huge potential for smartphones in transforming various aspects of the tourism business.*

**Keywords:** *Destination Promotion, Internet, Smartphone and Tourist Experience*

## INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In hand with internet, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) era has witnessed, boosted, and dramatically changed the tourism scenario globally. Fabi et al. (2014) had found use of mobile phones and its applications extensively in the field of tourism and hospitality industry, as it carries a lot of potentialities for promoting destination globally. This has become possible with the invent of electronic gadgets such as smartphones, tabs, and mini tabs for intellectual use with a variety of mobile and internet applications. Luo and Seyedian (2003) opined that mobile technologies and the Internet are reaching customers whenever and wherever they want. The tools of contextual marketing may include wireless phones, personal digital assistants, interactive web-connected kiosks, electronic wallets, and many other access technologies. Mobile devices and Internet access will let contextual marketers link real-life situations to virtual information and offerings.

When the use of such smartphones is recognized, they have taken an inevitable place in the day to day life of the layman particularly tourists. Handbook on E-Marketing for Tourism Destinations, (2014), UNWTO, recommendations includes use of mobile phones and its application for easy reach of the customers and destination promotion. In the life of the tourists, smartphones are used in a lot many ways including searching information, reservation, identifying geographical location etc. Law, et al. (2009) states that "mobile technologies provide a new and convenient path for travelers to collect information from any site, more significantly at the destination". Ibid also states that mobile technologies support location-based services, interpretation at the destination, and dynamic interaction with tourism suppliers (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Trihas et al. (2013) has indicated a model in his research focusing e-marketing practices. Ibid providing an insight into web technology interface, mobile tourism applications, tourism destination promotion through e-customer relationship management, strongly emphasized the use of two way communication

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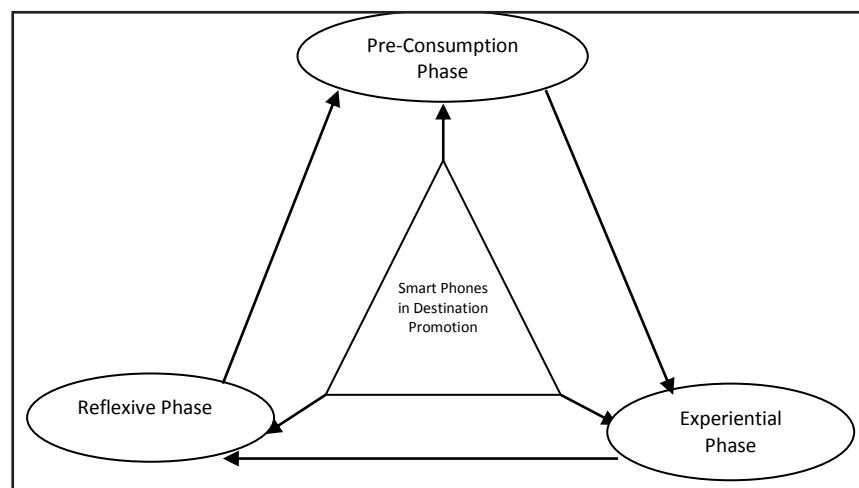
in web leading to easy handling of customer relationship management over internet.

No doubt, smart phones are used for leaving our remarks, comments, and feedback in social and internet media in real time. Berthon, et al. (1999) had discussed the feedback and information distribution elements of the web at different stages of the tourists such as pre-purchase, purchase, consume and post-consume. Kiralova and Pavlicecka (2014) list smartphones and android applications as social media campaigns promoting destination. Use of smartphones at the destination gradually increased to such an extent that along with “self” promotion, destination is also promoted. Ibid while analyzing the use of social media in developing destination image (Henelin, 2010; Graham, 2005), effort is made to throw light on use of smartphones in using social media websites for brand awareness and brand engagement (Pergolina, Rothman, Miller and Miller, 2012). Sambanthan and Good (arxiv.org) had discussed destination

promotion using different stages of the tourist approach to the destination. Such stage includes pre-sell, sell, consume and post-consume. They support that no e-marketing tool can beat e-Word of Mouth (e-WOM). Stokes (2013) had mentioned that mobile marketing can be used for “engaging” stage of the tourists in his TCEO (Think, Create, Engage and Optimize) model.

Theoretically tourists visit tourist places for rejuvenating and recreating themselves. But this is ironically observed by the researcher that tourists use their smartphones in tourist places for attending business and personal calls, paying more attention in taking “selfie”, and using social and internet applications frequently.

Hence, a study is realized by the researcher on the impact of smartphones in travel experience. For the purpose of study, keeping the foregoing literature and assumptions as base, the following model is proposed:



**Fig. 1: Pre-Consumption Phase is Further Divided into Pre-Purchase Stage and Purchase Stage for the Purpose of Data Collection**

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is set as follows:

- To identify the trend in using smart phones for travel.
- To identify the phase in which smart phones are used highly.
- To identify the phase in which smart phones are used less.
- To know whether smartphones is a travel partner or a hindrance to enjoy destination.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The relevant data for the study has been collected from primary as well as secondary sources.

Primary data was collected online by circulating questionnaires, interviewing tourists, business providing them service and various destination management agencies.

An unstructured interview had been conducted with service providers and destination management agencies with an objective to take their views on the role of mobile technology in destination promotion and its usefulness in various phases/stages of tour.

A questionnaire was circulated online with an idea of collecting 500 responses from tourists/travelers in the age group of 16-29 (“Youth” as per the definition of World Tourism Organization). However, 453 samples were collected, and 237 out of 453 samples were found valid. 216 samples were invalid as questionnaire was not responded in full.

Secondary data were collected through websites, books, journals, tourist brochures, annual reports of Department of Tourism etc. Along with this, researches already conducted on the problem were also taken into consideration.

## NEED OF THE STUDY

Understanding role of smart phone in reconciling the tourist experience and finding out relationship between smartphones, tourist information needs and destination promotion reveals the significance of this study. Considering that smart phones have become an inseparable part of human life, a study on this, particularly in the view point of travel and tourism, is required to be undertaken for getting directions further. The results and suggestions, if implemented, would be helpful to destination planners, tourism and travel environment and ecologists, and tourists as well.

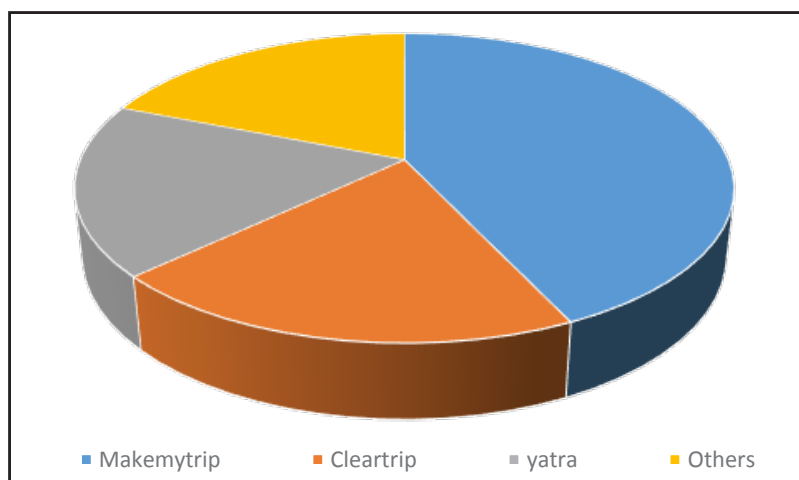
## RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Smartphones, as a modern media, can be used to access large amount of information and related services to assist not only main travel activities such as planning, reservation, navigation, but many “micro-activities” during the travel process such as finding shopping avenues, restaurants, booking cabs, estimating waiting time of ride, checking weather etc. Thus, smartphone is capable of addressing travelers’ need anytime and anywhere in the travel process including pre-purchase, purchase and post purchase stages. Thus, with smartphone as a guide, tourists can divert from their existing route and initiate unplanned activities during the tour. Also, existence of some applications in smartphone allow tourists to plot photos on a map immediately after taking a snap and share these pictures with friends and family through social networking websites. This helps travelers to keep their friends up to date and enjoy comments about their on-going travel experience. These evidences suggest a significant role that smartphones play in mediating touristic experience. Hence, smartphone has potential to enhance the travel experience and make it more lively.

## Recent Trends in Use of Smartphone for Travel

In the era of digital living, one is independent in terms of people, place and time as we can operate with anyone, from anywhere and at any time. Online travel market continues to grow in India. Mobile applications which are being used more and more for travel a year after another can be divided into travel agencies, hotels, car rentals, airlines, micro-moments etc. Recent trends identified through questionnaire reveals that around 70% of people are downloading either the same amount or more number of apps than last year. Out of these people only 55% use them regularly. The main purpose for using these apps is to search and book travel, check flight status, train’s running status, booking cabs, capturing photographs and uploading in social networking sites, using GPS to navigate, searching nearby attractions and various avenues like ATMs, Banks, shopping malls, medical centers, etc. ‘Voice search’ has been witnessed as an emerging trend amongst modern tourists. Voice powered technology in smartphones is gaining real time attention from users. As per the collected data, 31% of travelers use voice assistance during the trip. Out of these 31% travelers, 45% use them on regular basis, 25% of those once a week, 20% every day and 10% at least once a month. Turning towards Ancillaries, report prepared by *Travelport digital’s 2017* reveals that travelers are now buying more in-flight entertainments, car hire, web check-in, activities in destination, travel insurance etc. through mobile channels.

According to an online survey conducted during this study, 43% people were found using makemytrip, 20% cleartrip, 18% yatra and remaining 19% using other apps like goibibo, easemytrip etc.

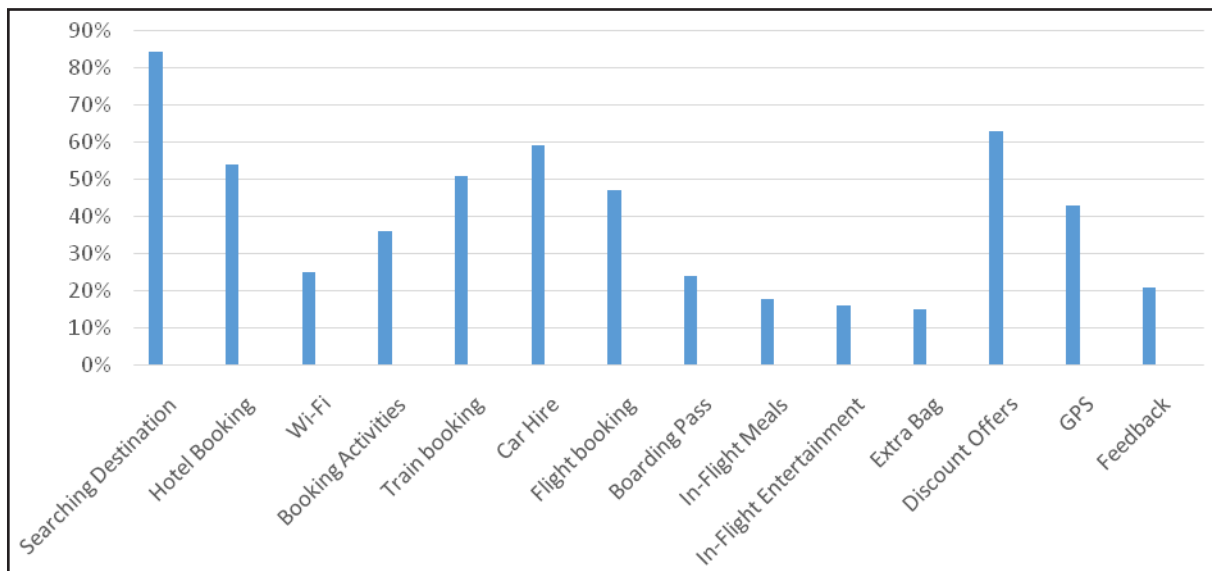


Source: Primary data collected by researcher

**Fig. 2: Major Online Travel Agency**

This pie chart reveals that the online travel market of India is dominated by Makemytrip, the first ever online travel mart of country followed by cleartrip and yatra respectively. As per the responses collected from 237 respondents using smartphone in various stages of travel, through google forms, on “Have you bought any of the following on mobile?”, we get to know the trends given below:

84% of smart travelers using smartphones to search destination, 54% to book hotels, 25% for Wi-Fi, 36% for activities in local destination, 51% for train bookings, 59% for car hire, 47% for booking flights, 24% for generating boarding pass, 18% for in-flight meals, 16% for in-flight entertainment, 15% for extra bag 63% for searching discount offers, 43% using GPS and 21% giving feedback.



Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

**Fig. 3: Usage of Various Services in Smartphones**

It is evident from the above chart that the usage rate of smartphone for various travel related services among smart travelers is varying in nature. Most of them were found using mobiles for searching destinations, car hires, booking flights & trains, booking hotels, searching discount offers and booking activities at destination. While, most of the travelers with smartphone have internet connection in their phones but they use it for selected activities before, during and after tour. However, the usage of smartphone as travel partner is increasing day by day. So, it can be concluded that India is on the way to become a smart tourist destination.

### Usability of Smartphones in Different Stages and Its Role in Destination Promotion

Usability of smartphones is predominant through various phases of travel experience such as pre consumption, experiential and reflexive. Smartphone has ability to address the various needs of tourist throughout his decision process

and makes his experience delighted. In addition, this phone also promotes destination in various ways in different stages of travel process.

While in *Pre-Consumption Phase*, smartphone addresses the information search, planning, expectation formation for upcoming trip, decision making, transactions and anticipation making needs of tourist. In India, 87% population was found using smartphone for the purpose of ‘finding destination’ in the year 2017-18 ([www.treksoft.com](http://www.treksoft.com)). To distinguish online users, one can divide tourist buying behavior in this stage into experienced and inexperienced travelers. Experienced are those who have destination knowledge because they have already visited the place and have used products and services several times. On the other hand, inexperienced travelers are first time users who feel uncomfortable and unsecure to decide on destination and make bookings online. Here comes the role of marketing. Destination promoters should acknowledge consumer’s needs clearly to provide sense of security to traveler. It will help travel industry to operate smoothly and successfully with smartphones. Large

number of packages available in different applications with wide range of services and amenities promotes destination. Whenever, a tour package is supposed to be realized, enquiry made by the tourist boost promotion of destination proposed for selection. The use of smartphone in this stage is maximum because even if customers don't buy products online, they are actively engaged in information search.

During *Experiential Phase*, smartphone offers a platform mainly for navigation, short-term decision making and on-site transactions. In this phase, smart traveler tries to optimize the value of his time at destination by using applications to reach to various locations, order food online, booking cabs, online booking of entry tickets of attractions instead of waiting in long queues, etc. All these activities reduce cost in terms of time, effort and money for tourist and makes his experience delighted. Also, a smart traveler attempts to maximize value of his money by comparing prices of same service at different websites and accepting smartphone as a digital guide. For example, we may compare fare offered by ola cab and uber cab for same journey and can ride by the one having lower fare. Destination promotion in stage is done by tourist by sharing the photographs clicked at destination on social networking sites like twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc. In this way, friends, relatives, family, colleagues, and other associated groups can also enjoy the destination sitting at home. Sharing moments during trip create excitement amongst reference group and gives them a clue to visit the respective destination. In this phase use of smartphone is little bit lesser than previous stage because many customers hire ground service provider at destination.

In *Reflexive phase*, people use smartphone for offering feedback, documentation, sharing stories and making attachments with sights visited by maintaining a record of trip related memories to keep the experience live. Customer reviews are presented in various websites and blogs written by unspecified customers. It means that, today's traveler is one who design their packages themselves to fit their needs and wants. Therefore, they are self-accountable for the level of satisfaction they have experienced during the tour. Customer's evaluation of trip and their suggestions offers opportunity to the online travel companies for making changes in their existing packages accordingly to match the taste and preferences of these modern travelers. Moreover, destination promotion in this stage takes place through word of mouth. It may be positive as well as negative. If customer feels he has actually enjoyed the tour and has realized value of his money, then his post tour conversation with various associated group positively promotes the destination. In contrast, if he is unsatisfied out of the experience he had during the tour then he acts as a negative ambassador and spoils the image of destination amongst these groups. Use of smartphone is least in this stage as many customers after returning from their trip keeps their phone in pocket and don't bother about post-tour activities like reviews, suggestions and feedback.

In order to identify the stage wherein smartphones are used highly and less, a survey was undertaken among the 237 respondents, and the responses given in likert-type scale is presented in the table given below:

**Table 1: (In Percentage)**

Statements	Strongly Disagree (1)		Disagree (2)		Neither Disagree Nor Agree (3)		Agree (4)		Strongly Agree (5)	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Pre-Consumption Phase - PRE PURCHASE STAGE										
I use smartphones for collecting information regarding destination	0.42	1	0.42	1	0.00	0	5.49	13	93.67	222
I visit websites of the destination directly to collect information	7.59	18	10.55	25	11.81	28	43.04	102	27.00	64
I visit websites of the travel agents directly to collect information.	5.06	12	3.38	8	11.39	27	54.01	128	26.16	62
I use apps of the online travel agents for collecting information.	0.42	1	1.27	3	11.81	28	65.82	156	20.68	49
Information given in the apps of the online travel agents is more reliable than the information given in the websites of the destination.	29.11	69	62.87	149	0.84	2	5.91	14	1.27	3
Use of application is easier than visiting websites in the smartphones.	1.27	3	1.69	4	2.11	5	87.34	207	7.59	18
Pre Consumption Phase - PURCHASE STAGE										
With the information given on the app/website, I easily take decision.	16.46	39	17.30	41	10.13	24	32.49	77	23.63	56
Even after collecting sufficient information, I hesitate to take a firm decision on my package.	16.46	39	16.46	39	10.55	25	32.07	76	24.47	58

Statements	Strongly Disagree (1)		Disagree (2)		Neither Disagree Nor Agree (3)		Agree (4)		Strongly Agree (5)	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
I feel lack of information while I do payment.	20.68	49	23.63	56	10.13	24	24.89	59	20.68	49
I use smartphones for making payment.	12.24	29	13.50	32	11.81	28	32.49	77	29.96	71
I am absolutely comfortable in doing payment using smartphones.	16.88	40	26.58	63	12.24	29	22.78	54	21.52	51
I get vouchers properly for payment done using apps in smartphones.	7.59	18	6.33	15	12.24	29	36.71	87	37.13	88
Experiential Phase										
I like taking “selfie” in the destination.	0.42	1	1.27	3	6.33	15	37.55	89	54.43	129
I like uploading “selfie” in the destination itself on social websites and applications.	9.28	22	12.24	29	11.81	28	32.49	77	34.18	81
I get messages on “selfie” as soon as I upload it.	21.52	51	21.94	52	11.81	28	24.05	57	20.68	49
People seeing my “selfie” raises questions to me about the destination.	16.46	39	13.08	31	11.39	27	30.38	72	28.69	68
I give reply to the questions raised by people on the destination, at once.	16.46	39	13.08	31	10.13	24	31.22	74	29.11	69
People go for discussion on the place I have visited, on seeing my selfie.	11.39	27	11.81	28	12.24	29	34.18	81	30.38	72
I do not feel that I am unable to enjoy the destination, as I am often busy in my cellphone.	21.94	52	19.41	46	11.81	28	22.36	53	24.47	58
I feel smartphones should be kept in silent mode or switched off at the destination, so that we can enjoy it fully.	7.59	18	6.75	16	10.97	26	35.44	84	39.24	93
I switch off my cellphone or keep it in silent mode as and when I feel that I am unable to enjoy destination fully.	7.59	18	6.33	15	11.39	27	35.44	84	39.24	93
Smartphones are not disturbance at the destination.	17.72	42	15.19	36	12.24	29	26.58	63	28.27	67
Reflexive Phase										
After my trip, my travel agent sends feedback / ranking of services form to me in my cellphone.	15.61	37	16.03	38	11.81	28	30.38	72	26.16	62
I give my feedback / rank services of the travel agent in forms, using my cellphone.	32.49	77	22.36	53	11.39	27	16.46	39	17.30	41
After my trip, I use to upload my photographs and selfies taken at the destination for recall my visit.	13.92	33	16.46	39	10.13	24	30.80	73	28.69	68
I use my cellphone to go for review of services at the destination online.	12.24	29	11.81	28	11.81	28	32.91	78	31.22	74
I use my cellphone to record my experience online.	8.44	20	11.39	27	14.77	35	34.18	81	31.22	74

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

This is evident from the above table that smartphone is used in all the stages of travel experience, particularly during pre-purchase stage (98%) and consume stage (91%). About 95% of the respondents claim that use of smartphone apps is easier. It indicates a successful move towards smart

tourist destination. However, in post-consume stage use of smartphone is found least while offering feedback. It suggests that many travelers become inactive in smartphone after trip. This snatches opportunity from online travel agencies to make favorable changes in their existing packages in the line with consumer's demand.

## Smartphone: Travel Partner or Hindrance While Enjoying Destination

Global insights on use of mobile phone by traveler uncovers its significant role in the entire journey from planning, bookings, shopping, clicking photographs, and other activities at destination to post tour management. It indicates that the smartphone has become an inseparable part of trips undertaken by modern traveler. Moreover, mobile phone acts as an electronic guide for the smart tourists in all the stages of their tour. It reduces distance in terms of time, money and place, and increases accessibility.

On the other hand, decision process has become tough, as the tourist have choices on internet in abundant. This becomes further complex, when it is surrounded by de-marketing and/or negative marketing of the destinations done by tourists through feedback, rating, blogging and micro-blogging, out of over-expectation or bitter experience. Techy-savvy habit of tourists of the contemporary era, at times, deters the travelers to enjoy destination in all aspects. During tour, overly self-engaging nature of tourists in social media through smartphones poses hurdles to explore destinations thoroughly. Optimum utilization of time in the destination becomes impossible, as the modern travelers are found busy in clicking photographs, editing them and sharing them with their kith and kin. In addition, recent trend witnessed in modern travelers is that of sharing live activities at destination with friends and relatives in social media. This distracts one from looking around and experiencing the destination.

## RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

- As smart tourist is effective in choosing destination, he is partly and equally self-accountable for his selection, though service providers also equally play their role.
- Smart phone has reduced the distances between service providers and service users. Hence smart phones can be seen as a mediating agent.
- As smart tourist has accessibility to large number of web resources from the very beginning of the tour till the end, so the researchers are of the view that smart tourist is more efficient than conventional tourist.
- Before deciding on any destination and buying services associated with it, a tourist must be able to screen package properly to receive optimal value for his money.
- Existence of abundant information in various websites makes decision making process difficult. Hence, the intervention of the responsible authorities in pooling and channelizing the activities of the tourists on the website and on the mobile application is must, so that,

tourists may not be cheated or become over expected, and may not get diverted.

- Online travel agencies must choose the best payment gateway provider, as the tourist considers his experience with the payment gateway provider as an online service of the travel agency. Online payment procedures must be hassle-free, simple and secured.
- It is the need of the hour that benchmarking in feedback, blogging, and micro-blogging should be developed, whether it de-markets the destination or promotes the destination.
- To avoid arbitrary negative marketing in the form of reviews, blogs etc., a legal system should be established to monitor such activities.
- Government/tourist service providers should develop campaigns with an aim of imparting knowledge on unnecessary use of smartphones at the destination. A chart depicting the minimum time needed to thoroughly enjoy every tourist spot at the destination without use of smartphones, and the list of uniqueness of the tourist spots that one should not miss, must be prepared and displayed at all important terminals of the destination. The same should also be uploaded on the websites.
- Tourists must be encouraged to keep their smartphones in silent mode or switched off so that tourists and their co-travelers can enjoy every moment at the spot.
- Online travel agencies must not upload edited photographs of the destination in their package to attract customers, doing so, will reduce the faith of customers from smart bookings.
- Online agencies must ensure that they are delivering the services promised in the packages so as to satisfy customers, which in turn, would result in positive marketing and then destination promotion.
- As use of application in smartphone is easier, government may support financially Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs) in creating, developing and maintaining mobile applications so that SMTEs can grab benefits of ICT.
- Tourists must assume their responsibilities while giving their valuable feedback in reflexive phase so that travel agencies should have opportunity to improve the quality in their existing package in the line with customers' tastes and preferences.

As this research does not describe any destination in particular, therefore, the above findings and recommendations has scope to be studied further by researchers in future to get an insight on role of smartphone in destination promotion and its uses at various stages of travel. A comparative study of the smart tourists of different destinations could also be undertaken to further analyze the problem so that tourist community can be served better.

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