



A STUDY ON TOURISM WEB SITES OF INDIAN STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES

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ABSTRACT

With the growing popularity of the Internet in the domain of information technology, the Web sites play important roles by providing valuable information to the users. Being an information-extensive area, tourism industry is also indebted to the Internet for promoting and marketing of the tourist destinations. In this paper, the contents of 34 tourism Web sites of Indian states and union territories are surveyed. Exhaustive lists of features that are present in these tourism Web sites are identified and their relative importance are determined. A quantitative measure for evaluating the quality of content of the tourism Web sites is also proposed. Using the proposed methodology, quality of all the Indian tourism Web sites is assessed and compared. As far as the contents are concerned, the overall average quality of the Indian tourism Web sites is found to be not very promising. The suggested methodology can equally be applicable for analyzing and evaluating quality of the commercial and educational Web sites.

Key words: India, State, Union territory, Tourism, Web site, Feature, Rating of Web site

Introduction

In the era of networked information, the Internet has emerged as the most powerful tool for instant access of information. The Internet has now become the most extensively used information source that empowers a person to get in roaming with the latest information. With the growing recognition of tourism as a source of revenue and employment, improved understanding of what tourism is, its role in the economy and its relationship

to other parts of economy is important. The Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) [1], adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission, provides an important platform towards improved understanding of the structure and role of tourism in the economy. Tourism is a demand-based concept defined not by its output, but by its use. The notion of tourism is aimed at covering elements of human activity that are different from the routine in life. Tourism, encompassing transport, accommodation, catering, recreation and services to the visitors, is one of the world's highest priority industries and employers. Tourism generates substantial economic benefits to both the host countries and tourists' home countries including contribution to government revenues, generation of foreign exchange earnings, employment generation and initiation of various business opportunities. As per the forecast by the WTO in their 'Tourism 2020 Vision', tourism is expected to grow at a world average rate of 4.1 percent per year up to 2020. Interestingly, the forecast also indicates that the share of tourism volumes and related receipts, employment and export earnings is expected to move away from the developed countries towards the less developed countries.

On the other hand, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates a 4.5 percent per annum increase in the total amount of travel and tourism economic activity between 2002 and 2012. This is largely attributed to a rise in global wealth, liberalization of international airspace, cheaper flights and the use of the Internet as a travel tool. The earnings from tourism have made it one of the world's largest industries and the fastest growing sectors of global trade accounting for 10.7 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP), 12.8 percent of global exports, 8.2 percent of global employment and 9.4 percent of global capital investment. Tourism in the least developed countries is growing faster than the world average, holding the promise of prosperity for many. International tourism flows are expected to reach 1.5 billion by 2020 and revenue estimated to cross US\$2000 billion.

In India, tourism was recognized as an industry in early 1990s and henceforth became eligible for several incentives and facilities that other industries of an economy are privileged with. Such incentives include tax benefits, subsidies, priorities in sanctioning of loans by the State Financial Institutions and preferences in providing electricity and water connections. In July 1991, tourism was also declared as a priority sector for foreign investment. Having realized the importance of tourism, India is now actively participating in various regional and sub-regional groups such as SAARC,

ASEAN, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Project etc. India has also bilateral tourism promotion agreements with 32 countries. According to the Annual Report 2004-05 published by the Ministry of Tourism, the year 2005 saw tourism in India emerging as a major sector of the Indian economy. It is a clear indication to the policy makers to be more liberal in order to promote tourism in India. In India, the Internet has a great impact on marketing of travel and tourism as an effective and ongoing market representation presence is established with the travel trade through setting up of the Internet portals in order to provide information to the target market segments. The Internet has already established itself as a channel through which the Indian tourism organizations can promote their destinations and attractions.

This paper conducts an objective investigation of the issue by selecting, accessing and evaluating tourism Web sites of 34 Indian states and union territories. Hence, the aim of this paper is to thoroughly examine the contents of 34 Indian tourism Web sites, identify the relevant features affecting the quality and usefulness of those Web sites, determine the relative importance of the Web site features and compare the quality of tourism Web sites highlighting the presence or absence of different features in those sites. Such an objective investigation may provide additional and valuable insights regarding the contents of tourism Web sites and identify the important commercial contents that are to be normally included in most of the tourism Web sites.

India as a tourism destination

India is (after China) the second most populous country in the world and as the Indians are always so fond of saying, the biggest democracy on earth. With a historical backdrop of 5,000 years, India is one big package of cultures and legends that never fail to captivate the imagination of the tourists. India is the land to travel to, a haven of tourism delights and a civilization to tour through [2]. Tourists come to India for its wealth of sights, cultural exuberance, diversity of terrain and in search of that special something, an extra punch that only India can promise and deliver. Major attractions in India are the world's highest mountains, miles of coastline with excellent beaches, tropical forests and wildlife, desert safari, lagoon backwaters, ancient monuments, forts and palaces, adventure tourism and the Taj Mahal. It has over 25 world heritage sites and offers various categories of tourism like history tourism, adventure tourism, medical

tourism (ayurved and other forms of medication), spiritual tourism and beach tourism.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has identified India as one of the world's foremost tourist growth centers in the coming decade. After Turkey, India is expected to achieve the fastest rate of growth of the total amount of economic activity likely to be generated by travel and tourism, at 9.7 percent over the next 10 years. Also, the largest employment creation after China is expected to take place in India over the same period. The growth in 'visitor exports' or spending by the international tourists is likely to be the fastest in India at 14.3 percent per annum over the next decade. On the whole, the WTTC forecast for India is promising, subject to the key policy issues that affect the growth of this sector being properly addressed. Despite numerous problems [3], tourism industry is the second-largest foreign exchange (Forex) earner for India. India has the potential to become the number one tourist destination in the world with the demand growing at 10.1 percent per annum, the WTTC has predicted. The only way to achieve this target is to develop and promote tourism within the country and make India internationally competitive as an attractive destination.

Tourism statistics of India

Tourism in India has tended to be regarded as an elitist activity conducted primarily for the purpose of earning foreign exchange. In 1951, international tourist arrivals stood at around 17000 only while the same has now gone up to 3.92 million in 2005. The year 2005 has been a highly successful year so far as tourism in India is concerned. For the third successive year, India witnessed a positive growth in international tourist arrivals, reaching a level of 3.92 million against 3.46 million during the last year. The growth rate of 13.2 percent during 2005 was achieved over and above a growth of about 26.8 percent witnessed during the year 2004; while the expected growth of world tourism during 2005 was estimated to be about 5-6 percent only. With this growth, the share of India in world tourism, which was hovering between 0.38-0.39 percent for number of years, is expected to be around 0.49 percent. An important highlight of Indian tourism during 2005 was an increase of 20.2 percent witnessed in the foreign exchange earnings in dollar terms. Another important feature of Indian tourism during 2005 was an increase in per tourist earnings. It was observed that on an average, per tourist foreign exchange earnings in India was about US\$1462 against the estimated world average of US\$844 [4].

India receives maximum number of international tourists from the United Kingdom, which is its largest source market, followed by the United States, Sri Lanka, France, Germany, Canada, Japan, Australia and Singapore. Of the tourists coming to India, 23.4 percent are in the age group of 25-34 years, 27.5 percent in the age group of 35-44 years and 20.8 percent in the age group of 45-54 years. Women constitute only 30.5 percent of India's total international arrivals [5]. According to a foreign tourist survey conducted in India, an international tourist from the top 15 foreign markets for India spends from 7 to 18 days in India, the overall average being 16 days. In India, for every international tourist, there are about 80 domestic tourists. There are approximately 800 million domestic tourists during 2006 and the number of domestic tourists has an expected growth rate of 15-20 percent.

India's travel and tourism industry was expected to generate INR1,846.3 billion (US\$38.8 billion) of economic activity (total demand) in 2004, growing (nominal terms) to INR7,027.7 billion (US\$90.4 billion) by 2014. Travel and tourism demand is expected to grow by 8.8 percent per annum, in real terms, between 2004 and 2014. India's travel and tourism economy employment was estimated at 24,456,600 jobs in 2004, 5.6 percent of total employment or 1 in every 17.8 jobs. By 2014, there will be a total of 27,790,000 jobs, 5.7 percent of total employment or 1 in every 17.5 jobs. India's travel and tourism industry was expected to contribute 2.0 percent to gross domestic product (GDP) in 2004 (INR618.4 billion or US\$13.0 billion), rising in nominal terms to INR2,002.3 billion or US\$25.8 billion (2.1 percent of total) by 2014. India's travel and tourism capital investment was estimated at INR485.3 billion (US\$10.2 billion) or 7.2 percent of the total investment in year 2004. By 2014, this will reach INR1,663.9 billion (US\$21.4 billion) or 7.8 percent of the total. International tourist arrivals to India increased to 4.43 million in 2006, 14.2 percent more from 3.92 million in 2005. The foreign exchange earnings from tourism grew to US\$6.569 billion in 2006, an increase of 14.6 percent from 2005.

India's vast potential as an engine of growth and employment generator has remained largely untapped. Although, with 25 million jobs, India ranks second in terms of number of persons employed in the travel and tourism industry, yet the contribution of this sector as a percentage share of total employment is amongst the lowest in the world. The Tenth Plan objective of the Government of India is to integrate tourism with the socio-economic objectives of the plan by creating 3.6 million jobs a year through the

promotion of domestic and international tourism and enhance India's share of international tourist arrivals from 0.38 percent to at least 0.62 percent by 2007.

Allocation to tourism has averaged 0.16 percent of the total plan outlay from the Third Plan to the Ninth Plan. In the Tenth Plan, India is likely to receive an allocation of 0.72 percent. According to the WTTC, India is one of the lowest spenders on tourism (153rd out of 160 countries), while its neighboring competitors and China invest far more such as Malaysia (5.1 percent), Nepal (5 percent), Indonesia (8.4 percent), Maldives (15.7 percent) and China (3.8 percent).

Role of Government to promote tourism

If India is to realize its enormous potential in tourism, it must provide exclusive world class tourism destinations and services to compete successfully for a larger share of the Asian tourism market. The scope and reach of domestic tourism will have to be broadened in the Tenth Plan through the development of competitive destinations that match international standards in terms of both price and quality. Apart from acknowledging the well accepted advantages of tourism development for the promotion of national integration, international understanding and foreign exchange earning, the Tenth Plan recognizes the vast employment generating potential of tourism and its role in fulfilling the socio-economic objectives of the plan. The Tenth Plan will mobilize the state governments to use tourism as a means for achieving their socio-economic objectives, encourage private sectors to enhance investment in tourism, provide legislative and regulatory support for sustainable tourism and protect the interests of the tourism industry. Most state governments in India give scant importance to tourism even though they virtually control the tourism industry located within their boundaries. They are responsible for local infrastructure, transportation, sanitation and hygiene, leisure and recreation, law and order, upkeep of local heritage places and general well-being of the tourists. Their support and participation is essential for tourism to succeed and spread its benefits among the host population. The approach of the state governments needs to be more focused, highly professional and result-oriented if India is to avail the opportunity that the currently favorable market trends are going to offer. The promotional endeavor under the banner of 'Incredible India' includes a wide ranging advertisement campaign in all prime print publications besides a global television campaign encompassing major

English, French, German and Italian channels and an innovative online campaign on the world's most popular Web sites. India is now recognizing the role of the Internet and Web marketing to promote its tourism industry.

Content analysis of Indian tourism Web sites

Providing information is the basic goal of a Web site. Using Web technologies, an organization can reach to its customers and provide them with not only general information about its products/services but also the opportunity of performing interactive business transactions. The contents of a Web site play an important role in influencing the purchase decision of a customer. The usefulness of a Web site not only depends on the information content, but also on the tools provided for navigating through and evaluating the use of the information. With the increasing popularity of the Internet, there now exists a new marketing potential for the tourist regions. It is observed that the users mainly want tourism-related information together with photographic illustrations of the tourist attractions. The ease of use, interactivity and flexibility of the Internet suggests an allied and important role of the Web sites in destination marketing and indications are there that the tourism Web sites are constantly being made more interactive and informative [6, 7]. The content of a tourism Web site is particularly important because it directly influences the perceived image of the destination and creates a virtual experience to the consumers [8-10]. The tourism Web sites can provide useful information, but if they are slow to load, difficult to navigate, search or read, their usefulness will be lost. Attracting and serving the domestic and international tourists are considered critical for the success of tourism related Web sites. But it is observed that the field of tourism Web site development has lacked standards and rules with respect to content and design. The content component of a Web site addresses the issue of what is included in the site and identifies various types of information. On the other hand, the design component consists of the presentation and navigation/accessibility features [11]. Presentation is related to the visual appearance or general attractiveness of a Web site. Navigation features allow the Web site visitor to have an easy access to the information of interest, both internal and external to the site.

At present, India has 29 states and 6 union territories within its geographical boundary [12, 13]. Among these states and union territories, 34 have their own tourism Web sites for promotion of tourism in their respective regions. One union territory has yet to develop its own tourism

Web site till date. Hence, in this paper, the contents of these 34 tourism Web sites are studied. Due to dynamic and changing characteristics of the Web sites, this study was conducted within a time span of two months (April-May, 2007). It is observed that all the 34 Web sites provide tourism information in English. Among these, 3 sites are multi-lingual, offering scopes to get the relevant information in different foreign languages like Spanish, Dutch, Italian, German and French. It is usually recommended that the homepage of a particular Web site should display its entire content in a single page without any scrolling [14]. But in all these 34 Web sites, the homepages are to be scrolled up in order to visualize their contents. This may perhaps create navigation problems to the tourists who are interested to search for specific information within a Web site. The currency or regularity of updating information is vital for the tourism Web sites. A Web site must have content that will satisfy the users' needs and it should be updated at least once in every month. But, only 6 (17.65 percent) Indian tourism Web sites contain latest update information and among them, 2 were updated within 1 month from the date of survey. So, Indian tourism Web sites lack current and regular information.

Based on the content analysis of 34 tourism Web sites, various features that are commonly available in these sites, are short-listed, as shown in Table 1. It is found that there are in total 24 tourism features and 12 design features in the Indian tourism Web sites. The tourism features have two broad sub-categories, i.e. (a) promotional features and (b) informative features. Out of 24 tourism features, 10 belong to promotional features and the remaining 14 are informative features. On the other hand, design features are also basically of two types, i.e. (a) presentation features and (b) accessibility features. Out of 12 design features, 7 are recognized as presentation features and the remaining 5 are accessibility features.

Promotional features include information about the history of a place of interest, art and crafts, fairs and festivals, culture and heritage, tour advisory, major attractions etc. so as to allure the tourists to visit the concerned place. These features generally portray the importance and attractiveness of the tourist place. Interactive feedback means requesting tourists to respond about their feelings/suggestions related to a tourism Web site. The Internet commerce transactions take place with the acceptance of on-line bookings for accommodation, travel and other tourism services. Contact information, weather report, guide maps, tour planner, accommodations, hotels and restaurants, tourist office information,

Table 1 Tourism Web site features

Web site features			
Tourism features		Design features	
Promotional features	Informative features	Presentation features	Accessibility features
a) About us b) Art and craft c) Fairs and festivals d) Attractions e) Culture and heritage f) Feedback g) Investment policy h) Government and administration i) Travel advisory j) On-line booking	a) News and events b) Weather c) Contact us d) Privacy statements e) FAQ f) Guide maps g) Places to visit h) Tour planner i) Transportation j) Accommodation k) Restaurants and cuisines l) Tourist office information m) Interactive value-added information n) Statistics	a) Use of flash animation b) Use of audio c) Use of video d) Background color e) Foreground color f) Number of pages g) Image gallery	a) Site map b) External links c) Internal links d) Site search e) Site evaluation

transportations and tourism statistics are some of the informative features that are also included in the tourism Web sites. News and events include news releases for the upcoming fairs and festivals, updated news, pertinent tourism information, new announcements, hot topics etc. FAQs include answers to the frequently asked questions about a specific tourist place and it is another type of content closely related to tourism service. Interactive value-added information contain guest books, discounts and special holiday offers, currency converter, distance calculator, time zones, downloads etc. Three Indian tourism Web sites also contain testimonials, i.e. certificates from some of the satisfied tourists.

Some of the important presentation features are uses of flash animation, audio, video and image gallery. Presence of these features makes a tourism Web site more attractive. Flash animation or multimedia increases the aesthetic element of a Web site and increases the visual appeal. Audio is mainly used for background music and sound effects, whereas video serves

a wider range of purposes including glimpses of the attractive tourist spots and virtual tour of the places of attraction. Colors of the foreground and background of a Web site play important roles to make it more presentable. On the other hand, larger homepage size or more number of pages can lower the speed of loading a Web site.

Accessibility features consist of site map, search facilities, site evaluation index and presence of internal and external links. A permanent menu or site map is provided to allow easy navigation through a Web site. The presence of this menu is essential to avoid the users from getting lost, informing them where they are in the Web site and how to find the information they want. The presence of a search facility in a Web site is extremely useful as it helps the users to locate the specific information quickly. The users can evaluate and rank a Web site using the site evaluation index. Internal and external links also help the users providing information they want from inside and outside of a Web site.

It may be noted that out of 36 features listed in Table 1, there are 33 features which can be represented as dichotomous variables, ($i = 1, 2, \dots, 33$). For a Web site, if the i th feature is present in the Web site; otherwise, . So, it can be possible to develop an objective system for rating different Indian tourism Web sites using these features. The other three features, i.e. background color, foreground color and number of pages in the Web sites cannot be represented as dichotomous variables. However, it is also of interest to know the current positions of these three features in the Indian tourism Web sites. Figure 1 and 2 shows the use of background and foreground colors in the Indian tourism Web sites respectively. In these Web sites, it is observed that white is the most preferred background, while blue and black are mostly used as foreground colors.

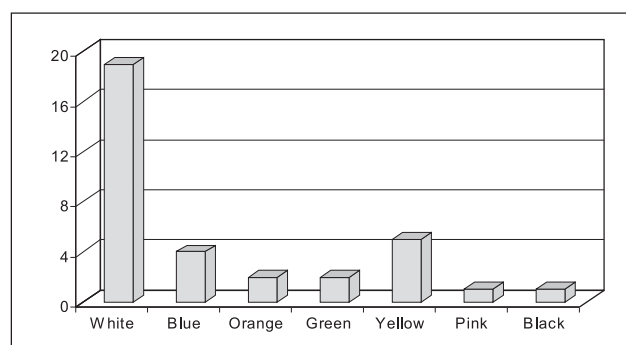


Figure 1 Use of background colors

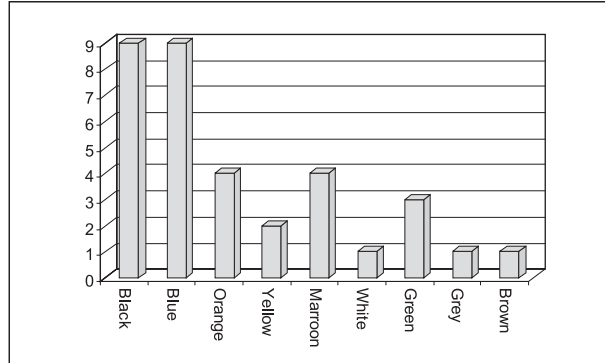


Figure 2 Use of foreground colors

The speed at which the main page of a Web site is completely loaded is related to its size, so a smaller homepage size will imply a faster access. Use of photos for illustration can increase the visual appeal of a Web site, but it is likely to increase the number of pages and size of the Web site. Thus a properly designed Web site should usually contain maximum information, wherever possible with relevant photographs, using minimum homepage size (bytes). The homepage size, number of photos and number of pages used in all the 34 Indian tourism Web sites are displayed in Figures 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

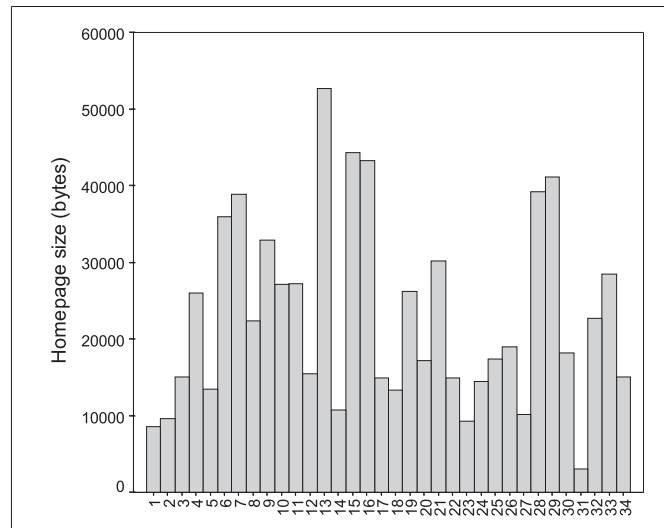


Figure 3 Homepage size of Indian tourism Web sites

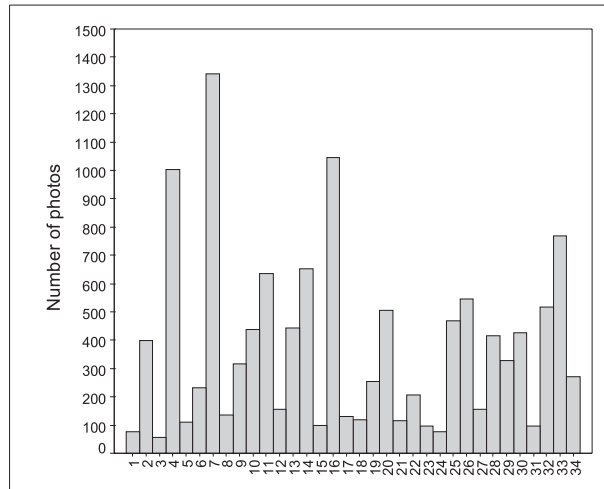


Figure 4 Number of photos used in Indian tourism Web sites

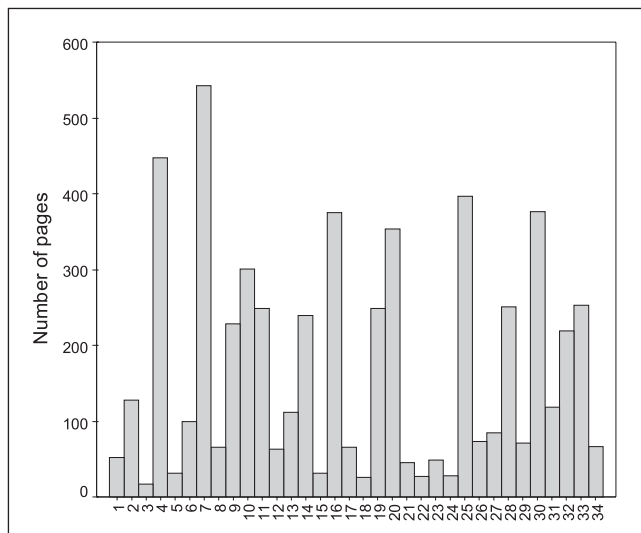


Figure 5 Number of pages in Indian tourism Web sites

The summary statistics for homepage size, number of photos, number of pages and total number of dichotomous features present in 34 tourism Web sites of Indian states and union territories are given in Table 2. The mean values of the number of features present, number of photos, number of pages and homepage size of the Indian tourism Web sites are estimated as 16.2, 371.4, 168.8 and 22884 respectively. High standard deviation and wide difference between the maximum and minimum values of these Web

site parameters, as shown in Table 2, signify that the Indian tourism Web sites are widely different in nature with respect to information content. Hence, efforts will have to be put forward to bring those Web sites to satisfactory levels.

Table 2 Summary statistics of some Web site parameters

Web site parameters	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Number of features	16.2	4.4	8	25
Number of photos	371.4	310.4	56	1343
Number of pages	168.8	144.5	17	542
Homepage size (in bytes)	22884	12267	3004	52673

Measure for quality of content of tourism Web sites

Since tourist arrivals are positively affected by the features present in the Web site of an Indian state/union territory, the quality of a tourism Web site should be assessed taking into account various features contained in the Web site. It is quite likely that all the features may not have equal importance to the intended tourists. However, the relative importance of different features to the tourists is not known. Here, it is assumed that more frequently appearing features in the Web sites have higher importance. Thus, the weights for different features are estimated using the following expression:

$$w_i = \frac{f_i}{N}; \quad (i = 1, 2, \dots, m) \quad (1)$$

where, w_i is weight value of i^{th} feature, f_i is the frequency of occurrences of i^{th} feature, i.e. the number of Web sites containing i^{th} feature, m is the total number of features and N is the total number of Web sites considered. In this present study, values of m and N are 33 and 34 respectively. With the aim to ensure that the sum of the weights adds up to 1, the weight values are, then, normalized using the following equation:

$$w_i^s = \frac{w_i}{\sum_{i=1}^m w_i} \quad (2)$$

where, w_i^s is the normalized weight for i^{th} feature. The computed normalized weights for various features are given in Table 3. It is observed from Table 3 that the most important 9 features for tourism Web sites, having normalized weights greater than 0.04, are a) about us, b) attractions,

c) internal links, d) external links, e) contact us, f) places to visit, g) fairs and festivals, h) accommodation, and i) tour planner. The comprehensive list of features as obtained from the survey of 34 Indian tourism Web sites and their relative weights can be useful for designing an improved tourism Web site.

The quality of content of a Web site cannot be evaluated and improved without assessing it quantitatively. For this purpose, a measure for the quality of tourism Web sites, called as Web site rating (R_{tw}), is proposed as follows:

$$R_{tw} = \left(\sum_{i=1}^m w_i^S x_i \right) \times 100 \quad (3)$$

It may be noted that the value of R_{tw} will always lie between 0 and 100. Higher will be the value of, better will be content quality of a tourism Web site. The estimated R_{tw} values for 34 Indian tourism Web sites are graphically shown in Figure 6. It can be observed that a Web site containing more number of features leads to higher rating value. This rating system is developed giving due consideration to the relative importance of various features present in the tourism Web sites. Therefore, the proposed system can be considered as a good measure for evaluating the content quality of tourism Web sites.

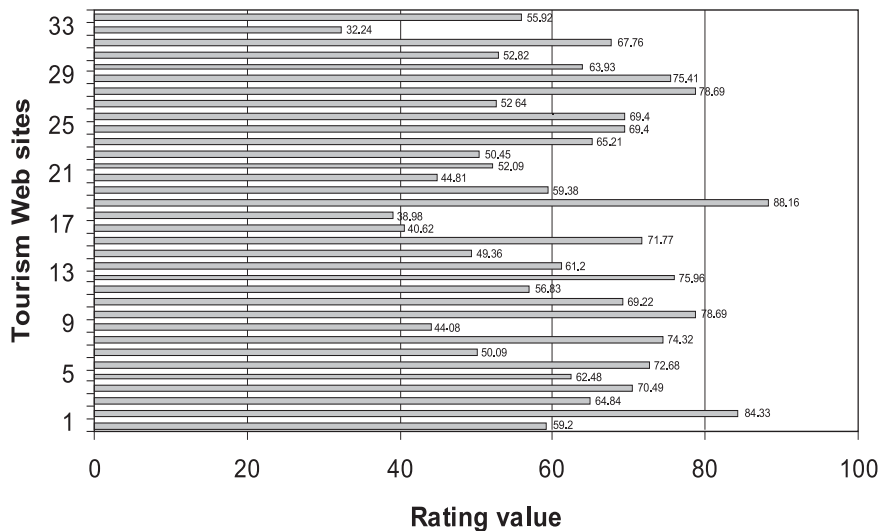


Figure 6 Rating of Indian tourism Web sites

Table 3 Normalized weights of various features for tourism Web sites

	Features	Normalized weights
Promotional features	About us	0.05647
	Art and craft	0.03461
	Fairs and festivals	0.04554
	Attractions	0.05464
	Culture and heritage	0.02732
	Feedback	0.02004
	Investment policy	0.01639
	Government and administration	0.03825
	Travel advisory	0.03279
	On-line booking	0.02368
Informative features	News and events	0.03643
	Weather	0.01634
	Contact us	0.04918
	Privacy statements	0.01639
	FAQ	0.01275
	Guide maps	0.03825
	Places to visit	0.04918
	Tour planner	0.04372
	Transportation	0.01822
	Accommodation	0.04553
	Restaurants and cuisines	0.02732
	Tourist office information	0.02914
	Interactive value-added information	0.03461
	Statistics	0.00911
Presentation features	Use of flash animation	0.03643
	Use of audio	0.00182
	Use of video	0.01275
	Image gallery	0.03825
Accessibility features	Site map	0.02186
	External links	0.05100
	Internal links	0.05282
	Site search	0.00729
	Site evaluation	0.00182
Total		1.00000

It can be noted that the overall average rating of the Indian tourism Web sites is 61.87 only. The Web site-wise rating varies from a minimum value of 32.24 to 88.16 and the standard deviation of the rating values is 13.53, which implies that the Indian tourism Web sites widely vary in their contents. Hence, efforts will have to be given from the central and state governments to remove the shortfalls of the Indian tourism Web sites, make them more demanding and informative to fulfill the needs of the tourists, and increase the homogeneity in the quality of the Web sites.

Conclusions

With the increasing number of domestic and international tourists visiting India every year, tourism Web sites have important roles to play by providing the required information to the intended tourists. Well designed and developed Web sites can attract more number of tourists helping in promotion of tourism in India. In this paper, the findings from the survey of 34 Indian tourism Web sites are presented. A measure for the quality of content of tourism Web sites is proposed. Using the proposed methodology, the quality of all the 34 Indian tourism Web sites is evaluated. The overall average quality of the Indian tourism Web sites is found to be not quite satisfactory. The quality of Indian tourism Web sites differ widely with respect to their contents. Therefore, Indian central and state governments will have to upgrade their tourism Web sites to a satisfactory level which will, in turn, fully satisfy the needs of the domestic and international tourists. This type of content analysis and evaluative study can be extended to commercial and educational Web sites and also to the international tourism Web sites.

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