

BENCHMARKING REPRESENTATION OF MARKETING MIX OF THE SELECTED DESTINATION WEBSITES OF STATE DMO'S OF INDIA

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Abstract

With increasing role of Destination websites as an information gateway for potential tourists, researchers are highlighting the importance of website evaluation. In the context of Indian tourism industry, though the area of tourism is well researched, no visible literature is found in the field of e-tourism initiatives of DMOs. Therefore, the present research evaluates the destination websites of state DMOs of India and successfully fills the research gap.

Top destination websites of Indian state DMOs were benchmarked by using content analysis method. For that the comprehensive list of total 105 contents, representing 'must-have contents of the destination websites', was developed. Factor loading technique of Benchmarking was applied to finalize the top 5 DMOs which led to the selection of destination websites of Kerala, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat states.

*The result of benchmarking exposed that sample websites have similar practices but different in design hence the benchmarking analysis was not able to identify general best website in all aspects. The highest score is achieved by Kerala, and then Uttar Pradesh followed by Gujarat and Maharashtra and the least score was achieved by destination website of Rajasthan state. Further, the areas such as interactivity, website customization, mobile techniques, accessibility, online booking facilities, use of UGC, online chat/ 24*7 interactive services were commonly neglected. Study revelations were presented in the form of spider chart and prolific suggestions for the improvement of the website design were given along with future scope of research..*

Keywords: Website Evaluation, Benchmarking, Content Analysis, Indian Tourism, DMOs

INTRODUCTION

Developments in information technologies are having far-reaching impacts on the travel and tourism industry (Küster, 2006). O'Connor (2004) annotated that the Internet is the most influential ICT, serves as an effective marketing and communication strategy for both suppliers and consumers, and facilitates information sharing, communication and online shopping (cited in Ip, Law, Lee, & Wiley, 2011).

Websites, as one of the important internet marketing tool affecting the competitiveness of destinations, have facilitated the use of destination potentials. Hence destination websites play a vital role for marketing strategies of DMOs (Baggio, 2003; Celik & Caylak, 2015).

Ip et al., (2011) elucidated that researchers had recognized the importance of websites to tourism industries since long hence the literature contains numerous studies exploring

various issues related to the segment such as website analysis, performance, assessment, usability etc. While Li, Wang, & Wiley, (2010) put into notice that research on the use of the Internet by DMOs in general is limited to date. Therein no visible literature is found on the websites of DMOs of India, which is one of the leading tourism countries of Asia Pacific region. To fill this research gap, the present research paper aims to benchmark Official websites of DMOs of selected States of India by performing content analysis. It identifies the most common contents and design features of these websites along with distinctive practices.

After achieving the fairly good coefficient of reliability from inter-coder reliability test, the code with 105 contents was finalized for content analysis. Destination websites of top five DMOs were selected by factor loading method and rated by using the code. The analysis is given in detail along with observations and recommendations.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Importance of Destination Website

In tourism industry, Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) are the organisations responsible for the marketing of destinations (Elbe, Hallén, & Axelsson Björn, 2009; ETC & UNWTO, 2003; Pike, 2004). Bastida & Huan (2014) stated that DMOs officially represent the cities and have the most impact on visitors. With the emergence of internet, DMOs are taking efforts to develop comprehensive internet marketing strategies for destination to target global market. According to Chaffey, Chadwick, Johnston, & Mayer (2015), developing and maintaining an effective online presence through website is a key part of Internet marketing.

Law, Qi, & Buhalis (2010) characterized DMO websites as official tourism websites or destination websites which are created by DMO solely to promote and represent destinations. Morrison (2013) elucidated nine roles of DMO websites, which are:

- Providing information on the destination
- Promoting destination product and services
- Supporting and enhancing traditional promotions
- Communicating destination positioning and branding
- Building relationships with tourists and travel trade
- Engaging travelers in discussions via social media
- Generating visitor databases and research
- Encouraging destination partnerships
- Allowing bookings and reservations (e-commerce)

Celik & Caylak (2015) annotated that DMOs' websites have become an important intermediary for destination marketing and competition, hence it has become important and critical, rather than an option, to have an effective website. Bastida & Huan (2014) make out that more attractive and useful an official destination website is the more likelihood to turn a potential tourist into an actual tourist.

With increasing role and importance of the destination website, evaluation of website performance to improve the effectiveness has been a growing concern among tourism scholars since late 1990s (Stepchenkova, Tang, Jang, Kirilenko, & Morrison, 2010). Methods suggested by UNWTO (2008) for website evaluation include web analytics and metrics, online survey of users, expert audit and evaluation, Laboratory testing and online experiments. Park & Gretzel (2007) has shed light on the several evaluation studies that have been conducted related to tourism Websites which applied a multitude of approaches that range from expert judgments to consumer surveys to automated evaluations by crawler technology which have

identified a myriad of possible factors.

From review of literature, it is evident that researchers have evaluated tourism websites by applying various methodologies such as content analysis, Balance score card (BSC), ICTR approach, benchmarking approach, Fuzzy topsis method, correspondence analysis, MICA (Model of Internet Commerce Adoption) or eMICA (extended MICA) etc. Among all techniques, Content analysis and BSC are actively used approaches by researchers (Han and Mills, 2006; Albadvi & Soddad, 2012).

Content Analysis

Contents of websites have an important role in influencing the purchase decision process of the tourists. Hence researchers recommend DMOs to pay attention on use and development of website contents (Das & Utkarsh, 2014; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2006). By applying Content analysis, which is the process of systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristic (Neuendorf, 2002), the detailed and systematic analysis of contents of destination website can be done to endorse the website design. In this vein, many researchers have analyzed or compared destination websites of DMOs by applying content analysis method.

Content analysis conducted by Han & Mills (2006) categorized contents of the website in 3 different categories namely: aesthetic features, informative features and interactive features and under which they studied 52 different items. Luna-nevarez & Hyman (2012) analyzed the contents of websites of top 235 global destinations to identify the most common features to reveal the conventional wisdom about the best design for such sites.

Moreover, review of literature brought forward the fact that most studies have focused on US and European websites, thus overlooking websites of Asian destinations, except few prior studies on China's tourism websites (Bastida & Huan, 2014; Li & Wang, 2010; Qi, Law, & Buhalis, 2008). Therein, no visible literature is found on the website evaluation of Indian DMOs.

Indian Tourism Industry

Being largest in the south Asian sub-region and well-known cultural tourism destination in the world, major tourist traffic in South Asia is driven by India (+5%) (UNWTO, 2016); receiving 8.03 million tourists in the year 2015 (GoI, 2016). Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT, GoI) (2016) explained that tourism sector is one of the largest employment generators in the country which plays important role in promotion and inclusive growth of the less-advantaged sections of the society and poverty eradication.

However, the country's development and promotion of its tourism sector, compared to other Asia Pacific destinations, has been stifled by many factors, leading to the widespread conclusion that India has punched below its weight in tourism (UNWTO & GTERC, 2014). The action plan suggested by India Initiative of WTTC (2014) stressed that "Incredible India" campaign needs an urgent revamp and to be ready for a Version 2.0 to re-position India as a major tourist destination to achieve its potential.

In this vein, already MoT,GoI (2013) had taken a step to encourage the State Tourism Departments to take major IT initiatives for marketing and publicizing their tourist products online by introducing the scheme of 'Central Financial Assistance for IT and Computerization' which incorporate providing financial assistance (up to 50%) for IT project (Ministry of Tourism & GoI, n.d.). Many state DMOs adopted the scheme to improve their online presence by introducing new or revamped destination website. But the assessment report of the scheme by MoT, GoI (2013) criticized that adoption and adaptation to technology and its take off had been poor in most cases and it advised that the scheme should place guidelines for benchmarking of websites to bring about parity and standardize the computerization of tourism offices in the different states.

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.

In order to fill this research gap, the study aimed:

- To benchmark the destination websites of selected state DMOs of India in order to identify the best design practices. Qualitative research of the DMO websites has been done with the application of Content analysis method.

To code the utmost contents, the study kept another objective

- To develop an all-inclusive list of 'must have' contents of destination website.

It is achieved by multistage categorization and it resulted into the comprehensive code of 105 contents.

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 5 DMOs (i.e. Benchmarking partners) 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 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 29 th 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 29 th 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.	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
6.	Policy	The policy of the state is reviewed and strategies of the state related to use of IT and digital marketing are highlighted	5
	Total	90	

Table 2: Selected DMOs for Benchmarking

No	State	URL of the destination website of State DMO	Obtained Marks
1.	Kerala	www.keralatourism.org	78
2.	Uttar Pradesh	http://uptourism.gov.in	62
3.	Maharashtra	www.maharashtratourism.gov.in	51
4.	Rajasthan	http://tourism.rajasthan.gov.in	47
5.	Gujarat	www.gujarattourism.com	58

METHODOLOGY

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.

For the present study, the process was initiated by preliminary analysis of destination websites of sample DMOs (Table 2), which was resulted into the extensive list of common and unique contents available on these websites. Further, the contents observed and suggested in priori literature, specially provided by UNWTO (2008), were added to the list. 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 the formation of all-inclusive list of 105 contents of destination website. Further the content categories, as per their relevance,

were placed under different P’s of ‘Marketing mix’.

Marketing mix, originally proposed by Jerome McCarthy in the year 1960 (Pomeroy, Johnson, & Noble, 2009), is applied by marketer to inform their marketing strategy. McCarthy initially proposed only 4P’s (Product, Price, Promotion & Place) later it was extended to 7P’s (adding People, Physical evidence and Process) then 10P’s. Still researchers are adding more P’s or arguing that all extended P’s are just subsumed within initial P’s (Chaffey et al., 2015).

According to Benckendorff & Black (2000), marketing mix provides framework to compare an organisation’s existing services with competitors’ in and outside of sector as a part of benchmarking process. Hence, its role in the presentation of content should also be considered. Thus the earlier developed categories were blended with P’s of Marketing mix to understand the presentation of contents related to different P’s of marketing on destination website.

The code is dealing with only 6 P’s (Product, Price, Promotion, Physical evidence, People and Partnership) which find relevance in both online environment and the research area.

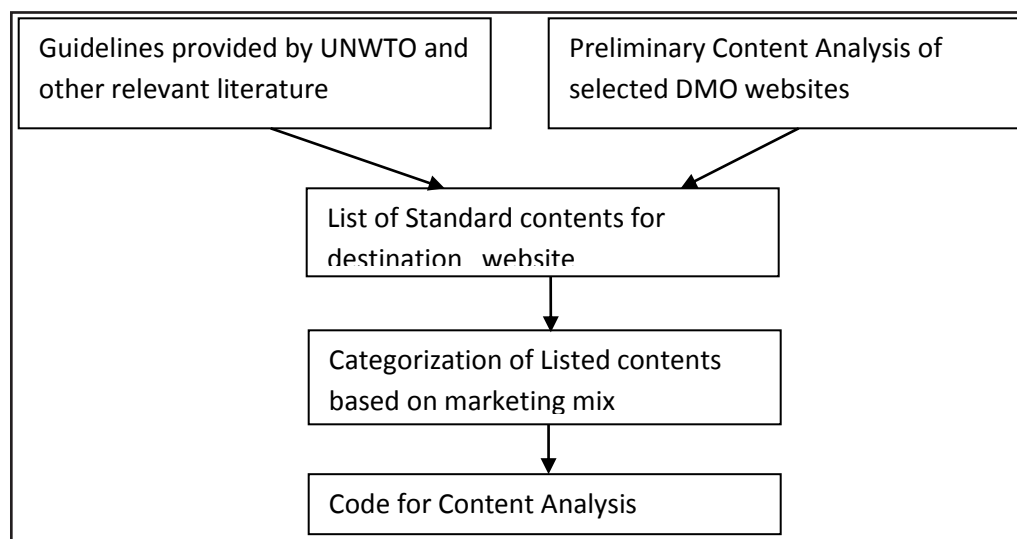


Fig. 1: Multistage Categorization for Developing Content Categories

Thus the application of two pronged strategies followed by two step categorization procedures resulted in all inclusive list of 105 website contents which represents the Content

analysis code for the present research study. Code details are given below:

Code Definition

Product

Product, one of the initial P's of marketing mix, is anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that satisfies a want or need (Kotler, 1998) (cited in (Pike, 2004). It deals with positioning & branding of your product, guarantee, customer service policy, product accessory, packaging, product quality, features, availability etc (Chaffey et al., 2015; Wilson., 2008).

Morrison (2013) and Buhalis (2000) explicated that tourism product for a region is an interdependent mixture of tangible and intangible components comprising of physical products, people, packages, programs, public goods and the entire range of facilities and services offered locally, plus all socio-cultural and environmental resources. Therefore under the component 'Product', various tourism products, their features, branding, their graphical presentation and services provided through website were studied.

Price

Price, the most flexible of tourism product's marketing mix, refers to the pricing policy of the organization (Pike, 2004). A detailed range of prices of the packages and accommodations offered on a destination website can induce reactions from online travellers such as inquiring more information (Han & Mills, 2006). Thus under pricing policy, contents such as price quoting, discounts, different payment modes, cancellation policy, refund policy etc. were analyzed.

People

It is an element of the marketing mix that involves delivery of services to customers during the interactions with customers. In online environment, the involvement of the staff is changed either through new role (e.g. replying-mails) or through automated online services (Chaffey et al., 2015). Thus this part of the code deals with the different automated online services for customer assistance & queries and information about organization.

Promotion

It is an element of marketing mix which explains the way in which the tourism organization communicates in an effective way with its target customers and other stakeholders to inform them about their products (Chaffey et al., 2015; Nouri & Soltani, 2015). Here the category embraced linkages with online promotional tools as social networking sites (SNS), reviewing sites and direct promotion of User Generated Contents (UGC) like reviews. It also incorporates e-CRM techniques like e-newsletter and online registration/ personal account provided on the website to encourage repeat visits

by providing latest information and enabling users to store information and personal itinerary.

The code also includes the content 'Clear statement of purpose of website'. It is identified as user confidence builder by UNWTO (2008).

Physical Evidence

In online context, 'Physical evidence' refers to the customer experience of the company through website. It covers the critical success factors of websites like navigation, ease of use, customization and accessibility (Smith P & Ze, 2011; UNWTO, 2008) which play very important role in enriching tourist experience (KAPLANIDOU & Vogt, 2006). Thus, the contents related to navigation and accessibility would be coded under this part of the code.

Partnerships

Morrison (1989) defined partnership as cooperative promotions and marketing efforts by hospitality and travel organizations (cited in Pomeroy, Johnson, & Noble, (2009)). Encouraging partnerships to empower local business is the most obvious role of the DMOs and it can be easily carried out by destination website. Hence this section of the code studies how the website promotes partnership with other stakeholders of the industry (tour operator, travel agents, accommodation units, tourist guides, interpreter etc.) and whether online booking of their services can be done through it.

Measuring

The Benchmarking Matrix of 6*5 (6 Ps and 5 Benchmarking Partners) was proposed. Each item of the code was measured on a dichotomous scale of '1' being present on the website and '0' not present on the website. For example, if the destination website offered event calendar, then the event calendar content under the category Product features and characteristic will receive the score of '1.' Likewise, content analysis of all sampled websites was conducted by visiting designated DMO websites and examining the presence of each item. In such manner, all web-pages of the website were considered as unit of analysis and coded for analysis procedure. The total score for the website is calculated by adding together the coded contents.

Few contents of the code represents design part or functionalities (like multilingual, font scalability, accessibility to disables etc.) of websites which cannot be coded through Qualitative data analysis softwares like Nvivo or QDA miner, therefore manual coding was preferred. Additionally, the number of units of analysis was also higher so it would have been tedious work to save and analyse them

in the software. There is positive correlation between total score of the website and performance of the website.

Reliability of Content Analysis Code

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

For inter-coder reliability, Coefficient of reliability is calculated 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).

To perform the reliability test for the developed Content Analysis code, 7 PhD scholars were selected. Before the test, the coder were trained and briefed about the code and research work. The test was executed on 20th July 2016 in the evening (16.00 IST). It took 2 hours for the coders to code each and every contents of the code.

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.

Coefficient of reliability = 104 / 105 = 99%

99% agreement represents fairly good amount of reliability and as per the content analysis methodology the code was finalized and used for further analysis.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE WEBSITES

Survey Revelations

The content analysis of five sampled websites was performed by the researcher in the duration of 10th November 2016 to

3rd January 2017. From each website 105 contents were analysed by coding it as 0 or 1 (if content is present then 1 else 0).

Product

Product information includes textual and graphical presentation of the product which attracts online travelers and encourages them to visit the destination. The content analysis exhibited that almost all sample websites scored good in informative services and destination branding. The Event calendar of Rajasthan provided information of events till 2020 which helps tourists to plan their tour in advance.

Branding contents (brand logo and tag line) which increase trustworthiness of the website generally placed in the upper left corner of the website along with official logo of the DMO.

DMOs are using variety of graphical contents, such as pictures, videos, wallpapers, online brochures, screen savers, post cards, virtual reality apps and gamification of the products which facilitate destination visualization for potential tourists. Importance of Virtual reality apps was discussed by Buhalis & Wagner (2013) stating that these apps are inspirational tool that gives future destination competitiveness.

Graphical presentation of Rajasthan, UP and Kerala tourism is noteworthy in true sense; especially the Kerala tourism boasts about more than 3000 videos and 1500 photos of diverse tourism products with easy sharing options through email and social media. Along with this, both (Kerala and UP) are taking excellent initiatives in the area of user engagement through virtual reality by providing gamification of the product. Unfortunately, Maharashtra tourism is underutilizing the graphic contents, especially virtual reality for product promotion.

Table 3: Content Analysis of Destination Websites: Product

Sr. No	Content	State				
		UP	GJ	KL	RJ	MH
	Product					
	Product Features and characteristics					
1.	Information of Destinations	1	1	1	1	1
2.	Historical & cultural background of the region	1	0	1	1	1
3.	Information about local Cuisine	1	1	1	1	1
4.	Information on Lifestyle of local community	1	0	1	1	1
5.	Information of Local festivals	1	1	1	1	1
6.	Information of tourist festivals	1	1	1	1	1

Sr. No	Content	State				
		UP	GJ	KL	RJ	MH
	Product					
	Product Features and characteristics					
7.	Event calendar	0	0	1	1	1
8.	Information about Geography and topography of the region	1	1	1	1	1
9.	Information about Souvenir (photos/ prices)	1	1	1	1	1
10.	Political details	1	0	0	0	0
11.	Information of Trade fair and exhibition	0	1	0	0	1
12.	Nearby places	1	1	1	1	1
13.	Distance of attraction from major places	1	1	1	1	1
	Branding					
14.	Brand Logo on homepage/ every of the website	1	1	1	1	1
15.	Tag line on homepage/ every page of the website	1	1	1	0	1
	Graphical presentation of the destination					
16.	Photos of the destinations	1	1	1	1	1
17.	Promotional videos of destinations	1	1	1	1	1
18.	Virtual tours/ 360' view	1	1	1	1	0
19.	Online brochures	1	1	1	1	1
20.	Postcards	1	1	1	0	0
21.	Wallpapers	1	0	1	1	0
22.	Screen savers	0	0	1	0	0
23.	Gamification of tourist products	1	0	1	0	0

The category 'Product' also includes online booking and other interactive services provided by the website.

Through websites, DMOs are vigilantly not only promoting the services provided by them but also providing online booking facilities for them which generally redirect user to appropriate webpage. Excluding Kerala tourism, other websites have provided separate tab for 'online booking' which redirects user to online booking system. Kerala tourism website has provided the details including URL of the service provided so that the user can do online booking from given website.

Interactive service is one factor in benchmark that the majority of destination websites have overlooked. It allows users to engage in some aspects of tour planning process (Han & Mills, 2006) by providing services like online tour planner, distance calculator, currency converter, weather forecasting tool, interactive maps etc (Buhalis & Wagner, 2013). Though tour planner is provided by other DMOs, Kerala website has provided very efficient and easy to use one.

Table 4: Content Analysis of Destination Websites: Product (Services)

Sr. No	Content	State				
		UP	GJ	KL	RJ	MH
	Product					
	Services provided by the website					
24.	Information of accommodation services of the organisation (if provided)	1	1	1	1	1
25.	Information of transport services of the organisation (if provided)	1	1	1	1	NA
26.	Tour packages of the organisation (if provided)	1	1	1	1	1
27.	Online Booking of accommodation units through the website (if provided)	1	1	0	1	1
28.	Online Booking of transport services through the website (if provided)	1	1	0	1	NA
29.	Online purchase of packages (if provided)	1	1	0	1	1

Sr. No	Content	State				
		UP	GJ	KL	RJ	MH
	Product					
30.	Link to download mobile applications	1	1	1	0	0
31.	Interactive tool for Weather forecasting	1	0	0	0	1
32.	Interactive tool for Currency conversion	0	0	0	0	0
33.	Interactive tour planner/ e-tour planner	0	0	1	0	0
34.	Interactive distance calculator	0	0	0	0	1
35.	Interactive map to locate destination / link to Google map	1	1	1	0	1
36.	Travel tips/ advisory	1	0	1	1	1
37.	Visa assistance	0	0	1	0	0
38.	Feedback	1	1	1	1	1
39.	RTI	1	1	1	1	1

Price

Analysis of destination websites shows that prices of services provided by DMOs and other service providers have been quoted along with refund and cancellation policy. As Kerala tourism doesn't provide the service of online bookings, no refund and cancellation policies are mentioned.

DMOs failed to quote the refund and cancellation policies of other service providers. Furthermore there is a general gap considering the area of differentiated pricing strategies which include web-only prices, online deals, last minute bookings etc.

Table 5: Content Analysis of Destination Websites: Price

Sr. No	Content	State				
		UP	GJ	KL	RJ	MH
	Price					
40.	Price quoting	1	1	1	1	1
41.	Price quoting of services provided by other organizations	1	1	1	0	1
42.	Own Refund policy	1	1	0	1	1
43.	Own cancellation charges	1	1	0	1	1
44.	Refund policy of others	0	0	0	0	0
45.	Cancellation charges of others	0	0	0	0	0
46.	Modes of payment	1	1	0	1	1
47.	Discounts on own services	1	0	0	1	1

People

Though Benchmarked websites have mentioned the details about the organization, they are underutilizing the interactive and automatic 24*7 tourist assistance services which include

virtual assistant, online chats, toll free number etc. These services can enhance the usability of the websites and encourage online traveler to become an actual.

Table 6: Content Analysis of Destination Websites: People

Sr. No	Content	State				
		UP	GJ	KL	RJ	MH
	People					
48.	About us/ contact us	1	1	1	1	1
49.	Information of regional offices	1	1	1	1	1
50.	Organisational structure	1	0	1	0	1
51.	virtual assistant / online chats	0	0	0	1	0
52.	Toll free number	1	1	1	1	1
53.	FAQ	1	0	0	1	0

Promotion

Component ‘Promotion’ is dealing with various online communication techniques like e-newsletter, user registration, social media presence, release of reports, online travel forum etc. available on websites.

According to Knight and Burn (2005) the important dimensions of information quality, as obtained from previous literature are accuracy, consistency, timeliness, completeness, conciseness, reliability and comprehension (cited in Das & Utkarsh, 2014). But the website of Maharashtra is lagging behind in these crucial characteristics of information. The event calendar of the MTDC provides trade exhibitions of the year 2016 and failed to display the upcoming tourist events which impoverish the user experience.

Another leading promotional tool available on websites is provided linkages to social media which can significantly and quickly influence the brand image (Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012). Likewise, Indian DMOs are attempting to utilize this promotional tool by starting their official pages on diverse social media channels. Among them, Facebook, YouTube, twitter are the most common while Google+, Instagram and other blogging sites are gradually gaining popularity. Respective links of the web-pages have been provided on the destination websites.

Destinations could have improved their efforts by implementing communities for their users by providing them virtual spaces (online travel forum) in which they can discuss, engage and share. Only Kerala tourism website has integrated online travel forum, where travelers can post their requirements, queries, travel plan; affiliated travel agents also can directly approach them through the forum which leads to trouble-free tourist felicitation, customer & stakeholders’ engagement and relationship enhancement with both industry & customer. ‘Travel diary’ tab of Rajasthan tourism website shares travel diaries of few tourists.

Besides this, reviewing websites such as Tripadvisor can help DMOs in increasing the ease and transparency in destination marketing and sustaining their future success (Buhalis & Wagner, 2013). But all destinations within the benchmark are missing out on such major opportunities. Else, websites can directly show the experiences of earlier tourists by enabling them to write and share their review.

Appreciable e-CRM techniques have been practiced by Kerala tourism. E-Newsletter of Kerala tourism has won the PATA Gold award for 4 times (2016, 2014, 2013 & 2005). Also online personal account of the website eases preparing and sharing of the tour itinerary with different interactive tour planning and sharing tools.

Table 7: Content Analysis of Destination Websites: Promotion

Sr. No	Content	State				
		UP	GJ	KL	RJ	MH
	Promotion					
54.	Clear statement of purpose of the website	0	0	1	0	0
55.	Sign – up for users	1	1	1	0	1
56.	Accurate and up to date information	1	1	1	1	0
57.	Sources are quoted for third party contents	1	1	1	0	1
58.	Awards /achievement	0	1	1	0	1
59.	State tourism Policy document	1	1	1	1	1
60.	Tourism statistics	1	1	1	1	1
61.	News article	1	1	1	1	1
62.	Link to tripadvisor.com	0	0	0	1	0
63.	Links to blogs	1	1	1	0	0
64.	Links to social networking sites	1	1	1	0	1
65.	Online Traveller forum	0	0	1	1	0
66.	Links to state tourism’s services	1	1	1	0	1
67.	Reviews by actual tourists	0	0	0	1	0
68.	Newsletter	1	0	1	1	1
69.	Pop ups/scrolls/flash for upcoming event	1	1	1	1	1

Physical Evidences

This part of the code mainly analyzed navigation, accessibility and customization features of destination websites.

Good navigation is characterized by organized pages, the presence of a navigation bar on every page, and the opportunity to access the home page from every subpage within the Website (Head 1999) (cited in KAPLANIDOU &

Vogt, 2006). The benchmarking websites show satisfactory navigation and categorization capabilities while fall short in the customization and accessibility capabilities.

Among all benchmarking partners Kerala tourism website is providing excellent navigation and categorization features and UP tourism website is doing well in accessibility features. The theme of the recent World tourism day of the year 2016 was 'Tourism for all: Promoting universal accessibility' recommending tourism accessibility to elderly and disabled

people. Considering this one important thing that should be noticed here, all sample DMOs, apart from UP tourism, overlooked the accessibility provisions for differently –able people, whereas the people with disabilities represent 15% of the world population (UNWTO, 2013).

The DMOs need to improve their websites as benchmarking reveals that they are not utilizing the available technology and apps to their full potentials.

Table 8: Content Analysis of Destination Websites: Physical Evidence

Sr. No	Content	State				
		UP	GJ	KL	RJ	MH
	Physical Evidence					
	Navigation					
70.	Global navigation for important contents	1	1	1	1	1
71.	Home link / icon	1	1	1	1	1
72.	Breadcrumb navigation	1	1	1	0	1
73.	Keyword search engine	1	1	1	1	1
74.	Site map	1	1	1	0	1
75.	OnMouseOver alt text	1	1	1	1	1
76.	Links changes colors after they have been used	0	0	0	0	0
77.	More / read on links	1	1	1	1	1
78.	Separate search for product database	0	0	1	0	0
79.	Categorization of tourist product	1	1	1	1	1
80.	Special interest pages	1	1	1	1	1
81.	Pages that meet needs of groups	0	0	1	0	0
82.	Geographically based searching	1	1	1	1	1
83.	Change language (Multilingual)	0	1	1	0	1
84.	Useful links to other sites	1	1	1	1	1
	Accessibility					
85.	Right and easy URL	1	1	1	1	1
86.	Accessibility to disables	1	0	0	0	0
87.	Text for non text content	1	1	1	0	1
88.	Font is scalable	1	0	0	0	0
89.	Good contrast between text and background	1	1	1	1	0
90.	Users can change the contrast between text and background	1	0	0	0	0
91.	All functionalities are operable by keyboard	1	0	1	1	1
92.	Easy language	1	1	1	1	1
93.	Consistent contents	1	1	1	1	1
94.	Level of WCAG 2.0 is mentioned	0	0	0	0	0
95.	Help user to scan pages	1	1	1	1	1
96.	Faultless performance	0	1	1	0	0

Partnership

Website of DMOs provides way to strengthen the partnership by promoting and selling services of local industry

stakeholders. The results of Content analysis exhibited that though Indian DMO websites are promoting services of industry stakeholder, they are not able to take the online booking for them.

Table 9: Content Analysis of Destination Websites: Partnership

Sr. No	Content	State				
		UP	GJ	KL	RJ	MH
	Partnership					
97.	Information of accommodation services provided by other organizations	0	1	1	1	1
98.	Information of transport operators/ travel agents/ tour operators services	0	1	1	1	1
99.	Tour packages provided by other organizations	0	1	1	0	0
100.	Information of food services provided by other organizations	0	1	1	0	1
101.	Information of tourist guides / translators	0	1	1	1	1
102.	Online Booking of accommodation units through the website	0	1	0	0	0
103.	Online Booking of other transport operator/ travel agents/ tour operators through the website	0	0	0	0	0
104.	Online booking of packages	0	0	0	0	0
105.	Online Booking of tourist guides / translators through the website	0	0	0	0	0

If taken as a whole, the result of benchmarking analysis exposed that sample websites revealed similar practices than different in design which is observed from the total score of the benchmarking partners ranging from 62-78. The highest score is achieved by Kerala, and then Uttar Pradesh followed by Gujarat and Maharashtra and the least score is achieved

by destination website of Rajasthan state. Further, the promising areas such as interactivity, website customization, mobile techniques, accessibility, online booking facilities, use of UGC, online chat/ 24*7 interactive services were commonly neglected.

Table 10: Total Scores and Best Practices of the Benchmarking Partners

P's with total score		Uttar Pradesh	Gujarat	Kerala	Rajasthan	Maharashtra
Product	information (23)	20	16	21 (Best Score)	17	17
	Services (16)	12	10	10	09	11
Price (08)		06 (Best Score)	05	02	05	06 (Best Score)
People (06)		05 (Best Score)	03	04	05 (Best Score)	04
Promotion (16)		12	12	14	09	11
Physical Evidence	Navigation (15)	11	12	14 (Best Score)	09	12
	Accessibility (12)	10 (Best Score)	07	08	06	06
Partnership (09)		00	06 (Best Score)	05	03	04
Total Score		76	72	78	62	71

Many national and international awards winning website of Kerala tourism (DoT, GoK, 2017) performing some very unique practices. Still there are other areas which need to be focused such as online booking facility which need urgent attention, addition of pricing contents, website customization features, virtual assistant or additional 24*7 communication ways and use of UGC for promotion etc.

The UP tourism website showed best practices in pricing, people and accessibility & customization related contents. It could have improved the performance by enhancing use of UGC, categorization of products and stakeholder partnership etc. Another major area ignored by the website is multilingual capability.

The website of Gujarat tourism is effectively maintaining partnerships with industry stakeholders but failed to take online booking for them. The website is also underperforming in the textual and graphical presentation of the products.

In the context of Maharashtra tourism website, which was recently revamped showed many contents as 'coming soon'. The website needs an urgent improvement in poor graphical presentation and interactive services.

The lowest scorer Rajasthan tourism website is rich in graphical contents; yet lot of improvements are expected in the contents related to tour planning, promotion, navigation and accessibility.

Adding to the point, the result also corroborate the fact that the good website is visited by the people. Here, the website

of Kerala tourism showed many good practices and received highest number of website visits (website hits) (2,77,55,447 on 29/05/2017).

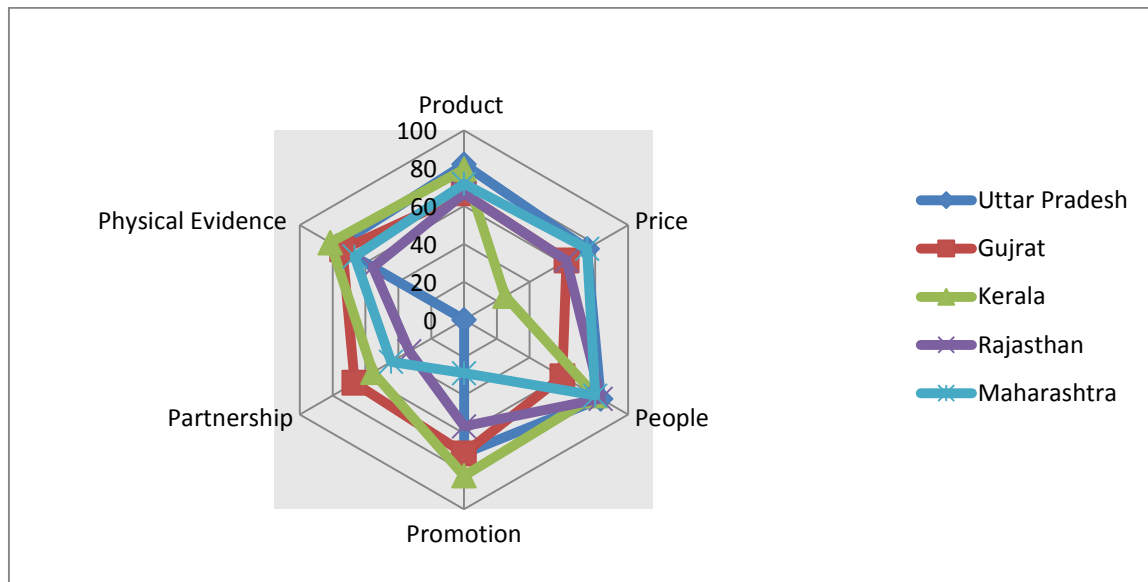


Fig. 2: Spider Chart Showing Output of Benchmarking

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated by Baggio (2003) website is one of the primary faces of an organization towards its customers, suppliers, employees, and partners and it can be a powerful tool for brand awareness, product information, commerce and customer service. Nevertheless, Luna-nevarez & Hyman, (2012) put into notice that despite this importance, DMOs' websites may not be as effective as it should be. For the reason, the constant evaluation of destination websites is essential (Morrison, 2013). Therefore, the present research study evaluates the destination websites of state DMOs of India and successfully fills the void of literature available in the context of Indian tourism industry.

Top destination websites of Indian state DMOs were benchmarked by using content analysis method. For that the comprehensive list of total 105 contents, representing 'must-have contents of the destination websites' was developed under the light of previous literature, observation of researcher and guidelines provided by UNWTO (2008). This research work will be useful for DMOs (especially of India) and website designers while developing 'One-stop-shop destination website'.

Unfortunately, the benchmarking analysis was not able to identify general best practice. Though there are some websites which can be identified as the example of best practices due to their use of certain technologies and applications, there

are other areas in which these destinations can improve in order to sustain their future success of web presence.

The study witnessed analogous practices of destination websites of Indian state DMOs which are considering online information distribution as the main function of destination website. This makes websites textual and informative rather than graphical and interactive one, thus could not satisfy trip planning requirements of users. As a result, websites are able to help tourists in information search phase but punched below in assisting them in tour planning phase. Therefore, it is suggested that websites should be simpler but more visually attractive with interactive designs. In addition, new and creative ways need to be researched on to deliver adequate help through website in different phases of tour planning.

Besides interactive tour planning services, DMOs failed to bring UGC into play. For that, DMOs should encourage past travellers as well as future travellers by providing virtual space and engaging options on destination websites to share up to date travel information and their destination experiences. Otherwise, destination website should have proper integration of social media sites such as reviewing sites or social networking sites.

DMOs are also suggested to look into location based & mobile empowered services which are greatly emphasized by researchers and industry practitioners nowadays. Development of more personalized and enhanced mobile apps providing location based services which can be downloaded from website will assist tourists in travelling phase.

To sum up, none of the DMOs are utilising the destination websites at their fullest potential which triggers a general need for DMOs to rethink about these websites. With rapid progress in web-based technologies, websites are not only information gateway for potential tourists but also acting as tour assistant which help in destination visualization, itinerary designing, destination facilitation and experience sharing etc. To execute these multifaceted roles of destination website, DMOs should continuously keep their eyes open in this rapidly changing competitive environment. New features should be continuously added and updated.

Another essential strategic change is periodic online and offline website assessment by users and experts must be performed. Through assessment DMOs' destination websites can grab user attention and engage them in destination marketing to achieve marketing objectives.

Over and above, appropriate communication between website designer, marketing personnel of the DMO, users and industry stakeholders will lead to understand the importance of some features compared to others to better serve visitors and cater their needs.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

As the study is limited to five sample destination websites, comparison of destination websites of all DMOs of India will help in understanding countrywide destination website design trends. Furthermore benchmarking with global best practices can offer extremely valuable insights in the field of optimum utilization of emerging technologies and application in website designing. In future, application of a quantitative research, measuring the extent of user satisfaction based on the questionnaire addressed to web users would be more supportive since it will be helpful in understanding users' impressions and their perceptions which might complement the present study with useful evidence.

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