An exploratory study to identify online activities for Trip Planning for India

Dr. Pawan Gupta,
IITTM,NOIDA – drpawan.gupta@yahoo.com, 9990050707
&
Ankita Devnath,
IITTM,NOIDA – ankitadevnath11@gmail.com, 9891062501

Abstract

With more than 3 billion internet users in the world, World Wide Web(WWW) has become an online community where people actually live. With the advent of smartphones and mobile internet which is economical and easily accessible, internet has reached all nook and corners of the world and by 2016 number of smartphone users will surpass 2 billion(emarketer,2014). Because of its unique characteristics, information is very essential for tourism industry and here, Web 2.0 has revolutionized the tourism industry by providing tourism related information that is accessed by internet users for travel planning. The information available has been generated both by tourism suppliers and tourists themselves. A tourist before making a final decision, goes through a lot of information search through various resources like literature, brochures, travel agents, internet, friends etc. With people spending most of their time being online, this paper tries to find the various online tools and resources that a tourist refers to while planning for a trip particularly to India and the various services booked online. It also tries to find the relation between demographic profile of tourist and the usage of online resources and tools. The paper further highlights that Online Travel Reviews is mostly preferred by tourist for travel planning.

Keywords: Online travel Planning, Online Travel Reviews, Travel Decision, Web 2.0

Introduction

As supported by various researches worldwide, it is clear that travel decision process is a multi-faceted process consisting of choosing a destination and grouping together tourism products and services (attractions, accommodations, and activities) closely related to the destination (Dellaert, et al, 1998; Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Moutinho, 1987). It requires extensive information search at all levels of decision making process. The classic decision making process, drawn from consumer behaviour literature, as outlined by Kotler (1998), identifies the following steps: 1. need recognition 2. information search 3. evaluation of alternatives 4. choice of product or service and 5. post-purchase evaluation. In tourism industry at all the steps of travel decision making process a potential tourist requires a lot of information to make his decision. This need of information about various tourism resources arises from the fact that tourism industry has its own unique characteristics of intangibility and heterogeneity. Moreover nowadays with new tourism demand which is more complex, segmented and specialized (Buhalis, D. 2002), a tourist buys an overall experience rather than a clearly defined product (Swarbrooke, J. & Horner, S., 2006). This greater need for information makes tourism an extensive problem solving decision making process where consumer invests a lot of time looking for information and benchmarks to make his choice (Howard J. & Sheth, J. 1969).

With the advent of internet and further by various technologies supported by Web 2.0, online resources have become a prominent means of gaining information for travel decision and has replaced many traditional resources like newspapers, brochures, flyers etc. Web 2.0, allows the creation and exchange of user-created content (video clips, photos, texts etc.) and is providing consumers with various technologies and tools to find, and design, not just the cheapest trip, but the perfect trip (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This allows tourist to share their experience of travel on internet which
can be referred further by potential tourist. So now consumers have information generated by both tourism suppliers and tourists. The Web culture has revolutionized and internet users now share information through Web 2.0 systems, which means that there is an interactive environment of sharing information and feedbacks, that didn’t exist before. The internet network is becoming a platform of data and knowledge creation and sharing which facilitates travel decision process by providing enormous online information pool. Tourists everywhere are looking for new experiences, hence they search on the Web, for all the relevant information about a particular destination (such as comments, videos, pictures, images, stories), customize products, choosing every detail, and compare prices. The fact that tourist are turning online for information to make their travel decisions can also be supported from the data that there are more than 3 billion users active on internet, which is around 50% of the world population. Moreover with rapidly increasing smartphone users who have access to internet 24 X 7. According to U.S. Consumer Travel Report 6th Ed.(2013), mobile travel audience spends on average 35% of their time looking for travel content on smartphones or tablets which makes internet as preferred source of information for travel planning.

**Objective**

This paper tries to find the usage of online resources related to travel and tourism industry available on internet that a tourists uses for travel planning. The objectives are as follows:

1. To find out the various online activities undertaken by a tourist for planning of their recent trip.
2. To see the influence of tourist demographics on online activity for trip planning
3. To find out the major tourism services booked online by the tourist for their recent trip.

**Methodology**

The data collection for the research was done by primary method. For primary data a questionnaire was constructed and was administered to tourist at various tourist locations in Delhi. As the study is exploratory and a sampling frame cannot be defined, no probabilistic method of sampling can be employed. Therefore, convenience method with judgement was used as the basic method for selection of samples. The samples were selected on the spot. However, care was taken to include respondents belonging to cross-section of the demography of tourists. The questionnaire included questions on demographics of tourist followed by various online activities they might indulge in while planning for a trip. As the responses were collected in Delhi and opinion was asked for the recent trip so the responses give an overview of trip planning to India, Delhi being the capital and has a major airport of India

**Findings**

For the research paper a total of 200 questionnaires were filled out of which 176 were valid for analysis which leads to a sample size of 176 including both domestics and inbound tourist. Sample included 129 inbound tourists from various countries and 47 domestic tourists. After analysis following are the findings:

1. **Online activities for travel planning**

A list of eight online travel activities was taken and respondents were asked to tick as many activities they engage in while planning for a trip. These online activities were included in the questionnaire after review of many researches in same area where use of internet on travel planning have been studied (Google, 2013., Trip Advisor, 2012. , Gretzel,2009). The data on the same are presented in figure 1.
It was found that people engage mostly in reading online travel reviews (85%) while they are planning for their trip. This was followed by searching of information about destinations/attractions on internet (78%). The other preferred online activities for travel planning are checking the official website of national tourism boards (56%) and watching destination/travel videos online (65%). Use of live chat to talk to travel experts (18%), interactive trip planners (25%) and joining discussion forums (19%) were the least preferred online activities for trip planning. This shows that people while planning for their trip rely heavily on travel reviews posted online on various websites. Online travel reviews are the reviews posted by travellers about their trip or experience they had with the destination or any tourism service like hotel, car rental, cab etc.

In connection to this question, a question was asked from the respondents about their experience of using online travel resources or engaging in online activities for travel planning. The parameters to evaluate the experience were again collected after review of research papers of the same field. Respondents were asked to mark their experience based on 5 point likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The data on the same are presented in figure 2.
The reading of the data indicates that:

- A good majority of the respondents (92%) were of the view that engaging in online activities for trip planning makes it easy to find the information needed for trip planning thus making the planning process easier.
- When asked whether the respondents were satisfied with the information available online, 81% of the respondents were satisfied with the travel information available online.
- A good majority of the respondents (78%) were of the opinion that searching for information online for trip planning is quicker than other modes of research for upcoming holiday.
- When asked whether the information available online is correct or incorrect, 37% of the respondents had no opinion about that whereas 51% of the respondents had the opinion that the information available is correct.
- Lastly, 79% of the respondents were of the opinion that the information available online helps them to make travel decisions.

The respondents were further asked as to how they made arrangements for their current travel. Out of 176 respondents 13% booked through travel agent, 49% booked through online travel portals and 38% used the services of both travel agent and online travel portals. It was further found that majority of the respondents (80% and above) had read online travel reviews irrespective of mode of booking for travel services. This is represented in figure 3.
2. Influence of tourist demographics on online activity for trip planning

Respondents were asked basic demographic questions like gender, age, country of residence, income group etc. Demographic profile of respondents is as below:

- Gender: 57% respondents were male, followed by 41% female and 2% transgender respondents.
- Country of residence: respondents were from various countries and a total of 32 countries have been represented including India. (Asia: 42%, Europe: 24%, North America: 18%, Oceania: 12%, and Africa & South America: 2% each.)
- Age: Most of the respondents were from 18-24 age group (38%) followed by 25-34 (30%).
- Education Level: About 49% of the respondents indicated that were graduate followed by 38% post graduates and 13% undergraduates.
- Income Group: Respondents were from various income levels which were divided into 9 groups.
- No. of trips taken in past 02 years: Respondents were asked about the numbers of trips they have taken in past 02 years. Most of the respondents (58%) have taken 1-3 trips followed by 30% who have taken 2-6 trips in past 02 years. 8% respondents have taken 7-9 trips and 5% have taken more than 09 trips.

On application of chi square test for finding the influence of demographic profile of tourists on various online activities for travel planning, out of all demographic profiles, only no. of trips taken had an significant influence on online activities. It was found that a demographic profile like gender, age, education background or income of tourist does have any influence on the use of online travel activities for trip planning. Only no. of trips taken by tourist in a year which can classify them into experienced traveller or naïve traveller. It was found that people who travel more read more travel blogs (P 0.041) as they tend to look for more experience and plan their trip on their own hence reading more travel blogs to collect information. This can also be supported from another finding which shows that people who travel more use interactive travel planner (P 0.006) hence they plan their trip on their own. Interactive trip planners are a great source for planning trip as they help in in making personalized travel itineraries. Again it was found that as number of trips taken in 02 years increases so does the search on information about destinations increases (P 0.031). This all shows that a person who travels more tends to look up more travel information online as he tends to plan his travel on his own which requires more information. This can be supported from the finding that people who travelled more booked their travel services online by themselves (P 0.006).

3. Tourism services booked online

Respondents were asked to select the services they booked online. The results are displayed in figure 4.

![Travel Services Booked Online](image)

It was found that hotels & airlines are the most booked services online followed by train and cab.
Conclusion

The survey demonstrates that though there are various online resources available related to travel and tourism, the majority of the tourists read online travel reviews, watch videos related to travel destinations, check the official website of the destination and search the internet about various attractions or destinations. This shows the importance of user generated content which is enabled by Web 2.0 as majority of the respondents read online travel reviews while planning for their trip. It was also seen that the travel information available on internet is satisfactory and easy to find. These online resources make the travel planning process quicker and help the tourist to make their final decisions. So this can be seen that as travel related decisions are information intensive, these online resources facilitate the process.

It was also found though many tourists book through a travel agent they still read online travel reviews and search information about destinations on internet showing the growing trust on online available tourism resources and this might also be because of ease of availability of online information. It was seen that most the demographic characteristics do not have any influence on use of online resources/activity for trip planning except no. of trip taken. It was seen that people who travel more are more likely to engage in online travel resources/activities and book their services online.

References


