Digital Marketing – Its Impact on Travel & Tourism Industry in India

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Abstract

Growth in number of internet users and use of internet, along with advancement in information technology is offering abundant information in the virtual space. With the increase in number of jobs and income levels, people are showing inclination towards travel and tourism. As travellers and tourists seek instant information, gathering information online visiting websites, search engines, mobile app, e-commerce aggregators and social media has made information search easy. Voluminous information is available online which has also lead to problem of information overload. Travel & tourism service providers, in order to capture larger business and to build their brand, are doing marketing by providing travel deals online & through other digital medium which has affected business & industry. This research focuses on assessing the impact of digital marketing on travel & tourism industry. It helps in gaining an understanding on the level of impact created by digital marketing, its pros & cons, and provide suggestions for travel & tourism service providers to address relevant issues and challenges. The outcomes of the research can be used by E-Commerce aggregators, digital marketers, Mobile App service providers, social media marketers' and implementers of IT for tourism as a reference for digital marketing decisions.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Internet Marketing, IT for Tourism, Online Bookings, Social Media Marketing, Travel & Tourism, Travel Deals Online.

1. Introduction

With the widespread growth of internet, the world has become a global village. Use of internet by consumers has opened an opportunity for online retailers to communicate about their products/services in a customised fashion. The evolution of digital marketing & its use has significantly impacted businesses to an extent that it has become an inevitable tool. Travel & Tourism industry is no exception to this fact. Than ever before, people are looking for information available on websites, e-commerce aggregators, online reviews, comments on social media e.t.c. to explore everything starting from planning and executing their tour and travel.

In addition to desktops & laptops, people have started using mobiles and mobile apps as it adds to their convenience in exploring destinations, gather information and transact in a simplified way. This has created a platform for tour operators, restaurants, travel agents, hotels and e-commerce aggregators to make use of online marketing which is far more accessible and affordable.

2. Review of Literature:

2.1 S.K.Kuthiala - Tourism and Hospitality Industry in India - Journal of Services Research, Volume 1, Number 1 (April-September, 2001) – To achieve rapid industrialization, need for advancements in the field of transportation and communication has become essential. Such advancements have led to start and growth of industries which has opened several job opportunities and has enhanced earning levels leading to increase in disposable income. People, to break from regular work, are showing interest in travelling & touring. India, with wider geographical diversity & culture, attracts people, thus offering tremendous potential for tourism.

2.2 Mohammad Amaan Khan - A broad view of prospects of tourism industry with reference to India - Pranjana Vol 17, No 2, Jul-Dec, 2014 - Use of internet plays a significant role in connecting tourism service providers and customers. Information technology is looked as a tool for marketing travel and tourism. It helps in creating information environment for tourism institution thus impacting tourism system.

2.3 UKESSAYS - Technology Has Significant Impact on the Travel Tourism Essay - Published: 23, March 2015 – Technology has an impact on the way business is operated. In the recent past, travel and tourism industry has progressed along with the development in technology. In short, technology has redefined the way tourism is managed. Communication technology has contributed towards promotion of destination, attracting tourists, enabling online reservations and payment systems. This has bridged gaps between the tourism service providers and the seekers. Tourists can access all kinds of information online, collate, compare and decide on their travel.

2.4 Professor Jennifer Rowley - The International Journal of Organizational Innovation Vol 8 Num 1 July 2015 – Digital marketing helps an organization to develop foresight and plan internet marketing activities and keep abreast with changing trends by offering customised services to the prospective customers.

2.5 Courtney L Vien - The future of marketing: Thriving in the digital world – Journal of Accountancy - June 1, 2015 - Use of digital marketing has introduced several changes and challenges in marketing strategies of organizations. There is a significant move where customers discover the firm, evaluate offerings, assess online instantaneously. Social media and content marketing complement each other by bringing in potential customers to business. With strong online presence, a firm can create their brand and impact target market.

2.6 Ferdinand - Presentation on digital marketing for tourism businesses and travel brands - Published on Feb 6, 2015 (SlideShare) Understanding is that, the organizations benefits from best practices related to website design and development. Tourism service providers have to focus on implementing digital marketing and use social media strategy to tap tourism business potential. SEO is an important element to be implemented.

2.7 Kelsey Bradbury/COMM 427 - The growing role of social media in tourism marketing (http://kelseybradbury.weebly.com) – States the role and importance of social media in tourism marketing. Use of Search engines, facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Youtube, user-generated reviews, Content sharing, Blogging is on significant increase and has contributed towards growth of tourism.

3. Statistical Data: Tourism and Digital Marketing:
3.1 According to India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF) the total contribution by travel and tourism sector to India's GDP is expected to increase from US$ 136.3 billion in 2015 to US$ 275.2 billion in 2025. Travel and tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner for India. It offers a diverse portfolio of niche tourism products - cruises, adventure, medical, wellness, sports, MICE, eco-tourism, film, rural and religious tourism. India has been recognized as a destination for spiritual tourism for domestic and international tourists. Travel & Indian tourism Industry is growing at CAGR of 10.2%. (Source: RedSeer Consulting India OTA market advisory overview)

3.2 According to www.w3trainingschool.com - Digital marketing industry achieved growth rate of 30% during 2015 and estimated growth for year 2016 is 40% and the fact is that the growth rate is going to grow further at a faster pace. Indian Internet population to reach half a billion by 2018 (Source: BCG Analysis). Indian E-Commerce market size to be $ 56 billion by 2023 (Source: www.w3trainingschool.com)

4. Application of Digital Marketing in Travel & Tourism Industry:
The growth of digital marketing has had an impact and will continue to impact travel & tourism industry. It has become an essential tool for managing the business. Understanding the main drivers of travel & tourism that includes geographical diversity, government initiatives, development of customised packages, changing consumer dynamics, easily available finance and benefits of customised packages for the target market are the key towards success in tourism. As compared to traditional promotion methods that use printed information, voluminous contents are available online. As a source of instant information, the web/mobile app is the first choice as there are no restrictions or constraints in searching for information. To exercise hold on brand and to create equity, it is important to make consistent presence online. In addition, web is the place where customers share their valuable feedback; write reviews, share visuals to attract larger audience. Another significant fact is the ability of digital marketing to address the niche market where customers have specific requirements. Ex: Eco tourism, Adventure tourism, Medical tourism e.t.c. With internet it is now possible to cater to specific needs by providing necessary information.

5. Research Design:
5.1 Statement of the problem: The rapid growth of the travel & tourism in India, and increased usage of technology as a tool to facilitate online transactions, has led to a blending of technology with travel & tourism management. Research across the globe indicates that modern travelers & tourists are looking for interactive facilities, high-quality services, varied information on services and appropriate information to assist them in decision making. Also the prospective tourists are finding it difficult to identify the required information and are facing the problem of information overload. Like many other service industries, the travel & tourism industry has been significantly affected by the strides made in use of internet & technology. This research focuses on understanding impact of digital marketing on travel & tourism industry.

5.2 Research Objectives:
   a. The purpose of research is to study the growth of tourism industry in India.
   b. The study ascertains the factors impacting different aspects relating to digital marketing in tourism.
   c. In specific, aim is to assess the impact of digital marketing on travel & tourism industry in India.

5.3 Significance of the study:
The world is moving from analog to digital. Enormous data is getting generated and consumed through several electronic gadgets like mobiles, laptops, desktops and tabs. Use of digital medium is faster, streamlined, affordable and versatile. In addition, the business performance can be tracked and monitored. The fact is that, in digital age, organizations by default have to adapt to the changes, ever changing marketing environment by exploring and implementing the potential of digital marketing. Travel & Tourism industry is no exception. This helps to engage the customers and make sure they have the finest of away-from-home experience. In order to attain competitive advantage, players in tourism industry are looking for innovative ways to reach out to their potential buyers and customise services to their end users. This research helps in understanding customer demography characteristics, preferences, how do they plan trips, how often they travel, decision making factors, use of different products and services, evaluating experiences e.t.c. Also how the above elements are impacted by digital marketing.

5.4 Tools for data collection and analysis:
   a. Sources of data: Both primary and secondary data are used for the study.
   b. Method of data collection: Primary data is collected through questionnaire using Google docs.
   c. Secondary data is collected from websites, books, publication and journals.
   d. Application of Chi-square & SPSS for analysis and hypotheses testing.

5.5 Scope of Research:
The research is guided by exploration inquiry into 'How digital marketing impacts the travel & tourism industry in India?' .Digital marketing affects the choice and decisions made by the customer. Therefore, to understand the customer's purpose of tour, budget, source of information referred to, use of gadgets, modes of bookings, use of e-commerce aggregators, impulse buying, best travel deals, ease of information search, tailored requirements, issues while making decision/purchase and risk factors considered are critical.

5.6 Sampling technique: Non-Probability Sampling - Convenient Sampling

5.7 Limitations:
The implication of this analysis is restricted to the data collected. The opinions perceptions and decision making of the customers may fluctuate over a period time. Limited time for undertaking the study was a constraint. Information collected and analyzed may not reflect the aggregate populace.

6. Data Analysis:
6.1   The numbers of respondents in 26 to 35 years age category are larger in number. This shows the potentiality among this age group for tourism. Use of internet, exposure to digital marketing, use of gadgets, disposable income and willingness to travel has led to increase in tourism activity. (Reference: Graph.1.)

6.2   Larger numbers of respondents are employees. Consistent use of internet, digital marketing at finger tip, and increase in disposable income, needing a break from routine work and to beat the stress has made employees to travel in larger numbers (Reference: Graph.2.)

6.3   The major reason for people to go on tour is to take family on vacation. However we see that people will travel for others reasons also such as to sightseeing, travel with friends, religious and adventure. Subsequent analysis indicates the use of digital marketing platform for tourism purpose. (Ref: Graph.3.)

6.4   Majority of the respondents prefer e-commerce websites (Makemytrip, yatra, goibibo, cleartrip, trivago, cox and kings, Thomas cook) that offer information and instant booking facilities related to tourism. These sites focus on digital marketing for reaching out to tourists and provide end to end information, customize packages according to specific needs, offer better deals and discounts, places pictures on the site and facilitate easy transaction. Multiple details related to travel, accommodation, hotels, food, taxis, sightseeing, do's and don'ts are instantly available. People also refer to respective company website for information. Mobile apps are also being referred and used. Few other elements referred include online ads, Youtube, social media and print media. This depicts that significant impact of digital marketing. In addition, people largely gather information from friends

and family who have visited the places earlier. This shows the importance of word of mouth reference as well. (Reference: Graph.4.)

6.5   Digital platforms offer several advantages for tourism information seekers. Elements such as instant information availability, updated information, convenience, easy access, time saving, 24/7 services and free access to information makes travelers to use of digital platforms. (Reference: Graph.5.)

6.6   Travelers prefer to check online on type of rooms, amenities, price and pictures. They also look for important places to be seen around, check distance between places, restaurants, events happening during visit and do's & don'ts. This shows the importance of use of internet in gathering relevant information. (Reference: Graph.6.)

6.7   Visitors' reviews online and trip advisor are the most sought out source of information while deciding on booking hotels and visiting places. As these provides update reviews and provide a platform for tourists to write about their experience which can be source of further reference for other travellers. People also, to an extent, refer to blogs, mouthshut, social media for getting such information. (Reference: Graph.7.)

6.8   Majority of people refer to E-commerce site while booking accommodation and flights. E-commerce service provides offer better offers, deals, discounts as compared to direct booking. As customers are meticulous in spending money, they refer to compare several sites and book the best deal available. At times the hotels and flight operators offer heavy discounts if booked directly through their website. Hence customers make thorough comparison before booking which is facilitated largely by E-commerce sites. When it comes to instant taxi booking, people prefer to book using phone by getting the phone number from just dial or by using the mobile app. Train tickets are largely booked through railway website. For booking buses and tourist activities people make use of e-commerce site, company website or phone. Irrespective of mode, it is evident that the digital mode has become integral part of any bookings done. (Reference: Graph.8.)

6.9   It is evident from the survey; Makemytrip is the most sought out platform for bookings followed by yatra, cleartrip and goibibo. Makemytrip platform provide better information, search criteria, multi services, easy to use, easy to navigate, payment options, impulse appeal, offers and deals, pay at hotel options and many other which has made them most preferred booking site. It can also be observed that travellers prefer IRCTC for booking the train tickets directly as compared to booking through other sites as it evades extra booking charges and services offered directly by Indian Railways. (Reference: Graph.9.)

6.10   Respondents to a great extent use Google maps. This indicates the need and importance of Google maps for knowing location-based services. It indicates the contribution of Google maps towards tourism. It aids in location mapping, checking distance between locations, restaurant details, places to visit around, find direction and many other. (Reference: Graph.10.)

6.11   More than 3/4th of the surveyed people agree that online platforms are useful while purchasing tour packages. It saves time in purchasing, makes purchases easier, is user friendly, and provides instant information. This indicates the significance of using online platforms for tourism activity. (Reference: Graph.11.)

6.12   More than 3/4th of the respondents feels that digital marketing helps in comparing services offered by competitors, helps in tourism service standardization, increases tourism business via e-commerce, helps in improving real time customer services, enables tourism companies to understand customer needs better, significantly impact on tourism purchase decision and helps customers in exploring unexplored destination by providing information. This shows that digital marketing has a great impact on tourism business. (Reference: Graph.12.)

6.13   Despite positive impact on tourism, digital marketing continue to pose challenges. Tourism details online are in the form of text, pictures and videos. This requires high speed internet which every customer may not have. Availability of too much information sometimes adds to confusion and complexities. Authenticity of information is an issue at times. Unaware of hidden charges is another issue. What looks on the initial screen may not the same on subsequent screen while booking. Refund polices are not clear as they come   with   lot of terms and conditions. Heavy cancellation charges add to burden on travellers if they want to cancel the travel. At times the deals may be of cheaper based on the condition that there is no refund in case of cancellation. At times there is no scope for making changes in the itinerary. Lack of privacy of information is another major issue. (Reference: Graph.13.)

6.14   Over 2/3rd of the respondents feel that their personal information is not safe as the e-commerce companies may do database marketing. Respondents feel that there is an element of risk in monetary transaction. Danger of credit card details getting hacked, payment gateway issues. At times money gets deducted without actual booking happening. Sometimes customers tend to lose huge money if booking policy is non-refundable. Handling such issues has to be addressed. (Reference: Graph.14.)

6.15   It can be interpreted that more than 3/4th of respondents are satisfied with the following services offered on digital marketing platform. Availability of relevant information, online booking system, information about what to do in the destination location, availability of pictures of destination, accommodation e.t.c., availability of information regarding prices and option to compare with competitor's price are the key parameters. The e-commerce service providers can know customer opinion and feedback. They can offer services to customers via email, instant messengers. (Reference: Graph.15.)

6.16   More than 3/4th of respondents continue to use digital platforms after touring for sharing information about tour, posting reviews, keep their network informed (facebook status) and Watsapp. This information gets communicated among their circle very fast at almost no cost. Such information will influence their peer circle to take decision on visiting those places. Digital marketing continue to work for companies and tourists even after people travel. (Reference: Graph.16.)

6.17   More than 80% of respondents share their post travel experience / information through digital medium by writing review and posting pictures in trip advisor, facebook page, reviews on company's page, blogs and respond to survey emails. Also companies take online feed back to measure satisfaction levels and gather feedback to standardize tourism services. (Reference: Graph.17.)

7. Test of Hypothesis:
7.1   Hypothesis: 1   (Reference: Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 and Graph 18)
   H0 - Digital Marketing has no impact on travel & tourism service
   H1 - Digital Marketing has significant impact on travel & tourism service
         The Chi-square value is 149.575 with 16 degree of freedom and significance value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. So we reject H0 (Null hypothesis) and accept H1 (Alternate hypothesis). This proves that Digital marketing has significant impact on tourism service. (Reference: Table.3.)

7.2   Hypothesis: 2   (Reference: Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6 and Graph 19)
   H0 – Travellers & Tourists are not satisfied with services offered on digital marketing platform
   H1 – Travellers & Tourists are satisfied with services offered on digital marketing platform
         The Chi-square value is 81.498 with 16 degree of freedom and significance value is 0.000 which is less   than 0.05. So we reject H0 (Null hypothesis) and accept H1 (Alternate hypothesis). Hence we can say that travellers & tourists are satisfied with services offered by digital marketing platform. (Reference: Table.6.)

8. Summary of findings:
   8.1 Large number of respondents in the survey were male (68.5%) and in the age category of 26-35 years with occupation as employees. The travel period is more during vacations.

   8.2 81% of the respondents' state that going out with family is the prime reason for tour followed by sightseeing and travelling with friends. Travellers also club their official travel with personal travel. More than 60 percent of people travel for one to three days or depending on purpose of tour.

   8.3 Around 50 percent of surveyed people are spending up to Rs.20,000 per person per year on travel which denotes high disposable income contributing to growth of tourism.

   8.4 Majority of the people (94%) use Google search engine while searching tour information. Search leads to e-commerce sites where 84% of the travellers make use of them, followed by knowing from friends and relatives, company websites, social media and mobile apps.

   8.5 Over 90% of the respondents opines that digital platforms provides instant and updated information, is convenient to search, provides easy access, saves time in searching (using filtering option), 24/7 accessibility and is free of cost. In addition these respondents refer digital platform specially to search for hotel rooms, important places to visit and check the distance between locations.

8.6 Over 2/3rd of travellers refer to Tripadvisor and visitors reviews on the company websites while deciding on booking tour.

8.7 Desktops and laptops (81%) are preferred against mobile or mobile apps (19%) for booking clearly indicating the need for looking into larger images, videos and other details.

8.8 E-commerce sites are most preferred for booking hotels and travel where as mobile apps and phone calls (through just dial) for booking taxis. People have more preference to book travel and accommodation through e-commerce sites as they offer better rates & deals, easy to compare between options, filter requirements based on criteria, user friendly.

8.9 People also book directly through company website as they are more trust worthy, have direct access, user friendly, 24 hrs check-in check-out options and better service.

8.10 Over 87% of people state Makemytrip is the most preferred platform for booking accommodation & flights and use IRCTC for train travel.

8.11 People prefer to get the best deals offered by which ever site that shows price sensitivity of customers over loyalty.

8.12 It is agreed to great extent (80% respondents) that Google maps have become inevitable to know location based services and the same is used during their travel.

8.13 Over 3/4th of the respondents agree that online platforms and digital marketing has positively impacted in buying decision.

8.14 Customers are satisfied with tourism services offered through digital platforms and digital marketing.

8.15 People continue face challenges related to privacy of personal data, loss of money due to cancellation, risk of online transactions, hidden costs, threat from hackers and payment gateway problems.

8.16 Travellers will continue to use digital platforms to share their travel experiences, post photos online (Tripadvisor) & social media and write reviews & blogs

9. Conclusion

It can be concluded that digital marketing in inevitable for growth & prosperity of travel & tourism industry. It is one of the Industries that are largely affected by digital phenomenon. In order to attain competitive advantage, tourism players are going with implementing the latest technology and exploring the right way to reach potential buyers by customising their offerings to specific requirements. In addition to contributing to increase in sales for the seller, it makes easy for tourists to decide and buy services online instantly. Digital marketing is not just limited to desktops or laptops. The use of mobile apps is on the rise because people need to be connected with all the time.

10. Recommendation

Getting into the space of digital marketing seem to be daunting, but over a period of time it gets easier as you build your customers and be able to make future marketing decisions on feedback collected. As part of marketing strategy, tourism service providers need to focus on making their niche place in the virtual space with their website and partnering with e-commerce aggregators. They have to optimize search engines, enhance user experience and take on to social media, email marketing and content marketing. Tourist service providers have to instantly address the comments/issues posted on Tripadvisor and blogs. As the customers compare the information available on different e-commerce site with respective company website for authentication, an element of trust needs to be developed. They have to ensure interaction with the customers is clear. The personal information of the customer has to be kept confidential to maintain higher levels of integrity. Ensure the terms & conditions and the policies are clear without and ambiguity. The power of digital communication has to be oriented towards tourism service standardization, understand customer needs better and create impact on purchase decision leading to increase in direct sales via e-commerce. E-tailers have to develop consistency, long-term commitment and have complete knowledge of target audience and an element of creativity to stand unique in the fast changing market place. Use of new tools, techniques and technology has to focus on promoting contents faster and easier which aids not only in sales but also in building the brand.

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12.Tables & Graphs:

12.1 Tables:

Hypothesis: 1   (Reference point 7.1)

H0 - Digital Marketing has no impact on travel & tourism service

H1 - Digital Marketing has significant impact on travel & tourism service

<div align="center">

Table.1. Case Processing Summary

Digital Marketing Helps in tourism services standardization Digital Marketing has impacted on your tourism purchase decision

</div>

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent

Table.1. Case Processing Summary

Digital Marketing Helps in tourism services standardization Digital Marketing has impacted on your tourism purchase decision

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Digital Marketing Helps in tourism services standardization * Digital Marketing Has impacted on your tourism purchase decision	108	100.0%	0	.0%	108	100.0%

Table.2. Cross tabulation

Count

		Digital Marketing Has impacted on your tourism purchase decision					
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Digital Marketing Helps in tourism services standardization	Strongly Disagree	3	0	0	0	0	3
	Disagree	1	2	3	0	0	6
	Neutral	0	1	12	10	1	24
	Agree	0	2	6	42	12	62
	Strongly Agree	0	2	0	1	10	13
Total		4	7	21	53	23	108

Table.3. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	149.575[a]	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	89.306	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	46.031	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	108		

a. 19 cells (76.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .11.

Hypothesis: 2   **(Reference point 7.2)**
H0 – Travellers & Tourists are not satisfied with services offered on digital marketing platform
H1 – Travellers & Tourists are satisfied with services offered on digital marketing platform

Table.4. Case Processing Summary

Pictures of the travel, accommodation etc * Information about the prices and ability to compare

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Pictures of the travel, accommodation etc * Information about the prices and ability to compare	108	78.3%	30	21.7%	138	100.0%

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Table.5. Cross tabulation

Pictures of the travel, accommodation etc * Information about the prices and ability to compare

Count

		Information about the prices and ability to compare					
		Extremely Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Extremely satisfied	Total
Pictures of the travel, accommodation etc	Extremely Dissatisfied	1	0	1	0	0	2
	Dissatisfied	1	1	2	0	0	4
	Neutral	1	0	13	13	2	29
	Satisfied	0	1	4	48	7	60
	Extremely satisfied	0	0	1	5	7	13
Total		3	2	21	66	16	108

Table:6 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	**81.498ª**	**16**	**.000**
Likelihood Ratio	**57.401**	**16**	**.000**
Linear-by-Linear Association	**38.524**	**1**	**.000**
N of Valid Cases	**108**		

a. 19 cells (76.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .04.

12.2 Graphs:
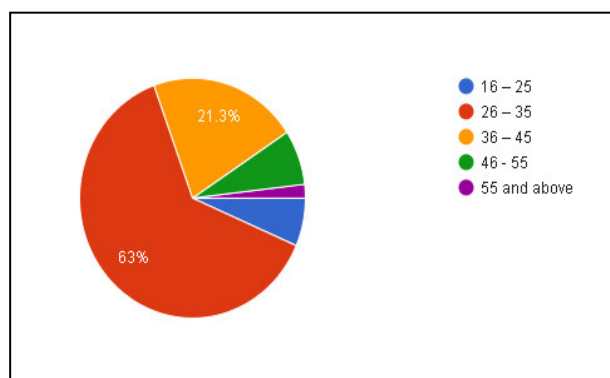
Graph.1. Age of respondents (in years)
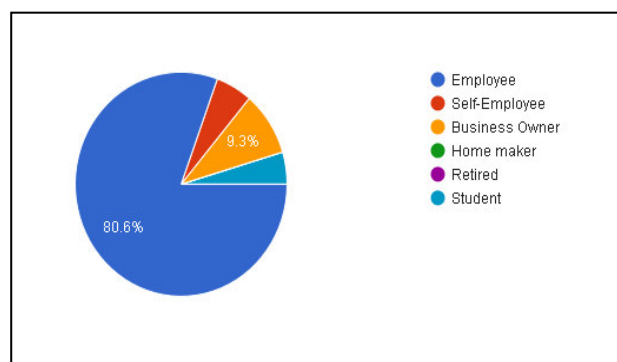
Graph.2. Occupation of respondents
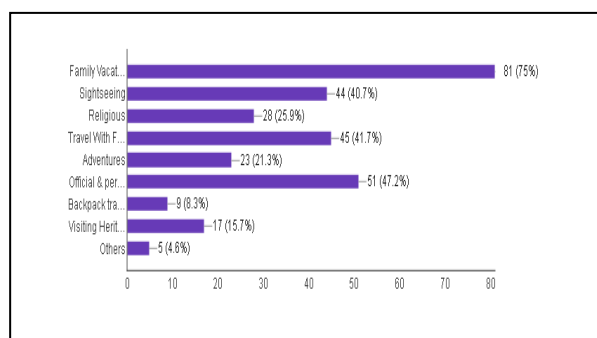
Graph.3. Purpose of tour
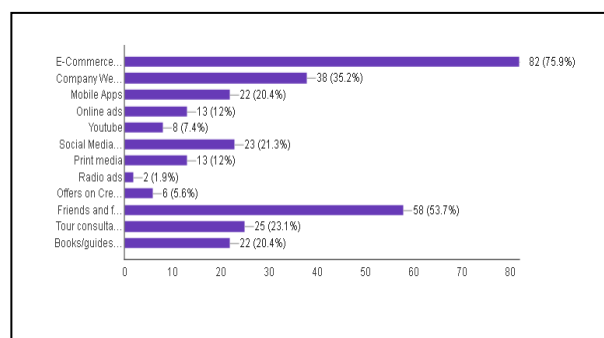
Graph.4. Reference sources while looking for information about tour package

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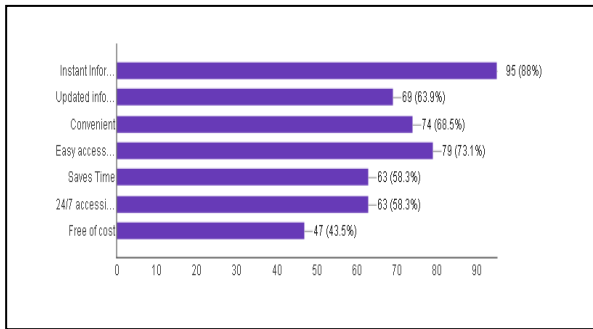
Graph.5. Reason for searching information
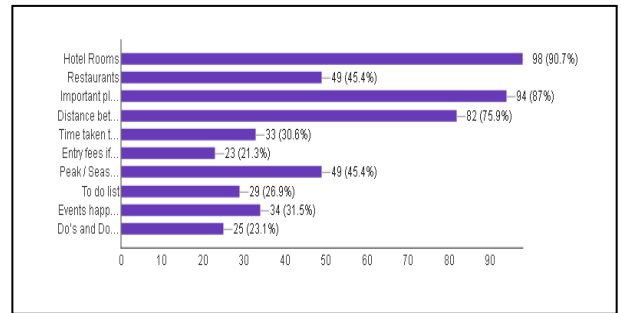
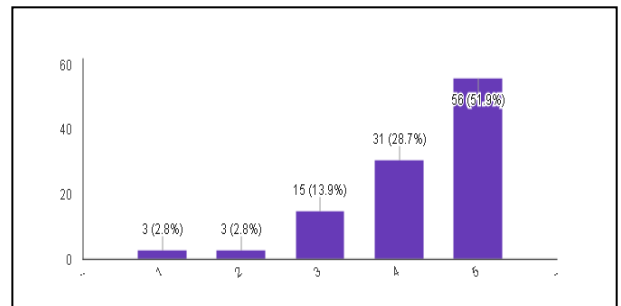**Graph.6. Destination elements travelers on digital platforms search while booking tour package**
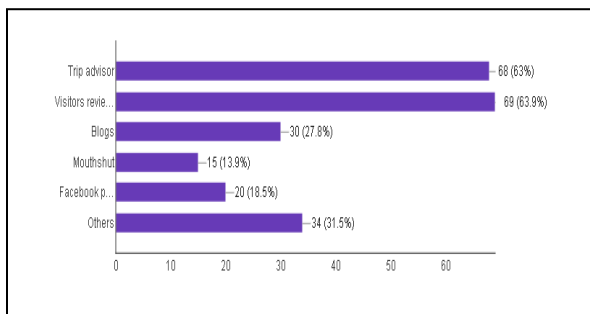
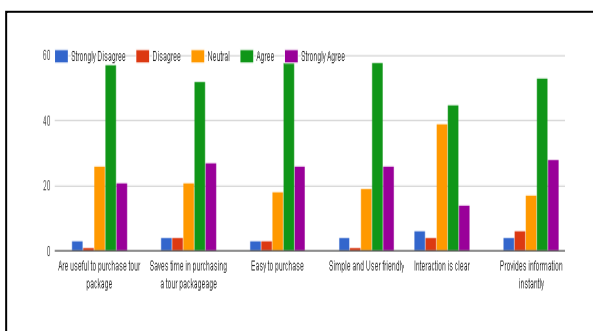**Graph.7. Sources referred to while deciding on Tours & travel**
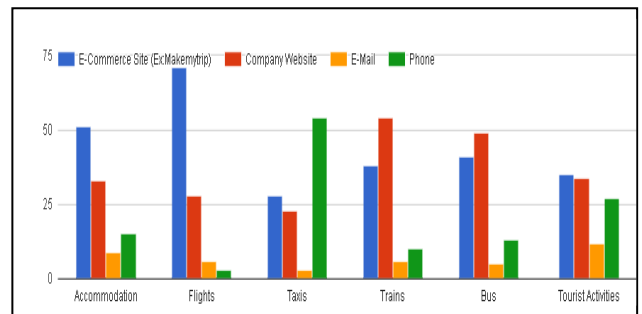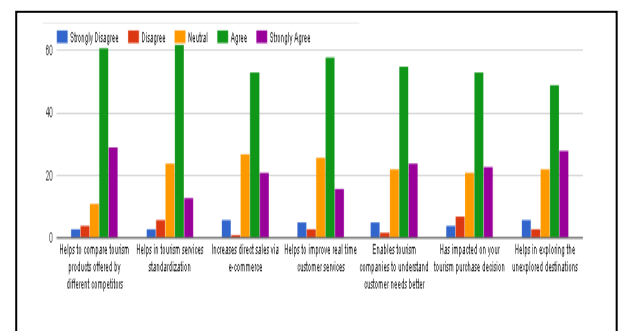

Graph.8. Preferred mode of tourist bookings
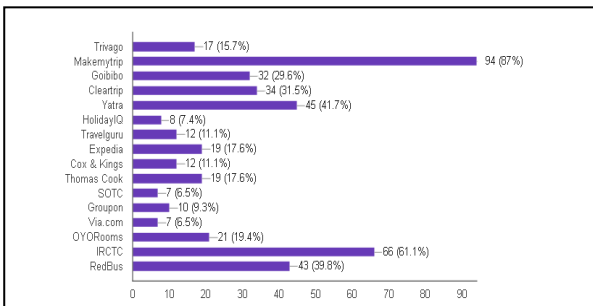
Graph.9. Preferred e-commerce service provider for Booking travel and accommodation

Graph.10. Extent of use of Google maps for knowing Location based services

Graph.11. Indicating agreement or disagreement - Online platforms

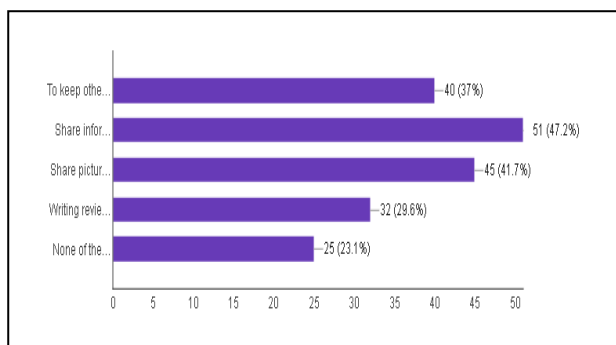**Graph.12. Indicating agreement or disagreement - Digital platforms**
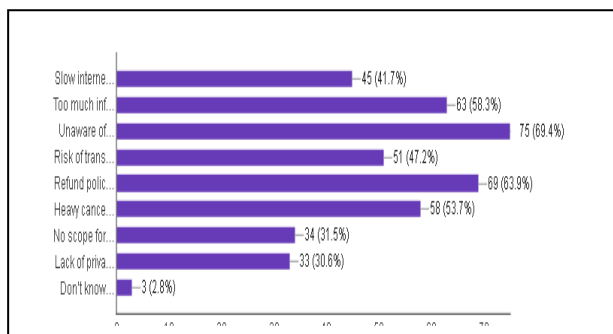
Graph.13. Problems faced while buying tour packages online
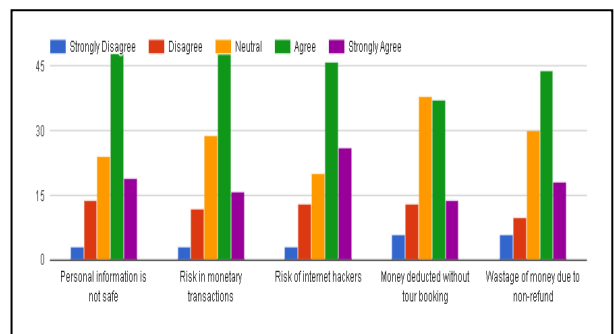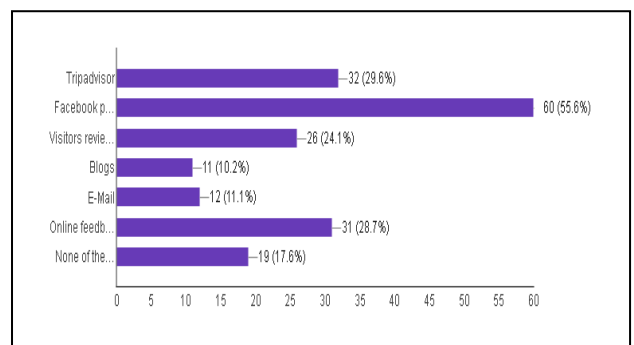

Graph.14. Perceived risk factors of buying tour package online
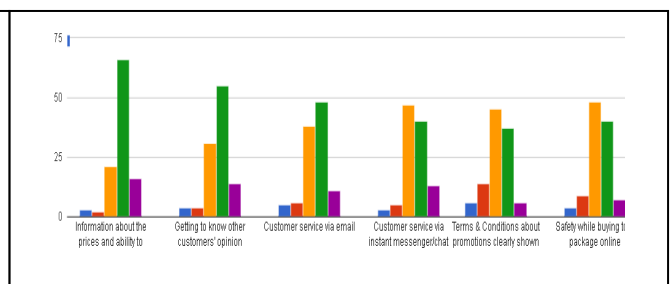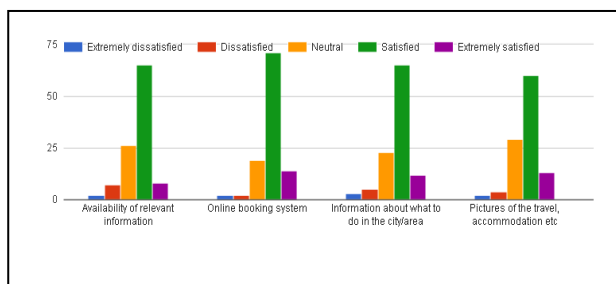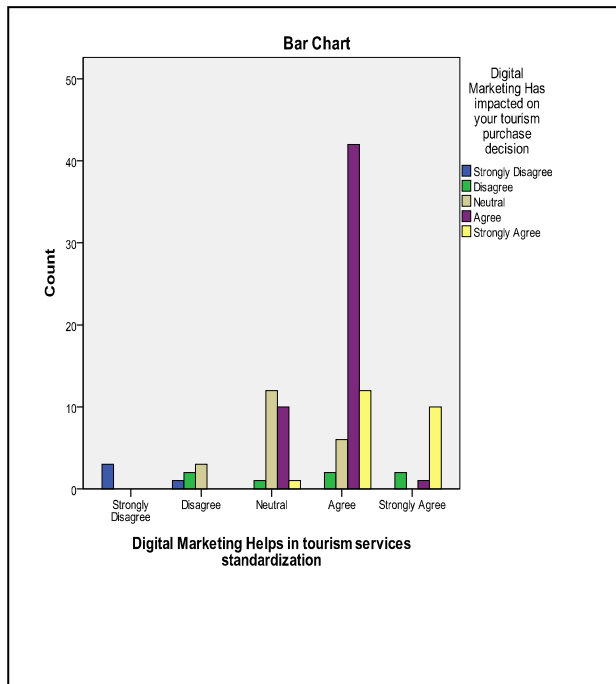

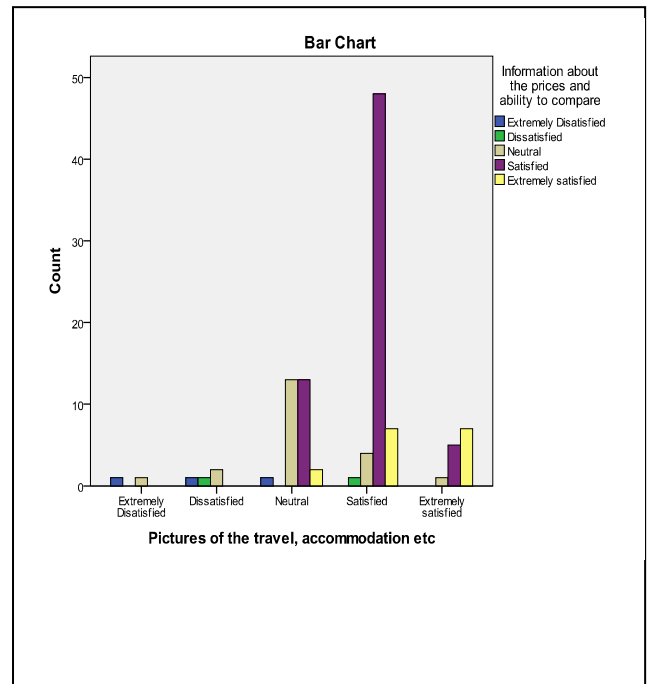**Graph.15. Ratings of service elements offered on digital marketing platforms**

Graph.16. After travel, digital platform are further used to

Graph.17. Post travel, customers' experience /information are shared on

11

Graph.18. Digital Marketing Impact on Tourism

Graph.19.Satisfaction with services offered by digital marketing platform