

Information Technology and its Role in Tourism Industry with Special Reference to UT of Jammu & Kashmir

Tariq Ahmad Lone

Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies, University of Kashmir,
Srinagar, India

Abstract

Information and Communication technology has a special significance in tourism industry. This is because of its special product behaviour. Therefore various high tech technologies are in use in tourism industry around the world. These technologies are used for tourism product development, marketing, distribution and training of tourism sector personnel. The use of such technologies cannot be neglected in order to give a boom to the tourism industry. This paper explains the use and advantages of ICT in tourism sector in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. It also explains how the application of ICT can be beneficial to tourism industry in J&K.

Keywords

Tourism, ICT, Technology, Travel, Accommodation, Destination

Introduction

Tourism can be defined as 'Travel and stay of a Non-resident at a particular place' [1] [2]. It can also be defined as 'Management of Local and foreign travellers by means of providing facilities like Accommodation, Transport so that their stay is made comfortable and enjoyable'. The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people "traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes" [3]. In order to travel to a particular place there must be reason e.g. for leisure, business, visiting friends and relatives, health, education, religion etc. Transport is necessary to travel and accommodation to stay at the destination. So tourism as an industry has three major components viz. Attraction, Accommodation and Transport". In the developed world all the three components have reached to their zenith in satisfying their customer's needs aided by latest technology. Tourism is figuring among the top categories of International trade. This growth of tourism activity and the associated manifold increase in the tourist flow and income generated through this flow has made tourism as one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomenon in the world [3].

Influence of ICT on tourism components

1. Attraction Sector: It comprises of Natural and manmade attractions developed to attract visitors entertaining, educational, religious, aesthetic and other needs. The owners of attraction sector whether state or other organizations or individuals need to communicate or educate/ inform their potential customers about their products. Information regarding the kind of attraction, their location accessibility are of vital importance to the customers. All this can be provided in a better way by means of ICT viz. Multimedia, Internet (web site), TV advertisements, Travel documentaries and other means [1] [4][5][6].

2. Accommodation Sector: It includes establishments offering lodging and comfortable staying to visitors like Hotel, Motel, Guest houses, Caravan Sarai's etc. Accommodation service providers can make their services available to the people on internet, through telephone, fax, telegraph etc. so that tourists can book their accommodations in advance making them free from many troubles for getting their accommodation. Visitors can access information about the type of accommodation, facilities available (like audio, video, water electricity etc), price and other relevant information without leaving their homes [1][4][5][6].

3. Transport Sector: It includes water air and surface transport that act as a link between origin and destination areas for travellers. Travellers can get advance information about the type of transport available for the destination, their traveling time, cost of traveling, facilities available enroute, safety features for travel, comfortability means available and other related information. The time of departure and arrival at various origin and destination areas can be known in advance and tourists can better schedule their journeys. Even advance booking of Planes, Rails, Buses and other means of travel is sometimes much cheaper as discount offers are available from service providers. All this is now under the fingertips of the intended travellers at their home/office by means of ICT- website, phone etc [4][5][6].

Travel agents/agencies and IT

One of the unique characteristics of tourism products is the role played by travel agents or agencies which includes tour operators, conference organizers, booking agents and other stake holders [7]. These agents and agencies are much important because of the nature of tourism product, its portability and intangibility. This means services products including tourism cannot be stored for a later sale and cannot be inspected for their quality before purchase respectively and thus entails a very big effort for marketing and distribution of these products. Tourist product supply is fragmented both geographically and as a product component. This gave rise to the middle men in the form of agents, operators and others and their role was indispensable till recent past when ICT took over this job and made all these tasks a boys play by means of providing all these facilities electronically in the form of TV/Radio ads, Internet, telephone and the like [8][9][10].

Internet Based Reservation Systems (IBRS)

The first large scale digitally enabled transaction system was deployed in France in 1981. The French Minitel was a videotext system that combined a telephone with an 8 inch screen. About 25,000 different services were to be found on Minitel including ticket agencies, travel services, retail products, and online banking [11][12]. This system and its predecessor CRS(computer Reservation System in 1950 and GDS (Global Distribution System) contributed to a great extent in increasing sales volume and giving precise information on availability and selling the products efficiently (including Tourism) ensuring substantial profit gain [10].

In these systems, IT was used but with intermediaries, as an indispensable part in the distribution and marketing of travel and tourism products, but modern truly Internet based systems eliminate these intermediaries and there is direct communication between the product/producer and consumer.

The intangibility of the product where risk and uncertainty for the customer is higher, his needs for reliable pre-purchase information is stronger. The potential customer's decision risk and dependence on information is further increased because he can't see, inspect and

compare or try out tourist services before deciding to use them [7]. Internet- the modern information super highway and a product of Information Technology with all its new facets does away with all the limitations present in the earlier systems. Internet provides an interactive information supplying medium in a user friendly manner with all kinds of information related to travel. Apart from supplying information on world's leading and emerging tourist destinations of all kind, it is now possible to book and buy travel, accommodation through Internet using different payment methods like digital cash, online stored value systems, digital accumulating balance payment systems, digital credit accounts, digital chequeing etc and to make payments secure new protocols like SET (Secure Electronic Transaction) are used [11].

Internet gives information on all Airlines, Hotels, Car hiring companies present in the Databases. Nowadays information on the web is available from Govt. departments, hotel owners, car hiring/rental companies with special packages available for customers for advance booking on Internet. Several websites provide a comparative study of features available from different service providers for their products like ezeegol and makemytrip. Tourists can be attracted by having multimedia presentations available on their websites with all the graphical features picturizing tourist (entertaining/religious/educational etc) spots, accommodation and transport facilities with all kinds of price tags and advance booking facilities available with easy payment mechanisms with weather and other environmental information available. Internet telephony, e-mail, Internet Relay Chat, Audio/Video conferencing can also be used to get more and better information about the tourist destination.

Customer facilitation and IT

User/customer facilitation is one important facet of enhancing tourism. Facilitation includes issuing Visa, customs clearing and immigration/security clearance at the sea/airports or bus/train terminals. Lack of appropriate management in giving fast and efficient service to tourists in this area will deter the tourist flow substantially. Now, electronic facilitation media are being used to make the facilitation faster and easier.

A predecessor to modern online facilitation in issuing Passports, Visa and related documentation was Australian ETAS- Electronic Travel Authority System [10]. The ease in the form of online facilitation has generated an immense tourist flow from year to year initially to Australia and then to other tourist destinations throughout the whole world.

ICT and Tourism in J&K

Although J&K, especially Kashmir valley, the paradise on earth is a world famous tourist/pilgrimage place but the tourism industry is not so developed as it should have been. Also the Three components of tourism mentioned earlier in the paper are also at their nascent/child stage as compared to many tourist destinations elsewhere in the world like Switzerland. In J&K the three Ss' (Safety, Sanitation and Service) which are a major concern of a tourist are not fulfilled to a better level of fulfilment.

The way IT has a role in the three components of tourism, it has a far better role in the safety, sanitation and service of tourists. In J&K little attention is given to this decisive concern of tourists. There are no clear safety regulations for passengers especially on surface and water transport. The cabs on surface and boats in lakes and rivers do not have a proper radio communication and navigation equipment for safe travel leaving aside the bad condition of

roads leading to tourist destinations. No medical arrangements are on board and there are rarely any means of entertainment for tourists while traveling.

The accommodation sector is also with limited use of IT in its day today activity. Earlier it has been mentioned that IT has got a diversified use both in order to generate and serve a customer efficiently. The use of IT in accommodation sector like CRS, electronic billing, electronic safety systems like electronic door system, electronic smoke detector, electronic fire extinguisher, modern telephone service, in-room entertainment and Internet service are not in a wide use in almost all big hotels of the state. Lack of all these facilities necessitates the use of all the modern IT tools to make the visits of the tourists joyful. The JKTDC should have its own website carrying information about attraction, accommodation and transport facilities for their potential customers. It should contain information about hotels, airlines, surface and water transport available to the customers in the form of web pages or hyperlinks to the web pages of the organizations providing these services.

Major Suggestions for IT use in J&K Tourism

For UT of Jammu and Kashmir, Tourism is an indispensable industry because it forms the backbone of its Economy and has a great potential to generate sufficient revenues for its prosperity. It is acclaimed as an alternative source of foreign currency which many countries including India are in a great deficiency. Tourism can play a vital role in generating revenue/income to govt. through taxes, to people through employment in tourism sector which is known to be labour intensive, and to the owners of the components running tourism business. To get all the above mentioned benefits and many more we need to follow a well-planned and well thought up tourism policy with greater thrust on amalgamation of ICT as outlined below:

1. Information and Communication infrastructure, which is already in place, needs to be made more sophisticated so that our tourism products are available to potential customers throughout world on Internet. For this JKTDC can have collaboration with other related departments like DOT, LAWDA, SRTC, Airways etc.
2. Transport sector particularly Surface and inland water transport facilities need to be regulated and provided with modern ICT facilities like communication and entertainment. Apart from this medical and other facilities should also be kept available.
3. In the attraction sector, the establishment of tourist information centres similar to the passenger information centres at railway stations are of special significance. These centres should be well equipped with latest ICT equipment and connected to some centralized information system so as to provide products and product related information to the potential customers to attract them. This will also facilitate the monitoring of disasters and destructions caused by various natural and human factors.
4. The accommodation sector too needs a well-equipped ICT system so as to communicate with its customers. This has a potential to attract and accommodate the tourists if proper information is kept available to the customers in advance.

All this needs a trained manpower. This paper suggests that all the concerned parties ie. Govt. departments, Hoteliers, Transporters, tour operator's need to have a skilled and well equipped manpower. The staff should be well versed with the use of modern ICT equipment as well as with some international language so as to properly converse with the tourists. A sound policy should govern all this activity properly monitored by some regulatory authority.

Conclusion

This paper discussed many dimensions of tourism industry and how the use of IT can further help in its growth especially in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Tourism is a big economic and social activity which can further be harnessed by introducing ICT in its development to a large scale. It has a potential of generating large income, employment and foreign exchange and investment opportunities. The use of IT in tourism should contribute towards the socio-economic development and should at the same time help in environment preservation. Apart from satisfying the recreational, educational and aesthetic needs of the tourists, technology oriented tourism can be used as a community development vehicle. It can also be used as a force for uniting people from different parts of the world and giving rise to a common mind set of peace and prosperity for all, which could be furthered by spreading the same message and ideas by means of ICT.

References

1. Mekonnen, G, "Information Technology: Its uses in Tourism Industry", Catering and Tourism Training Institute, <https://www.scribd.com/document/36420270/IT-in-Tourism-Mekonnen>
2. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266462612_Information_technology_in_Tourism [Accessed Nov 2022].
3. <https://www.unwto.org/archive/europe/publication/unwto-publications-publicaciones-omt-edition-2016> [Accessed Nov 2022]
4. Buhalis, D & Laws, E. (eds) (2001). Tourism Distribution Channels-Practices, Issues and Transformations, Continuum Publishing, London.
5. Buhalis, D. (2003). e tourism –Information Technology for strategic tourism management, Prentice Hall, Harlow, UK.
6. Carter R & Bedard, F. (2001). E-Business for Tourism-Practical Guidelines for Tourism Destinations and Business, WTO Business Council, Madrid.
7. Schmoll, G.A Tourism Promotion, Tourism International Press, 1997.
8. Holloway, J.C, Marketing of Tourism, Longman, 1993.
9. Holloway, J.C, The Business of Tourism, Longman, 1998.
10. Inkpen, G. Information Technology to Travel and Tourism, Longman, 1998.
11. Laudon and Traver e-commerce-Business, Technology and Society, 2002
12. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minitel>