Are Our State Websites Impressive enough to attract International tourists? An Investigation through Comparative Content Analysis

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Abstract: Tourists are more likely to know or enquire about a destination through website(s) pertaining to it. It wouldn't be wrong to say that websites take a destination to the world. The paper uses the content analysis approach to support the proposed hypothesis. The states have been purposively selected on the basis of their performance in terms of foreign tourist arrival as per the latest data available. To bring focus study was conducted in a limited time frame of three days and content analysis was restricted to home page of the select websites. It was found that content of websites performing better in attracting tourists from abroad are able to represent their state destinations in more informative and impressive way unlike the states that have received less international tourists. Further a comparative evaluation has been carried out. To assess websites ranking and reach self-selected online tool has also been used.

Keywords- Destination websites, content analysis, website, Indian states, international tourist arrivals

Introduction

The international tourist arrivals to Indian states demonstrate their tourism strength, or so called 'pull factor' of the place in tourism terminology. Official websites of Indian states are expected to reach globally to entice tourists making mind to travel by showcasing and highlighting destination features. Internet is most prominent medium for information transfer. Its reach has metaphorically shrunk the world, and nothing seems to remain away from the realm of internet. Products and services connect with their customers through their respective websites, and with the growing competition the firms are exploiting all possible opportunities to enhance and increase websites reach. The paper would restrict to focusing on certain destination websites to corroborate relevant topic. Content analysis is a systematic attempt to examine some form of verbal or image communication such as newspapers, diaries, letters, speeches, movies, or television shows (Gray et al., 2007). Content analysis is a widely used research method for objective, systematic and quantitative examination of communication content (Berelson, 1952).

Methodology

The methodology is influenced by the procedural model given by Mayring (1983) for content analysis. The elementary information to proceed with the content analysis is given below:

Material for analysis- Web pages (homepage). The researcher uses two approaches to research, one being the self-analysis of the studied web pages and second assisted by online analysis tool-www.alexa.com. It provides the global rankings of the websites on the basis of page views that happened in past 3 months. The more the page views the better the rank a website holds. Similar figure can be obtained related to the site's India ranking, the calculation of India ranking considers past one month's daily average visitors to the websites. Audience geography is an important determinant of site's popularity globally. This communicates the global location of website visitors of past month.

Generation of material- Online access to official tourism websites through web 2.0. The information was accessed and collected by the researcher using personal computer via university internet access.

Classification of material- The material was documented in the form of notes and computer assisted 'saving' options. A systematic pattern was followed to obtain data from online website analysis tools, which included obtaining select information relevant to the study. The duration of collection, analysis and documentation was restricted between 72 hours (11 April 2014-13 April 2014).

Direction of Analysis- For the study purpose home page of websites of the destinations was considered in order to investigate visual exhibition features and important links on the page to assist visitors to website browse to explore the options.

Literature review

Both published and unpublished work suggest the research with assistance of content analysis. The literature review initially contemplates the understanding of the concept of content analysis and goes further to its application in certain field especially how it has been exploited for analysis of web contents. Content analysis has previously been defined as an objective, systematic, and quantitative method of describing the content of

texts (Kassarjian, 1977). Content analysis traditionally is often divided into manifest and latent content analysis (Lasswell, 1941). Manifest content analysis regards the most obvious and straightforward meanings of a text, whereas latent content analysis searches for text's subtler meanings. Manifest and latent content analysis look at different aspects of a text, but they use the same traditional content analytic methodology to conduct the research. It has long been recognized that traditional content analysis presents special difficulties when applied to "latent content" (Lasswell, 1941).

Internet has launched a wide range of new marketing tools that are accessible and affordable for smaller organizations (Sigala, 2003), and also destinations (Tanrisevdi & Duran, 2011). The tourism industry provides intangible products which are difficult to evaluate prior to consumption due to the fact that travel is an experiential activity (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).This implies that the information search effort within the decision-making process is a key factor (Tanrisevdi & Duran, 2011). Holsti (1969) describes content analysis as 'a multipurpose method developed specifically for investigating any problem in which the study of communication content serves as the basis for inference'. Content analysis endeavours to bring order into studies of communication content through the application of standard methods of scientific investigation. Content analysis is evolving and has been taken as a substitute to traditional research approaches. As Moodie states (1971, p. 148):

> The growing importance of content analysis in the social sciences and humanities is indicated by the exponential increase in the number of studies in recent years, in the development of a variety of computer applications and in its adoption as a research tool in an increasing number of disciplines, including psychology, political science, sociology, general communications, history, literature and music, which account for the bulk of the studies produced.

Michalec (2006, fall) conducted content analysis of art websites to critically analyse the design elements and content elements. In the study factors to analyse website colours, backgrounds, font styles, links, graphics, navigation and special effects were considered (ibid.). Another study focused on women's assault related resource availability on website, comprising of precision, extensiveness of the programs for women (Rebecca Hayes-Smith, Justin Hayes-Smith, 2009). Few studies on web communication have looked at the cultural dimensions of website design and content (Wenyong Zhao , Brian Massey , Jamie Murphy & Liu Fang (2003). Zhao et al (2003), focused on

culturally-neutral website attributes. The study presented a comparative content analysis of US and Chinese websites (ibid.). Ju-Pak (1999) studied the brand product websites from United States, United Kingdom and South Korea and found that web advertisements of South Korea had more hyperlinks than advertisements in US and UK websites. Meester et al (2012) studied evaluated websites that provide information on health care services related to arthritis. Tanrisevdi & Duran (2011) observed four destination websites from the point of reference of customers. The research used a quasi-experimental approach where questionnaires were used to assess customer's preference and destination websites of Spain and Greece outweighed others in consideration.

Research question-

Are there differences in the visual presentation of web page(s) of high performing tourism states in comparison to low performing states?

Are there differences in the quality of content of web page(s) of high performing tourism states in comparison to low performing states?

The national and global rankings of these websites differ between high and low performing tourism destinations.

Hypotheses

There are differences in the visual presentation of the websites of high performing states to low performing tourism states.

There are differences in the quality of content of the websites of high performing states to low performing tourism states.

The national and global rankings of these websites differ between high and low performing tourism destinations.

Premise

Top performing states/union territories in terms of international tourist arrivals

State	International Visitors	Rank
Maharashtra	5120287	1
Tamil Nadu	3561740	2

(Sources: India Tourism Statistics 2012)

Low performing states/union territories in terms of international tourist arrivals

State	International Visitors	Rank
Lakshadweep	580	35
Mizoram	744	34

(Sources: India Tourism Statistics 2012)

For research purpose only homepage of the official websites of four states have been considered.

Foreign tourist arrivals are the basis of ranking for the existing study. The web addresses are as follows:

Top performing tourism states/union territories in terms of international tourist arrivals web addresses:

Site T1 www.maharashtratourism.gov.in

Site T2 www.tamilnadutourism.org

Low performing tourism states/union territories in terms of international tourist arrivals web addresses:

Site L1 lakshadweeptourism.nic.in

Site L2 tourism.mizoram.gov.in

Sites for states with top tourism inflow are referred to as T1 and T2; and low tourism inflow are referred to as L1 and L2 following a sequence in respect to their respective rankings.

Content analysis of homepage of tourism states/union territories websites with most foreign tourist arrivals:

Site T1 i.e. the official site of Maharashtra tourism takes the visitors to the web page through a welcome page with an artistic wallpaper depicting the patterns of cave paintings, apparently portraying the art of Ajanta caves. This is the only website, for which two web pages were studied (due to its home page access through a welcome page). The welcome page further gives options of two language namely Marathi and English to continue. The home page provides a rich information and varied links for the browsers to explore. Luxury train service of Maharashtra 'The Deccan Odyssey' occupies the centre place on the home page, online booking option for resorts and the luxury train is available. The page contains snippets of interesting destinations with focus on Ajanta caves, Ellora caves, Mumbai and Shirdi. Left bottom corner is dedicated to an innovative column with animations to motivate tourists to enjoy tourism responsibly- the space titles 'Greeny The Great'. Mumbai is home to most famous Hindi film industry, which is reflected on the homepage that offers a link to 'Bollywood Tourism' on vertical navigation sidebar on right of homepage. The written content in form of long descriptive paragraph is absent on the home page of the website. This is contrary to the website(s) home page of least performing states that are being discussed in the later part of research. Most of space of the website's homepage is taken by moving images and distributed space for various links. Visitors can however click on the supporting hyperlinks 'more information' to navigate further. Links for connecting through face book and twitter are available at the centre bottom in form of tiny logos of both.

Further to details of the page analysis data regarding website global and national rankings are being obtained via an online tool alexa.com. The site T1 holds 87,132 rank globally and 7,707 nationally. The percentage visitors to the site are mostly from India constituting 94.8% and rest 5.2% are international visitors to the website.

Site T2 refers to the official website of Tamil Nadu Tourism. Tamil Nadu holds second rank in international tourist arrival mainly due to its rich culture, commerce and medical tourism. The website's homepage welcomes the site visitors with main images of landing page viz. Pamban Rail Scissor Bridge, Meenakshi Amman Temple, Botanical garden, Vivekananda Memorial, Rathas of Mallapuram in the top middle of the homepage. Logo of Tamil Nadu Tourism appears on the left top corner and 'Incredible India' on the right top corner. The website also offers multiple languages to browse the website with options of French or Tamil. The white space appears to balance in context of navigation links. Pictorial links on the page include tours, hotels, mobile booking options, destinations, video gallery, virtual tour, photo gallery, specialities, hill stations, and testimonials. Vertical right navigation sidebar provides links to department of tourism, online bookings, policy notes, orders and announcements, bottom right space provides link to latest news and events, and fee back for the visitors. Similar to the Maharashtra tourism website the home page offers various links to explore further rather than giving a detailed description on the page. 'Testimonials' column finds a prominent space on home page of the website at centre bottom. The spaces on the home page are evenly distributed with a considerable space for large clear images of select destinations to enthral website visitors. Interested visitors can connect through facebook, twitter and additional option of you tube is also available at left bottom of the homepage.

The site T2 holds 217,900 rank globally and 19,269 nationally. The percentage visitors to the site are- 91.6% from India and rest 8.4% are international visitors to the website.

Content analysis of homepage of tourism states/union territories websites with least foreign tourist arrivals:

Site L1 is the official website of Lakshadweep. Lakshadweep is a union territory off south western coast of India, an archipelago and also known for its sea beaches. This union territory stands last among the entire states and union territories put together in terms of foreign tourist arrivals which was a mere 580 foreign tourist visits in 2012 (India Tourism Statistics, 2012). The official tourism website of the place is considerable simple and inconspicuous, that may fail to hold the visitors to website. The white space which refers to the space around elements on the webpage is non- uniformly

distributed, making the web page look irregular and unattractive. This is also due to the content sticking to the left part of webpage making right portion bare. Not much of thought has been put into the creation of the page. The landing page welcomes visitors with randomly arranged pictures of the island territory and fewer links on left navigation sidebar including facts, information on different islands, water sports, package tours, 10th plan outlay, frequently asked questions and photo gallery. The textual description's first line reads 'The Tourism sector is one of the newly developed sector in Lakshadweep'. The text has a frequent use of word 'no'; 'no ship nor any mechanized vessel', 'there was no building nor any infrastructure' in first paragraph, 'flow of tourists were not encouraging' in second paragraph, and 'land resources are not over taxed' indicate presence of passive expressions in the web text. Option to connect through social media are absent on the homepage.

Alexa.com ranks the website at 997, 165 globally and 155, 559 in India. 12% of site visitors are from outside India and still 82% visitors accessed the website from within India.

Site L2 is website to promote Mizoram tourism. Aesthetically the website stands better than the website of last rank holder Lakshadweep. Centre images capture the traditional Mizoram culture. Right top corner holds the national emblem. The moving links notifies the bygone event of 6th march which was 3rd Mizoram bamboo day. This indicates the absence of regular update of the web page information. The landing page offers a rich drop down menu ranging from the facts about the state, profile history, places of interest, events and festivals, adventure activities, information for prospective tourists tour plans and much more. Left sidebar looks sparse with an empty notice board, grievance/feedback link and fewer links for navigation viz. tender, photo gallery. The text on the homepage describes Mizoram as tranquil place and words 'least frequented' and 'unfrequented'. The oxford advance learner's dictionary gives meaning of the word frequent (verb) as 'to visit a particular place often' seems to highlight Mizoram as very less visited and capture the attention of those tourists that look for a less visited destination.

The alexa.com figures state that the website has a global rank 327,836, and holds 25,207th rank in India. Most visitors to the website are from India constituting 95% and rest are international browsers.

Conclusion and Discussion

With the help of online analysis tools and content analysis of the select homepage of top and low performers in tourism gives a firm premise to debate over the presentation of the tourism destination on its websites. It can be said from the present research that a correlation can be drawn between quality of content and aesthetics of tourism websites and its ability to attract foreign tourists to the destination, as a website is one the most important way to reach to the global audience. The description of the place and innovative presentation of tourism offerings may significantly contribute towards arising curiosity among travellers. Hence the analysis supports the hypotheses of visual presentation and quality of content, as there were differences observed on both the criteria between top and low performing states/ union territories. Textual content found prominence in form of long paragraph describing the place occupying major space of the home page of both the low performing states website which was absent in top performing states website. It was also observed that the national and global rankings differed from high and low performing tourism states websites.

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