Travel industry selecting between online and offline mode

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Abstract: The travel industry in India is operating through two different modes, online and offline respectively. The present study is the investigation into the future prospects of online retail in travel industry in India. It involves the identification of the competitive strategies adopted by the tour operators. The research further investigates the tour operator's perception towards 'Incredible India campaign'. It was found that e-retail travel is a platform that is bringing two market forces the demand and supply (tour operators and the customers) together, and both the parties are more inclined towards online mode in near future. Tour operators are gaining by operating at low cost and increasing their business reach while customers get what they desire as per their convenience. Tour operators know the importance of 'Incredible India campaign' for the Indian tourism Industry and they want to create the tourism brand as 'Incredible' through their services. The study is limited within the geographical boundary of Delhi and NCR.

Index terms: Tourism, tour operators, online, offline, Incredible India

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry in India holds major importance for the country because tourism provides fuel to economic development of the country. Tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner for the country and accounts for 6.8% in the country's GDP[1]. In India ministry of tourism is responsible for development of tourism in India. The ministry takes care of the promotion of tourism in India and abroad, and the development of tourism throughout the country. In the year 1966 government of India established the ITDC (Indian Tourism Development Corporation) with the objective of the development and promotion of tourism in the country. ITDC has been the prime mover in the progressive development, promotion and expansion of tourism in the country. ITDC runs a chain of hotels under the brand name of Ashok group with its headquarters situated in New Delhi. The cities where other hotels are located are Bhubaneswar, Jaipur, Bharatpur, Puducherry, Mysore, Bhopal, Jammu, Patna, Ranchi, Guwahati, Itanagar, and Agra.

Apart from ITDC, there is another public sector organization namely IRCTC(Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation) that takes care of travel booking, catering and tourism in Indian railways. It was initiated by Indian railways in association with the government of India.

The government had launched the tourism campaign named "Incredible India" in the year 2002 to promote the tourism within and outside the India. Incredible India campaign promotes the different tourist destination and activities across the countries.

Incredible India has promoted Indian tourism destination through website that allow user to use interface for booking, transportation, foreign exchange, etc....

Government of India is very active in promotion and development of tourism and has also taken various initiatives but it should focus on the different gears of the tourism industry. There should be coordination between all the gears, as everything is required to flourish the Indian tourism Industry.

Every tourism industry in the world works on the gears of hospitality, restaurants, transportation, travel industry including travel agencies and tour operators. The role of private sector should be emphasized, as without them it would be a difficult task for the government to do all by itself.

II. GEARS OF TOURISM INDUSTRY

Hospitality Industry:

Accommodation facilities in India range from luxury five stars deluxe category hotels to small guest houses. The primary need of the tourist is to find a place for residing in foreign country or other state so as to ensure his safety and relaxing needs. In India a tourist can find a place according to his/her needs and paying capacity. Besides star rated hotels various other options of accommodation are

available in India. They are home stays, house boats near lakes, dharamshalas, tribal huts and heritage hotels. Heritage hotels are the old forts and palaces that have been converted into hotels.

Restaurant (Food and Beverages) industry

Full service restaurants are divided into two categories; fine dining and casual dining restaurants. Fine dining restaurants are usually located in the premises of luxury hotels, provide high quality food at premium price with good ambience and highly trained professionals. Example of Fine dine restaurant are Bukhara, Akira back.

Casual dine restaurant charged lower price providing moderate quality of food with quick table service. Takeaways are also provided. Some of casual dine restaurants in India are the Big Chille Cape, Fridays, Sbarro etc...

Quick service restaurants are also called as fast food joints; they provide processed food at lower prices. The basic menu items include pizza, burgers, fries, cold drinks, ice creams etc... They provide the option of takeaway and home delivery but minimal table service. QSR operating in India are Haldiram, Dominos, Mac Donald's, Pizza hut, KFC, Burger king, and Dunkin donuts.

Infrastructural facility:

In terms of infrastructure India is not behind as it has well connected network of roads and national highways interlinking the states. Tourism circuits have also been designed. Expressways have been designed for the tourism circuit of golden triangle from Delhi to Agra to Jaipur. There are 17 international and 87 domestic airports[2].

Indian railway is one of the world's largest rail network comprising 11500 Km of track over a route of 64,436Km and 7,172 stations[3]. India has 13 major seaports and 200 non major seaports[4].

Tour and Travel Industry:

250+ tour operators are registered with the ministry of tourism (Website of tourism ministry), and the major players in the industry are dealing online and are dominating the travel industry. The major players of the industry are Thomas cook, Cox and Kings; make my trip, clear trip, yatra.com and Expedia.

The tour operators whether online or offline offers a large number of services to the tourists including customized package where the customer selects each element of the tour specific to his or her need, designed standardized tour package, specialized tourism package and complete tour guide package. Every solution is provided to the customers to make their travel a memorable one.

The tour operators in India are working through two different modes: offline and online. Big brands with huge investment are dealing online and enjoying low cost benefits and huge profit margins. While the small tour operators have carved out their niche and managing their profits by dealing offline. Indians generally prefer offline mode that is the opportunity for small tour operators. But the scenario is changing as with the usage of internet by the tour operators have given convenience to the customers and now the customers of modern age have started developing preference for online mode. So it is a challenging task for the tour operators as how they select the medium, which mode they would adopt or they would adopt the combination of both the mediums.

III. Technology and tourism industry

Khare and Khare (2010) conducted the research on the usage of internet in tourism industry. The research was conducted into two phases. The first phase was exploratory in nature; focus group technique was adopted to ascertain the variable and constructs of the study. They found that the use of internet has been growing in India among the tourists however they make use of internet for the search of information for decision making however they lack trust on internet for financial transactions. The respondents were the customers of the travel agencies. After first phase, 25 attributes were found out related to safety and security and services attributes of online travel websites. Questionnaire was designed for second phase based on those attributes. Questionnaire was rated on 5 point Likert scale. Data was collected from the respondents who were familiar with online travel firms. Total sample size consisted of 200 respondents but 173 was found to be usable. It was found that the use of internet has been growing in India among the tourists but they make use of internet for the search of information for decision making however they lack trust on internet for financial transactions. The research lacks in identifying the factors which could help the decision makers to build the trust of people for financial transactions.

Bethapudi (2013) further explored the role of internet for Indian tourism. The research identified that Information communication and technology has very crucial role for tourism industry. Tourist can access any kind of information about tourism destination and tourism products from any part of the world. Tourism comprehends with social media.

It was found that ICT is boosting up tourism industry. ICT helps in searching the location, search for information on tourism products, and e-booking of airline tickets and hotel reservation. The researcher has suggested that all the organisations in association with tourism industry should remain updated with latest technology. Technology up gradation is suggested.

Law et al. (2014) discussed the recent development in the field of information communication and technology and its practical application in tourism and hospitality industry. The study was conducted from two sides; the consumer side and the supplier side. The decision making process of consumer was analyzed and it was found that information search and post purchase behaviour are corresponding with the usage of ICT. User generated content websites and social media has important role in understanding consumer behaviour in tourism industry.

The two most important things for suppliers are online marketing and strategic management. Former can enhance business and latter can enhance business operations. Use of ICT develops financial capabilities however it depends on management choice, financial condition and position. The researchers suggested that the usage of IT should not be restricted at operational level however it should be extended up to senior level and should be used for decision making. Social media is regarded as a platform where the tourists and suppliers of tourism industry cross each other. The role of social media has been directed for future research in tourism industry. The research did not provide the way through which IT implementation can be done in tourism and hospitality industry.

Smaranda et al. (2014) compared online v/s offline tourist behaviour and prospects. The research was qualitative and exploratory in nature. Data was collected using online portal 'isondaje.ro'. The word association technique was used in association with Chinese portraits. 346 respondents were interviewed and snow ball sampling technique was used. Tourist behaviour profile found identical in online as well as offline mode. The role of internet considered important for tourism destination. It was found that tourist explores more information which is reliable and they can plan well their holidays. In online mode tourist is alone however he gets good information. While in offline mode he has to rely on somebody else and he needs others for the information.

Tourist personality affects the behaviour of tourist and their decision making process. The research has been lacking in application of the role of understanding tourist behaviour for decision maker. How to communicate this to decision makers have not been explained in the study.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Majumder (2012) examined the role of public and private sector in travel industry with reference to Delhi. In Delhi the prominent player of public sector is Delhi tourism and transport department corporation (DTTDC) responsible for managing tourism activities and tourism promotion of Delhi to compete against all other tourist destination in India. The services offered by DTTDC are regular tourist packages including sightseeing and travelling through Ho-Ho buses, transport services, travel and travel insurance, accommodation, entertainment, other ways of experiencing Delhi, and other facilities like booking of tickets, hotel reservations etc...

The services offered by private tour operators are providing combination of flights and hotels, flight booking, corporate travel, travel insurance, cruise package, deals on travel plans, hotels and train reservations. Lower distributions costs and high return ensure high market share for private tour operators. Factors identified for success of private tour websites are information and service quality, system use, playfulness and system design quality. It was found that the foreign tourists prefer private tour operators in comparison to public sector. They rely on private tour operators because of convenience and brand name and good quality. Private hotels were also preferred more in comparison to public sector hotel because of international standards adopted by them. Innovation and continuous adaptation to changing environment is the key of success of private tour operators.

Gupta (2013) conducted the extensive research study to identify as to why Indian travel industry lacks competent professionals and have high attrition rate. The study is specific to travel industry where hospitality and aviation industry was excluded. The research stated that Indian tourism industry is a growing industry with 8.9% expected annual growth rate for the next ten years. Indian travel industry is lacking in terms of HR professionals. The study also pointed that human resource in tourism industry has high number of uneducated and unskilled workforce because of working conditions and low salary status. In comparison to other sectors like banking, IT, retail, telecom, etc..., HR in tourism industry receives less wages comparatively. The reasons identified for high attrition rate in tourism industry are low pay as compared to other industries, poor working conditions, lack of growth opportunities, lack of recognition and social status.

Sigala (2013) provided a holistic model of sustainable supply chain management through customer involvement at each stage. The study stated that today's customers themselves care for the environment and adopt sustainable and eco friendly practices. Here customers are referring to tourists. The social networking groups have significant influence on individuals as each group has its own

values and customs. The model has four dimensions which are factors motivating customer involvement, degree of customer involvement, management strategies of customer involvement, and outcome of customer involvement. The research is not supported by enough literature in tourism industry which may question the validity of development of the proposed model.

Bhatia (2014) conducted the research study measuring the perception of Indian inbound tour operators on destination competitiveness between India and Singapore. It was found that Indians prefer Singapore for outbound tourism while Singaporeans have no such preference for India as a tourist destination. In India, spiritual tourism, wildlife tourism, medical tourism, rural tourism, adventure tourism and cultural and heritage tourism are prevalent. In Singapore eco tourism, adventure and wildlife tourism and educational tourism are prevalent. "The attributes of safety and security maintenance of cleanliness, infrastructure, man-made attractions, facilities at tourist's spots and behaviour of country residents the standing of Singapore is significantly better than India in the opinion of the tour operators. However, for the attributes of information and communication and natural resources, the position of India is significantly better than that of Singapore in tour operator's opinion". It was found that the prices of food, local transportation, shopping goods and other commodity prices are reasonable in India as compared to Singapore. But, the prices of accommodation and air-fare are much cheaper in Singapore in comparison to India in the viewpoint of the tour operators of both the countries. It was concluded in the study that there is differences in terms of tourism competitiveness of both the countries on the basis of tour operators' perception. Singapore was found to be more competitive destination than India.

Begum (2014) presented a case study on the scenario of e-retail in Indian tourism Industry. It was stated in the study that e-retail is the fastest growing sector of India with 12% annual growth rate and 12% contribution in the GDP in the year 2010. Future prospects of online travel industry in India are increasing users of internet, availability of debit cards and credit cards, longer reach to customers, India emerging as an IT hub, and more secured operations. However there are some challenges to Indian online travel industry which are problems in shipping and payment system, offline presence of tour operators offering products at discounted rates, language problems and new emerging business models. The study also presented SWOT analysis of E retail travel Indian industry. Strengths are convenience as it saves time and cost, people have more power to expand and get good discount and lower prices. Opportunities are growth in low cost carrier and approval of FDI in retail by government, increase in consumer spending and income. The weaknesses identified are lack of big investment for expansion, concentration in urban areas, less confidence on payment mechanism. Threats are lack of qualified personnel, poor security in cyber system, high investing and lack of rural coverage.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research study is conducted to know the perception of tour operator's toward online travel industry.

Objectives of the research are as under:

1. To understand tour operator's perception towards online travel industry.
2. To know the marketing strategies adopted by the private tour operators to deal with the competition.
3. Do the private operators actually works towards creating brand "Incredible India"

Sample Design: Simple Random Sampling

Sample Size: 70

Data Source: Online and offline data collection from the tour operators

Data Type: Quantitative

Geographical Boundary: Delhi and NCR

Data Analysis Technique: Calculation of Mode and frequencies through SPSS

Research Design: Exploratory Research design

VI.FINDINGS

Data was collected through questionnaire consisting of 20 statements measured on 5 point Likert scale. Responses were marked by the tour operators. The scale ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Ordinal numbers 1 to 5 were assigned to the responses. 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree. All the statements were positive therefore the need to reverse the rating on Likert scale for negative statements was eliminated. Data was entered manually in the SPSS 22 software. 20 statements were based on the 20 variables. For defining variable in SPSS codes were assigned to each of the variable. In addition with codes, labels were also assigned to each of the variable.

Mode for the first micro item 'Online business reach' is 4 (agree).The highest frequency count for the micro item is 25 for 'strongly agree'. Combining together 'agree' and 'strongly agree' 64 out of 70 have opted for these options. 91.4 % of the respondents agreed to the statement that online mode increases the reach of their business operations. This means that online business mode brings the suppliers (tour operators) of the tourism products near to their customers. Online mode brings suppliers and customers on same platform. This is an rising trends in tour and travel operators business; and in future most of the tour operators would prefer to work online as it increases their reach. This could become a threat for the offline mode.

The mode for the second micro item 'online business reducing cost of operations' is 4. That means 'agree'. 41.4% of the respondents have agreed to the statement. However, in small number the statement has mix responses as well. Reduced cost of operation through online mode can become another important factor for the offline tour operators, to shift their business model from offline to online. Cost is the most important thing that decides the profitability of the business; thus driven by the profit motive; tour and travel industry can witness a major change involving huge importance of online business in the near future. The mode obtained for the micro item 'customer feels convenience through offline mode' is 4, with highest frequency count of 41. 41 respondents agreed to the statement. Beside this, 20 people strongly agreed to the statement. If customer feels convenient while dealing online, then directly it would influence tour operator's choice to select the medium for business operation.

The fourth micro item for the study was customer preference for online mode as compared to offline mode. Mode for this micro item is 4 (agree). 29 respondents have agreed to the statement accounting to the 41.4%; 12 respondents have strongly agreed to the statement accounting to 17.1 %. This shows that today's modern customer with handy digital devices like mobile phones, tablets, prefer to deal online rather than offline. Online mode saves time and fare on the part of the customer. Thus consumer preference for online mode boosts up the online business model for the tour operators. The fifth micro item was customer feels financially secure while dealing online. The mode obtained was '2' depicting that 22 respondents disagreed to the statement, in addition another three respondents strongly disagreed to this statement. The total percentage of 'disagreement' accounting to 35.7%. In contrast 16 respondents agreed to the statement while 11 respondents strongly agreed to the statement. The sum of agree and strongly agree cumulates to 27 respondents. Mode indicating that customer doesn't feel financially secure online. However, if dealt with the argument of disagreement and agreement, more number of respondents are in favor of agreement. Thus, this micro item has become a dicey situation, but if online mode is gaining popularity and is becoming the next big thing in tour and travel operator's industry; probably this issue needs to be addressed first by the industry. The mode for this 'online comparison' is 4, stating that 28 respondents have agreed to the statement that "Customer makes comparison online with other tour operators". This depicts that with convenience, customer has the choice to compare between different tour packages offered by different tour operators. Customer using online mode increases competition among the tour operators; though online travel is a recent trends in tour and travel industry but it brings intense competition also.

The seventh micro item was "online comparison helps customer to get economical packages". With 42 frequency count mode for this item is 4. 42 respondents have agreed to this statement. Another set of 16 respondents have strongly agreed to this statement. It is visible that along with the tour operators customers are also getting benefit from online tour and travel industry. Customers gets economical packages according to their need, on the other hand tour operators gets customer. Online mode is good for both the parties involved. The mode obtained for the micro item "Online is better than offline" is 4 (agree). Another set of 7 respondents consisted of strongly agree responses. This clearly brings out the preference of two different mode online and offline among the tour operators. Online mode is the preferred mode against the offline mode by the tour operators. This preference could lead to end of offline business in the near future.

The micro item 'customization of tour packages help to beat competition' was agreed by 41 respondents. Mode for this micro item was 4 (agree). Tour operators are anticipating the demand of today's modern and trendy tourists; thus customizing their tour packages according to particular individual's need. Through customization they win their customer's over their competitors. Today's consumer of digital age has become smarter, and now it is not an easy task to fulfil their expectations easily. Mode for the micro item 'Low cost operations allows tour operators to give discount to customers' is 4 (agree) with frequency count of 32 respondents. Operating at low cost because of online mode allows the tour operators to give discount to their customers. Online mode is benefitting the tour operators in terms of low cost operations and customers are benefitting in terms of discount. This is a good sign for online mode in tour and travel industry in India.

The eleventh micro item was 'advertising helps in creating brand name as compared to competitors'. Mode obtained for this item is 4 (agree). The total frequency count is 40 for 'agree' accounting to 57.1%. Advertising creates brand awareness among the customers; and they develop preference for them against those about which they are unaware. Thus advertising is essential tour and travel industry. The twelfth micro item was ' Processing of the customer query in time influences the customer'. Mode for this item was 4 (agree). 32 respondents agreed to this statement. In addition 19 respondents strongly agreed to this statement. Along with the brand name, business processes like timely response to the customer's query is essential for tour and travel business to win customers over the competitors. Online business operation helps tour operators to do their work smoothly, efficiently and timely; with less manpower

required. The thirteenth micro item was 'brand name is essential in tour and travel industry'; the mode of this micro item is 5; indicating that the statement is strongly agreed by the 29 respondents. In addition 14 respondents agreed this statement. This accounts to 61.4% in totality. Thus creating a brand name has become essential in tour and travel industry. The fourteenth micro item was ' good tie-ups provides competitive advantage '. Mode for the micro item is 4. 45 respondents have agreed to the statement. This accounts to 64.3%. 18.6%, 13 respondents have strongly agreed to this statement. Good tie-ups mean coordinating relationship among the various gears of the tourism industry. A tour operators needs to maintain good relationship with the hoteliers, transporters, ticket bookers, airport authority etc...

60% of the respondents have agreed to the statement 'public sector also a major threat'. They consider public sector operations in tour and travel industry as a big threat for their business. The mode for this micro item is 4 (agree). Public sector works for the development of tourism in the country. However, private sector perceives the public sector as a major threat. There should be harmony between both the sector for the growth and development of the Indian tourism industry.

The micro item 'IIC a boost for Indian tourism industry' has gained majority of the responses as 'strongly agreed' with 41 respondents opting for it, accounting to 58.6%. Therefore the mode of the micro item is five. Another 26% of the sample, agreed to this statement accounting to 37.1%. If summed up, it becomes 95.7%. It is stating that all the tour operators know the role and importance of the 'Incredible India Campaign' for the development of Indian tourism industry. Thus, they should also play their respective roles for creating a brand Incredible India.

Mode obtained for the micro item 'Customers perceptions are influenced by incredible India campaign' is 4 (agree). 38.6% (27) respondents have agreed to the statement. Another set of 10 respondents strongly agreed to this statement. However 37.1% (26) respondents were neutral for this statement. Customers perception are influenced through IIC, thus it becomes a major challenge for the tour operators to manage their business offering in match with the customers' expectations influenced by Incredible India campaign. Tour operators should work with collaboration with Indian tourism ministry so as to promote single brand image of the country.

Eighteenth micro item was 'incorporation of IIC in branding strategy'. The purpose of the statement was to check how much value tour operators gives to Incredible India campaign. How essential it is for the tour operators to align with the campaign. Alignment of tour operators with the campaign ensures standardized flow of brand message among the target customers. Mode for the micro item is 3, which means neutral. 42.9% (30) respondents have chosen to be neutral for the statement. Cumulative percentage of agree and strongly agree accounts to 52.9%, which is a positive sign for Indian tourism industry. More than half of the sample population agreed for the incorporation of IIC into their brand strategy. This means that tour operators work in line with IIC.

The nineteenth micro item was "There should be match between tourism offerings as per Incredible India campaign irrespective of the fact it is provided by whom". The findings are very much similar to the previous micro item. 40% respondents are neutral to the statement, which is also a mode for the statement. 3 is the mode for the statement; which means neutral. However, 32.9% respondents have agreed to the statement, and also 17.1% strongly agreed to this statement. The statement is sharing a mixed response from the tour operators. 50% of the responses are agreed to the statement and rest of the 50% falls under the category of disagree or neutral. It is good, that 50% of the sample is aiming for providing match between tourism offerings as per Incredible India campaign. But other 50% of the sample is not following the statement. It is a critical situation. Thus it can't be interpreted how tour operators are designing their products? Either they are designing their own strategies; according to customer's requirement or under the influence of incredible India campaign. There should be uniformity in the operations of all the tour operators.

The twentieth micro item was "aim for creating brand Incredible India through services offered to the customers". Mode obtained for this item is 4, which means 'agree'. 37 respondents have agreed to the statement accounting to 52.9%. Another set of 24 respondents, accounting to 34.3% strongly agreed to this statement. It is a very good sign for Indian tourism industry that the service providers are aiming to create brand 'India incredible' in tourist experiences through their offerings.

VII. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The study was focused towards knowing the perception of private tour operators with respect to online mode in comparison to offline mode. Online mode of operations is the recent trend in tour and travel industry. Online mode helps tour operators to increase their reach to the customers; online operation leads to cost reduction because of which tour operators can provide the discount to their customers. Today's modern customer prefer online mode against offline mode, they search online, make comparisons and get economical packages as per their need. Online mode is preferred because it provides convenience to the customers; saving their time and money. However, online mode has not gain 100% trust of customer in terms of finance as customers do not feel financially secure while dealing offline. Still it can be said that online mode is better than offline mode. Trust needs to be generated among the customers for online financial transactions.

To beat the competition it is essential to create brand name in tour and travel industry. An effective medium considered for creation of brand name is advertising. Responding to customer query on time and providing customization in tour packages influences the customers; creating a competitive edge over the competitors. Good tie-ups with other stakeholders of tourism industry acts as a big competitive advantage over the competitors in tour and travel industry. The different stakeholders in tourism industry are hoteliers, restaurants, transporters, specialized tour operators, govt. tourism agencies etc...

Private tour operators consider public sector as a major threat to their business. But, they acknowledge the role of 'Incredible India Campaign' in boosting up the Indian tourism industry. Customer's expectations are influenced by the 'Incredible India Campaign' therefore it has become essential for travel industry to incorporate 'Incredible India Campaign' as a theme in their core branding strategies. The tour operators believe in the philosophy that there tourism offerings in India should be in accordance with the 'Incredible India Campaign' irrespective of the fact it is provided by whom; private or public sector. The tour operators aim to contribute in making of a brand 'Incredible India' by incorporating the brand in their business philosophy.

Online mode of operations is gaining popularity in travel industry. Tour operators prefer to deal online because it allows them to operate at low cost and reach at wider target audience. Today's customers prefer to deal online because they have many options to compare and get what they want. According to customer's preference tour operators have to adopt with the market change. Therefore 'online mode' is pushing both the market forces towards each other. Thus online mode has become an essential in travel industry. Tour operators are positively inclined towards online mode. Moreover, tour operators compete on the brand name and tie ups with each other. But, they know the importance of the 'Incredible India Campaign' and they incorporate the brand into their branding strategy. The private tour operators in Delhi and NCR wish to design tourism packages and services which create a memorable experience in the mind of the customers; for making a sparkling brand 'Incredible India'.

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