



Understanding the Role of Online Support to Tourist Spots in India

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Article History	Abstract
Received: 03 June 2023 Revised: 12 Sept 2023 Accepted: 29 Sept 2023	The online travel agencies or popularly known as OTAs have become one of the most reliable options for the travellers to make their arrangements. The number of players both across the world and in India have seen a rise and the same has quite successfully helped in planning trips for many tourists. The study here is curious to understand the role of these OTAs in the process of resuming the tourist destination especially in India. The situation in India with respect to the use of OTAs is quite different as the country is an emerging one and there are issues of digital divide still persistent in the economy. The study here collected 238 primary responses from tourist across the country to identify their perception about the online travel agencies and recognise the factors that cause an impact in the adoption process. The study has used a number of advanced statistical methods such as principal component analyses and multiple linear regression to establish the factors as well as the relationship with the adoption process. The regression model being formulated is able to estimate of variance of 14% on the intention of using online modes to put the two responses in India by highlighting the two main factors causing an impact on it. The perceived ease of use and the information transparency are the main reasons why a tourist based in India prefers to book their destination requirements using online travel agencies.
CC License CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	Keywords: Online; Travel, Tourism, India, Tourists

1. Introduction

The travel and tourism sector has been experiencing a new level of success in the past few years. The sector can be termed as one of the most revenue engrossing arenas in the last few years. The projected estimate for revenue has been for the industry to reach 734 billion US dollars in the year 2022 (Statista Research Department, 2022a). The user penetration is expected to further increase in the coming years as well. Although these figures exhibit a promising term for the sector, the pandemic in the beginning of the year 2020 has caused severe impact on the same. The travel and tourism sector is one of the most affected areas as soon as the pandemic occurred and led to a lockdown across the world. The amount of spending made by the consumers in the sector saw a decrease in the recovering phases of Covid-19 (Statista Research Department, 2022b). Due to the high level of risk involved in travelling, the entire sector faced down fall.

There have been reduction in the employment levels as offered by the sector. However, the sector underwent a number of strategically planned methods of recovering post pandemic. It included online modes of offering the facilities as one of its main components. The replacement of real-life based services into a virtual medium helped the sector to cope up to a large extent. It is predicted that by 2027, almost 74% of the total income in the travel and tourism sector would be generated through online sales (Statista Research Department, 2022c). The online travel agencies or popularly known as OTAs have become one of the most reliable options for the travellers to make their arrangements. The number of players both across the world and in India have seen a rise and the same has quite successfully helped in planning trips for many tourists. The study here is curious to understand the role of these OTAs in the process of resuming the tourist destination especially in India. The situation in India with respect to the use of OTAs is quite different as the country is an emerging one and there are issues of digital divide still persistent in the economy (Tewathia et al., 2020). Due to these challenges and the OTAs becoming the most popular option for booking majority of the tourist spots, it is essential to understand about the factors that would impact the tourists belonging to the country of India specifically. Hence, the following research questions are to be attempted here - RQ 1: Are the tourists in India ready to use

online travel agencies for booking any tourist spot post pandemic? RQ2: What are the factors that can cause an impact on using the online methods of booking tourist spots in an era post pandemic? The main idea in the study is to understand the situation for using online travel agencies in India specifically in an era after the Covid-19 emergence has altered all the methods of doing the bookings. The detailed review conducted on the changes in the tourism sector is discussed in the upcoming section.

2. Review of Literature

(Toubes et al., 2021) based their study on understanding the changes occurring in the ways of consuming tourism related services after Covid-19. The study based in Spain tried to find out the changes occurring in the promotion of tourism by talking with 65 experts from the industry. The experts highlighted the fact that the process of using technologies have found new levels of importance in this situation and the use of artificial intelligence and virtual reality has helped. (Sung et al., 2020) used big data analytics to understand the behaviour of Korean tourists after the pandemic. The study did reveal that there is a difference in the consumer behaviour noticed in travel post the pandemic and it is found that the travellers now prefer to look for places within the country to avoid any risk. There is demand for eco-trips found among the respondents. (González-Torres et al., 2021) did a study about the supply chain management in the tourism industry after the outbreak of Covid-19. The study highlighted the need for incorporating changes in the same and stated how it is important to make changes as per the new norms post the pandemic. The role of government in this case has been established as important in the process. (Sharma et al., 2021) explored the ways in which the tourism industry can be revived after the pandemic has started to slow down. The study in its attempt highlighted a number of factors which can be highly effective in putting the market back in track. The model includes aspects such as achieving sustainability in tourism, the response from the government and the attachment with the local communities.

Furthermore, the study establishes technology as an important part of the process. It highlights the need to incorporate more measures of technology-based innovations to help the sector regain its operations. (Czerny et al., 2021) conducted a study to analyse the aviation market after the pandemic. The aviation industry is quite closely related to the tourism sector and has interrelated relationships in regaining operations in the post pandemic era. The sector introduced strategies of reducing the marginal cost in order to achieve the best possible results. The use of online methods of booking in the process has been highlighted here as well. (Nunes & Cooke, 2021) mentioned that the role of marketing and communication in the tourism sector has shown a high level of increase through the online methods available as the consumers themselves became quite comfortable using the digital methods. (Sánchez-Teba et al., 2020) mentioned that the tourism companies started using social media as one of their main channels of communicating and implemented the direct marketing as well sales technique during the period. The consumers during the lockdown had mostly become used to browsing social media and hence the two methods became compatible with each other (Wang et al., 2020). (Chen et al., 2020; Sigala, 2020) mentioned that the consumers while preferring online travel agencies post pandemic made it clear that they would like to have proper information about the hygiene aspects undertaken during the process on the website itself.

Overall, it is seen that there are a number of studies that have been conducted about the same but in case of India the studies seem not to be abundant. As the pandemic brought about a number of significant changes to the tourism sector it is important that the related measures are investigated. Therefore, the objectives laid down for the study are as follows-

1. To understand the perception of consumers about using online modes for booking tourist spots.
2. To determine the factors influencing the use of online modes for booking tourist spots post pandemic.

3. Materials and Methods

The above section in the paper showed how the study is interested in knowing about the adoption of online travel modes by the tourists in India specifically. The objectives being set are to understand the established research questions. The study takes course of a descriptive mode of study and uses quantitative method to arrive at the results. A structured questionnaire is designed having questions extracted from the extensive literature review in a 5 Point Likert type scale. Non-probabilistic method of sampling is used in which judgement sampling is implemented to select the respondents having an experience of visiting tourist spots in India. A total of 238 responses are collected across the country along with secondary sources from books, journals and reports. The data collected would be analysed using statistical tools including chi-square tests, t-tests, ANOVA, principal component analysis and multiple linear regression. The data analysis conducted is shown in detail in the next section of the study.

Data Analysis

The data collected in the form of primary responses has been entered and analysed using SPSS. As a part of the study, the demographics of the respondents are being analysed to understand the composition of the data sets to be used for the analysis.

4. Result and Discussion

Gender			
Gender	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Female	62	26.1 %	26.1 %
Male	176	73.9 %	100.0 %

The data collected includes majority of male population as there are a greater number of male tourists observed across the country. There are

Age			
Age (in years)	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
20-30	48	20.2 %	20.2 %
31-40	93	39.1 %	59.2 %
Above 40	97	40.8 %	100.0 %

26.1% of female respondents being considered here. The next demographic factor being investigated about the respondents is that of age. There are instances found where the age group can impact on the behaviour of the tourists. There are 40.8% responses collected from above 40 years of tourists followed by 39.1% in the 31-40 years of age group.

Education Level			
Education Level	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Graduates	100	42.0 %	42.0 %
Postgraduates	71	29.8 %	71.8 %
Undergraduates	67	28.2 %	100.0 %

The education level of the respondents can help in understanding a number of behaviour traits about them. The education level is associated with the type of lifestyle one has and hence can generate information about tourist behaviour as well. There are majority of the respondents having graduation as the highest degree of education followed by postgraduates. The undergraduates are the least in number.

Marital Status			
Marital Status	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Married	116	48.7 %	48.7 %
Unmarried	122	51.3 %	100.0 %

The last demographic variable being considered is that of marital status and it is seen that the composition is almost equivalent for both the categories. With 51.3% the number of unmarried respondents are slightly higher than the married ones. The first objective in the study has been to get an idea about the perception of consumers towards the use of online modes to get assistance in their tours. There are a few preliminary questions asked which are dichotomous in nature to understand the minimum idea about the status. The results are shown below.

Do you use online platforms for making bookings?			
Do you use online platforms for making bookings?	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Yes	227	95.4 %	95.4 %
No	11	4.6 %	100.0 %

The first question enquires if the respondents being enquired have the experience of using online platforms for making travel bookings. It is seen that at this point of time 95.4% of the respondents have an experience of using the same. This shows that the online platforms for booking in the tourism sector has already been used to a large extent.

Do you like using online travel services for planning your trip?			
Do you like using online travel services for planning your trip?	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Yes	216	90.8 %	90.8 %
No	22	9.2 %	100.0 %

The next question enquired if they liked using these online travel modes when planning their trip. It is seen that 90.8% of the respondents accepted their liking for the mode while 9.2% are there who do not like the same. These two questions give a preliminary idea on the perception of the respondents about using online modes of booking in their travel plans. However, to indulge further into the current discussion in hand further statistical tools are being used. A 35-item scale has been put in the questionnaire to identify the probable factors impacting the intention to use online modes for booking tourist spots. To extract the underlying factors from this list, principal component analysis is done. This enables the items in the scales to be divided into the underlying factors having eigen value more than 1. The threshold for considering the factor loadings is 0.4. The factors are shown below.

Component Loadings						
	Component					Uniqueness
	1	2	3	4	5	
I get discounts on the bookings made through online travel applications or agencies	0.529					0.862
There are cashbacks available for the bookings I make through online travel applications or agencies	0.502					0.661
There are attractive rewards associated with the purchase of bookings through online travel applications or agencies	0.454					0.717
The payment system in online travel applications or agencies is easy to use	0.456					0.683
Payments made through online travel applications or agencies is useful according to me	0.560					0.765
I trust the mode of payment in online travel applications or agencies	0.425					0.702
The bookings made through online travel applications or agencies saves a lot of my time		0.522				0.592
I prefer online travel applications or agencies because I can book it from the comfort of my home		0.757				0.316
The online travel applications or agencies provides a lot of information about the booking made		0.603				0.602
There are pictures and videos available for the required information with the online travel applications or agencies		0.626				0.600

The assistance provided by online travel applications or agencies on the pre- and post-booking services is very good	0.414	0.800
The client support services in online travel applications or agencies are very strong	0.490	0.668
The online travel applications or agencies provide proper guidance to the clients	0.420	0.747
Online travel applications or agencies can provide emergency healthcare services	0.533	0.868
The online travel applications or agencies provides full details on the hygiene and cleanliness measures when making a booking	0.444	0.659
The healthcare facilities provided by online travel applications or agencies can be seen clearly through online reviews, photos and videos available on their website	0.673	0.673
The food facilities available for the tour is well informed while booking for the services through online reviews	0.411	0.631
The food facilities available for the tour is well informed while booking for the services through website listings and other information available	0.402	0.781
I will book through the online travel applications or agencies in the future	0.505	0.492
I will book through the online travel applications or agencies in the next six months	0.418	0.397
I would suggest my others to book through the online travel applications or agencies	0.599	0.810
I am confident about using the online travel agencies	0.498	0.830

Note. 'varimax' rotation was used

As evident from the table above it is seen that a total of five factors have been extracted from the PCA conducted. The list of items included a number of different aspects of using online platforms for booking the travel plans. Based on the characteristics of each of the items being segregated as an underlying factor they are being termed as follows-

1. Perceived Monetary Benefits – It consists of a total of six factors which shows the monetary benefits that are derived from making bookings through the online platforms. These benefits are in the form of cashbacks and discounts that are the unique selling propositions for these online travel agencies.
2. Perceived Ease of Use – The second factor with a total of seven items corresponds to the ease of using these online modes of bookings and includes factors such as convenience of time, location etc.
3. Transparency of Information – The next factor with five factors includes the information shared in the online travel agencies about the trips one is about to book. It includes aspects such as hygiene, healthcare etc. information which are being displayed in the online travel agencies.
4. Intention- This three-item scale uses the responses to understand the intention of the respondents to continue using online platforms for booking travel bookings in the future.

The above five factors generated shows the important aspects that might impact the intention to prefer for online travel agencies in the future as well. It is seen that there is already market for the online travel agencies post pandemic but conducting a multiple linear regression would help identifying the specific factors that causes an impact on the intention to use them.

Model Fit Measures							
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Overall Model Test			
				F	df1	df2	p
1	0.241	0.1581	0.1419	3.59	4	233	0.007

Model Coefficients - Intention				
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	0.77072	1.061	0.7265	0.468
Perceived Monetary Benefits	0.07135	0.160	0.4450	0.657
Perceived Ease of Use	0.40988	0.153	2.6872	0.008
Transparency of Information	0.28318	0.140	2.0207	0.044

The above model generated shows that it is statistically significant in nature. The adjusted R² generated is 0.1419 which states that a variance of 14.19% is caused on the intention to use online travel modes based on the independent variables. However, from the set of four factors, it is only the two aspects that have caused the intention to be altered. The first one is perceived ease of use and is followed by transparency of information. It is found that PEOU has the highest impact on intention. This shows that it is mostly the convenience of its use and the transparency in information regarding the pandemic that caused the tourists to prefer the mode. Now to investigate the nature of the tourists and the extracted factors, t-tests and one way ANOVA is conducted.

Independent Samples T-Test- Gender				
		Statistic	df	p
Perceived Monetary Benefits	Student's t	2.339	236	0.020
Perceived Ease of Use	Student's t	3.838	236	< .001
Transparency of Information	Student's t	-0.512	236	0.609
Intention	Student's t	1.591	236	0.113

The t-test conducted with respect to gender showed that there is a significant mean score difference when it comes to the first two factors only. These include the perceived monetary benefits and PEOU.

Independent Samples T-Test- Marital Status				
		Statistic	df	p
Perceived Monetary Benefits	Student's t	0.456 ^a	236	0.649
Perceived Ease of Use	Student's t	3.846	236	< .001
Transparency of Information	Student's t	-0.706	236	0.481
Intention	Student's t	-1.157	236	0.249

^a Levene's test is significant ($p < .05$), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances

Now, the second factor with two levels is the marital status and here the statistically significant mean score difference is observed in case of the factors of PEOU only.

One-Way ANOVA - Age				
	F	df1	df2	p
Perceived Monetary Benefits	10.047	2	131	< .001
Perceived Ease of Use	14.995	2	145	< .001
Transparency of Information	0.821	2	125	0.442
Intention	3.011	2	119	0.053

One-Way ANOVA – Education Level				
	F	df1	df2	p
Perceived Monetary Benefits	3.169	2	142	0.045
Perceived Ease of Use	0.698	2	139	0.500
Transparency of Information	1.977	2	151	0.142
Intention	6.312	2	151	0.002
Covid-19 Situation	4.756	2	154	0.010

The One way ANOVA tests are conducted for the education level and age group factors shows that perceived monetary benefits and Covid-19 situation have different mean scores based on the two factors. On the other hand for PEOU it is only the age group and for intention it is only prevalent for the education level. The study here therefore lists out the factors impacting on the prevalence of using online booking platforms for resuming the tourist spots in the country of India. The results being found are hereby discussed in the next sections of the paper.

The main purpose of the study is to analyse the resuming of tourist operations in the destinations of India while analysing the role of online platforms in the process. The role of online platforms across various activities including shopping, banking etc. has been quite popular among the consumers in the recent past. The online travel agencies have been able to gain its importance among the consumers in the country like India specifically after the pandemic has hit the world. As the exposure of the consumers in India having digital divide across the rural urban sections have seen surge in the number of consumers preferring to use online platforms for booking travel related options, it became important to identify the factors which have caused a positive impact in the process. There are a number of online travel agencies that became popular among the tourist in India post pandemic and saw a massive rise in the preference for online bookings. The study here collected 238 primary responses from tourist across the country to identify their perception about the online travel agencies and recognise the factors that cause an impact in the adoption process. The study has used a number of

advanced statistical methods such as principal component analyses and multiple linear regression to establish the factors as well as the relationship with the adoption process.

The regression model being formulated is able to estimate of variance of 14% on the intention of using online modes to put the two responses in India by highlighting the two main factors causing an impact on it. The perceived ease of use and the information transparency are the main reasons why a tourist based in India prefers to book their destination requirements using online travel agencies. The convenience offered by the online travel agencies specifically to book the destinations from the comfort of one's home while providing time management option is one of the main reasons why the preference for such platforms have seen a rise. Similarly, as the online agencies offer a detailed information about the process to be followed when travelling in an era of post pandemic such as the health and hygiene concerns also make the online travel booking option of feasible one for the tourists. It is quite interesting to note that direct COVID-19 information or situation does not cause an impact on the intention but it is the perceived ease of use and the information related facilities that motivate a tourist in India to go for online booking of tickets. The study also highlighted that majority of the population in India are now comfortable with the online booking methods and consider them useful in making the required reservations. The demographics too are found to have an influence on the factors and mostly on the perceived ease of use which is found to impact the respondents of every nature.

5. Conclusion

Future Research

The travel and tourism industry have recovered quite well post pandemic and has also manifested a sense of consciousness among the tourist when it comes to travelling in this era. The need to know the hygiene status of the places while travelling or staying during one's travel plans has become an important part of the entire process. The study here shows that why it is the prime requirement of the tourist travelling in the region, the online travel agencies are able to provide a transparent information handle regarding the same. As this information related to health-conscious tourist and maintenance of hygiene in the process is written in the website it makes the consumers further secured. It is suggested that the transparency in information needs to be maintained in the future as well to increase the adoption process of using online travel agencies specifically in India. The second factor includes perceived ease of use which refers to providing ease of booking at the fingertips when trying to manage a vacation.

This by default has been the main differentiating point of online travel agencies but from the study here it is suggested that the transparency of information weather related to Covid or otherwise needs to be maintained at the best possible way. The reliability of the online travel agencies about the truth in this information can be verified using reviews which can help the further gain the trust of the consumers. There are a number of scopes that can be continued in the future for the betterment of the use of online travel agencies in India. A qualitative nature of study in this area can help in gaining further insights into the process and highlight more factors that can accelerate the process of adoption of online moods for booking tourist spots in India. A comparative analysis of the post pandemic recovering facilitated using online travel agencies used in other developed economies can be done and suggestions can be provided for India to make the process even better in the future. The regression model generated can be further extended by adding other relevant variables and examining their impact on the intention to use online travel agencies for booking tourist spots in India.

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