

## E-Tourism: A Study of Tourist Satisfaction

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### ABSTRACT

Internet and computers technology has an inevitable impact on tourism industry. Hence, understanding of what creates a satisfying tourist experience becomes crucial for e-tourism service environment. This research paper investigates the satisfaction level of tourists in using e-tourism services. This study is based on primary data sources collected by using self-constructed questionnaire by adopting convenient sampling technique from the tourists who purchase tourism products/service from electronic means i.e. internet/website. The data was collected through online questionnaire from respondents by adopting convenient sampling technique. The suitable statistical tools such as frequency distribution, percentage, mean and rank methods were used to analyze the data. The result of the study present through figures & tables to make it more meaningful. The findings of the study revealed that the factors namely convenience, merchandising and serviceability satisfying tourists' requirements whereas other does not do so. The study concluded the necessity of continuous improvement of factors to increase customer loyalty in tourism sector.

**KEYWORDS:** Internet, computer technology, tourism, e-booking, satisfaction, repurchases

### INTRODUCTION

Information & communication technology is widely used in business related activities (Avramovic, 2010) especially in service sector like tourism. ICT represent one of the most effective tools for tourism promotion, generate more revenue for the local economy, and remain competitive by promoting new and complementary tourism offers online (Bethapudi, 2013; UNCTAD, 2005). Hence, the integration of ICT in the tourism industry is essential for success of tourism enterprise. ICT facilitates an individual to access the tourism products information from anywhere any time in a single click (Bethapudi, 2013). There are three stages in tourism; the first one is when the people who are likely to travel start searching for accommodation, air/rail tickets and other tourist services while planning their trip.

This stage is called pre-trip stage. The next stage starts when tourists commence their journey and make it to their first destination or wrap up their journey. The mentioned stage is called in-trip stage. The third and final stage follows the previous stage and consists of the services which tourist service providers offer their customers after their trip (Massomeh, 2006).

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For guest travelling to a certain destination get help of ICT to help them in gathering details about it in a way that it becomes easier and more clear to choose among available products & services. Same creates a personalized travel plan, for instance as a proactive proposal based on tourist profile and preferences. During travel phase electronic guide system that provides travelers with road direction signs and electronic information notes should be released to enhance travel experience. After a travel tour & travel phase it is so necessary to gather travel experience of guests with the help of ICT tools providing platform to the guests for sharing their experience. Other guests use this feedback as a basis for decision making. The impact of ICT in form of e-tourism is such that it plays a vital role in keeping travel and tourism sector of that particular area competitive and abreast with modern innovative technologies.

Tourism is acknowledged to be very information intensive. Hence it is of utmost importance to practice e-tourism practices which eventually help travelers and guests choose their required services & products based on the available information and feedback online.

Since, ICTs have been applied in tourism since as early adoption of Computer Reservation System (CRS) in airlines in 1950s and in the transformation to Global Distribution Systems (GDSs) in the 1980s, Destination Management Organizations (DMO) and Hotel property management systems (PMSs) and hotel CRS systems appeared shortly afterwards, bringing switch companies into the market as well in order to improve interconnectivity and interoperability. However, it is the development of the Internet that brought the revolutionary changes to the structure of the industry (Xiaoqiu et al., 2003; Gupta, 2012).

The internet revolutionizes flexibility in both consumer choice and service delivery processes. Customers have become much more demanding and perceptive for high quality products and value for their money. This also includes value for time, online information and ease of gathering their required information. This demands travel agents, tour operators, tourist handling offices, airlines, hotels and car rental companies etc to be developed suiting the need and demand of travelers. This also helps travel employees and managers to handle guests and travelers queries and service them more efficiently giving them ultimate quality service and world class experience. Deep root analysis of problems and challenges is necessary for the managers to finding out the causes and hurdles marring the travelers & guest experience so that an organization stays in demand and profitable. So, there is a quick need for finding a way to assess and increase tourist satisfaction while they are searching and purchasing on line.

The tourism industry in India has a high potentiality to grow and equipped with the number of tourist destinations to attract domestic and international tourists.

So, it is obvious that e-tourism is playing an important role in the tourism industry today. Several tourism companies have taken to the digital platform to display information, facilitate bookings and allow customers to reserve their preferences online. Lots of people use tourist websites as information channel or for purchasing tourism products instead of traditional travel agencies. Owing to websites being the sole channels that connect tourism companies with tourists, it is essential to design and project them in a sense that pleases customers (Masoomah, 2006). As a result it is necessary to investigate which factors are important for tourist satisfaction while they are implementing the first step of their trip online.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

It is widely recognized that information & communication technologies are rapidly expanding and have affected the way businesses are performed and the way organizations compete (Porter, 2001) especially in business like tourism which is closely been connected to the progress of information & communication technologies (ICTs) almost three decades in the form of Computer Reservation Systems (CRSs), Global Distribution Systems (GDSs) and the Internet have transformed operational and strategic practices dramatically in tourism (Buhalis and Law, 2008). Therefore, it is of paramount importance to offer tourism product search and booking online.

Since, several tourism practitioners increased their efforts to develop the online booking of tourism products and services such as airline or train service, hotel rooms, vacation packages, car rentals and so on. The implementation of e-tourism created expectations among tourists in terms of the quick response to enquiries, more detailed and tailored information on tourism destinations, possibility of booking travel, accommodation and restaurants online, able to check out competition easily at the click of a button, importance of destination management and marketing of tourism products and services, tourism marketing (Scottish Parliament ,2002). These expectations are essential for measuring tourist satisfaction. Satisfaction with these expectations are seen as the basis to which the customer relates for their requirements. In time, expectations rise, so, in order to maintain the level of satisfaction continuous improvement is needed (Flavian et al., 2006). When customers get what they had anticipated, a great amount of satisfaction is achieved which plays a major role in impacting their outlook while shopping online, decision making, and purchasing (Wu & Ho 1999). However, if perceived performance falls below initial expectation, then the tourist may be dissatisfied (Masoomah, 2006). For the travel sector, it is inevitable choice to provide online booking for improving service efficiency, enhancing service quality and gaining competitive advantages (Pen & Chen, 2013) and more importantly enhancing e-satisfaction.

The examination of consumer satisfaction in an online context is not only a critical performance outcome, but also a primary predictor of customer loyalty (Masoomah, 2006) because satisfied tourists are more likely to recommend the tourist destination to others, which is the cheapest and most effective form of marketing and promotion by positive word of mouth and development of long-term loyalty to the

destination. Moreover, an increment in the tourist numbers and overall earning as economic objectives will increase when the tourists feel satisfied. Consequently, destination managers should establish a higher tourist satisfaction level to create positive post-purchase tourist behavior (Yoon & Uysal, 2005) by decreasing the existing gap between expectations made by customers and noticeable experiences for around the globe.

ICT is expected to improve the quality of services and enhancing the level of clients' satisfaction as well. It is stated that while e-commerce is mainly related to the utilization of a new technological asset, it is very crucial to be receptive towards online environment which would create an upbeat relationship with satisfaction. Bai et al. (2008) believe that in online environments, there should be a significant effort to fulfill customers' satisfaction because it increases their intentions for actual purchase of tourism products online. So, a good understanding of factors that affect online customer satisfaction is very important to the electronic marketing.

Cyr (2008) has done a research on e-satisfaction in the hotel industry. He examined a total of three segments of website design which included virtual design, navigation and information while assessing relationships between faith and fulfilment with allegiance within the setting of multiple cultures.

On the other hand Chang & Hsu (2013) investigated online customer perceived value in relation to the online purchase of tourism products in Thailand. The study revealed that online purchasing has become more prevalent recently due to relatively lower prices and convenience for customers which in turn focus on promoting online purchase in tourism. Similarly, Yang et al. (2003) identify a total of 14 dimensions and 42 sub-dimensions of internal service quality although as they report, only five are the principal drivers of customer satisfaction. They are responsiveness, credibility, ease of use, reliability and convenience.

There are some very significant components for online consumers satisfaction which are confidentiality, usability, location plan and privacy, ease, usability, trust and trustworthiness delivery, and merchandising, product quality, product value and product customization. These factors proved to be the most important indicator in determining buyer satisfaction online. These are important as they affect buyers' online behavior.

Szymansky & Hise, (2000) in a study on online satisfaction reveals several antecedents of satisfaction such as convenience, site design, product information,

financial security etc. Though, economic security is not the key predictor of e-satisfaction amidst e-buyers.

Phuong (2010) conducted a study in order to determine tourists' satisfaction on E-tourism in Vietnam. The study showed that the greatest influences on e-satisfaction are site design and convenience. It was also found that perception of superior product information and product offering do not have a impressive effect on online satisfaction level. In fact these two are tied together as the first most important determinants of e-satisfaction.

Alagha (2013) in a study analyzed that convenience factor has the greatest influence on user satisfaction of online services. After that specialization, accessibility and web-site design strongly effect on user satisfaction. Hence convenience and specialization can be introduced as the two most important factors of e-tourism. Website design should be improved in order to be faster and more user-friendly. Increasing time efficiency, possibility of purchase from anywhere, at any time and cost efficiency are some of the factors which can increase users' convenience. Lack of special offers and lack of complete packages from websites, comparing with travel agencies are some of the main reasons that people still have tendency to produce their packages by agencies.

Cho & Park (2001) in study identified that duration of delivery, accuracy of delivery duration, delivery costs, variety of accepted credit cards, variety of payment methods, quality of product information, site design, ease of use and suitable information provided on delivery are characteristics used to assess satisfaction. Furthermore, Schaupp & Belanger (2005) declared that since the transactions occur electronically and the customer can only get the product subsequent to placing the order, providing a tracking number and minimizing the delivery time is important. In terms of convenience, ease of shopping has proven to be more important in relation to the ability to compare prices and get information.

Coker (2013) conducted a study by focusing on website navigation, website performance, trustworthiness of website in order to determine antecedents to website satisfaction, loyalty and word of mouth. The author further identified several variables for measuring website satisfaction and loyalty such as ease of use, ease of search, information quality & relevance and visual appeal etc.

Dargah & Golrokhshari (2012) in their study aimed on E-tourism and customer satisfaction stated that ICT are rapidly expanding and have affected the business

and the way organizations complete. They further explored that time efficiency, possibility of purchasing anywhere & anytime, direct access to information and customer service are the factors which build convenience in e-tourism comparing with traditional travel agencies.

In conclusion there are many factors that can be considered as basis to measure satisfaction of tourists in e-tourism. While ICT have its great significance in tourism business but despite the importance of E-tourism there has been less research on its different aspects. In this research the gap in previous research will be attempted to be filled by finding the E-satisfaction in tourism industry.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The present study is focused on empirically identifying the satisfaction level of tourists in e-tourism environment.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present study is going to investigate satisfaction of tourists while they are purchasing online. The study used primary data sources. An extensive review of literature were reviewed in order to find out the suitable factors for the study and then interviews are conducted with both, people who travel a lot and also experts. These experts are professional in tourism and customer online buying behavior. Next step for answering research question is to prepare a self-structured questionnaire to collect primary data from respondents through. The respondents were those who electronically purchased the tourism services such as airline tickets, train tickets, hotels, car rentals, package tours etc at least once. The data were collected from 50 respondents through online questionnaire in order to receive quick feedback. The questionnaire starts with socio-demographic information. After that there were asked about responding to their level of satisfaction towards electronic tourism purchasing by adopting five point Likert scale ranging from highly satisfied (5) to highly dissatisfied (1). After collection of data it was tabulated and analyzed with the help of suitable statistical tools such as frequency distribution, percentage, mean and rank method and so on. The result of the study was presented through diagrams and figures in order to make it more attractive.

### **RESULT OF THE STUDY**

#### **Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

The respondents were inquired about their socio-demographic background. Out of total respondents 32 respondents were male as compared to 18 female. This indicates that male respondents were more enthusiastic to participate in survey. In respect of age almost forty percent (19) respondents were between

21-30 years followed by 31-40 years respondents (14), 41-60 years (11) and above 60 years (06). This depicted that youngsters were more interested in online purchasing of services or products. Out of total respondents 17 were postgraduate, 13 were graduate, and 12 were more than postgraduate whereas remaining 08 were studied up to senior secondary level. This brings it to notice that higher the qualification of the respondents more will be the chances of online purchasing. It means there is positive association between education level of respondents and their online purchasing behavior. On asking about occupation from the respondents belongs to students and serviceperson shared the almost same frequencies (16 & 15 respectively), followed by 10 businessperson and 09 belongs to other occupation such as shopkeepers, farmers, retired person etc. As far as income level of the respondents concerns more than forty percent (21) were in the income group of 2-5 lakhs followed by 17 those who were in the income group of 5-10 lakh and remaining (12) respondents were in the category of above 10 lakhs. This result showed that low income group respondents were more likely to purchase online travel bookings as compared to high income group respondents. This is also due to cost effectiveness of online bookings.

On asking about frequency of using internet 34 were responded that they used internet daily. One fifth respondents (10) were used internet once during a week, 05 were used fortnightly and very rare (01) respondents used internet once in a month. Out of total respondents 42 were oftenly used to book travel services through internet or websites and remaining 08 were used rarely internet or website for the purpose. On asking about purpose of visit almost forty percent (19) respondents used to travel for attending business meetings & conferences followed by more than twenty percent respondents (11) were traveled for education & research and 14 were oftenly visited for leisure purpose as well for leisure purpose. The remaining respondents (06) were travelled to visit relatives & friends. This result supported the time efficiency of the online travel bookings. In response to type of service booked through internet the highest number of respondents (18) were booked train ticket through internet followed by 13 who were booked hotel or accommodation service, 12 were used to book complete package tour and remaining 07 were used to book air ticket through internet or websites. This result depicted user friendliness of the online travel bookings.

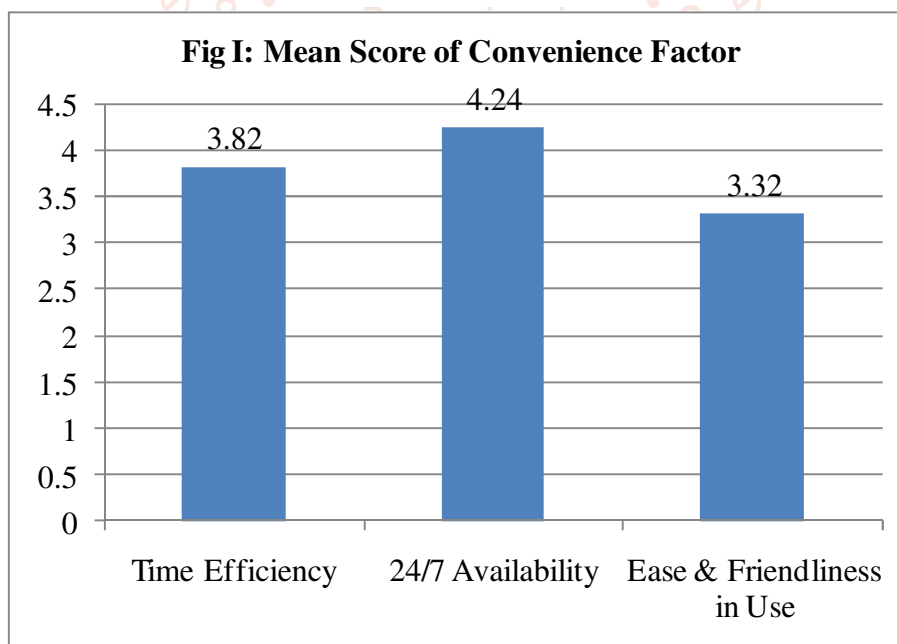
**E-Tourism Satisfaction**

The respondents were inquired about to express their satisfaction level towards five selected factors of e-tourism bookings.

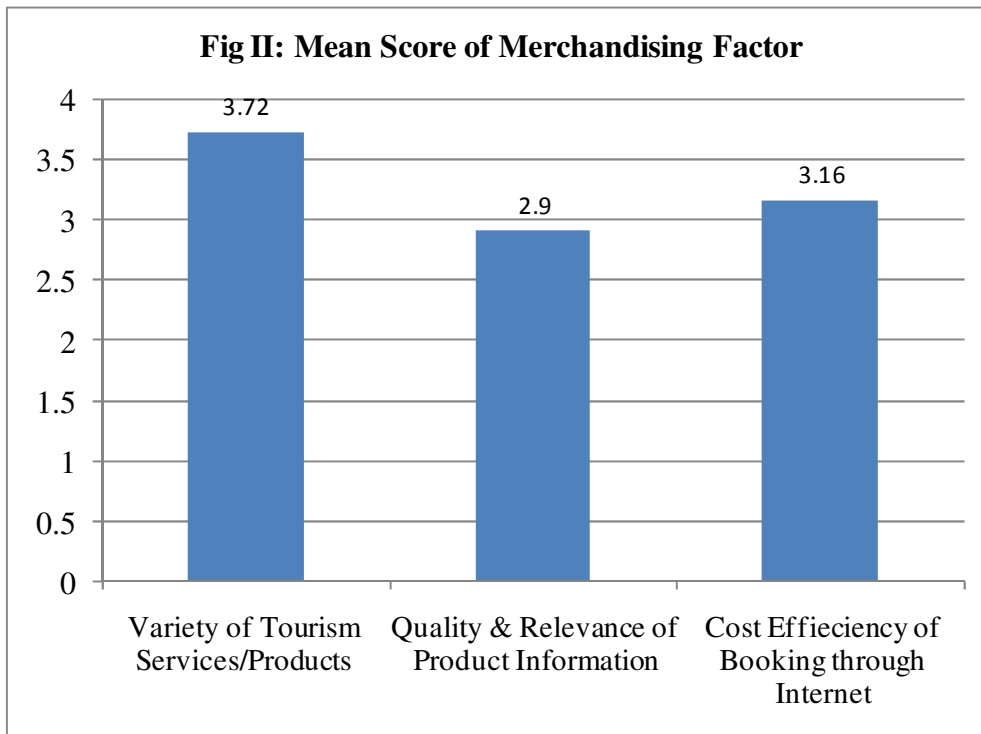
**Table I: Satisfaction towards E-Tourism**

Factors	Variables	Mean
Convenience	Time efficiency of purchasing online travel service	3.82
	24/7 availability of online travel booking options	4.24
	Ease & friendliness in use of online travel booking	3.32
Merchandising	Variety of tourism services (Airline ticket, hotels, car rental, package tour etc.) offered on internet	3.72
	Quality & relevance of information about tourism products & services available on internet	2.90
	Cost efficiency of booking through tourism website & internet	3.16
Site Design	Visual appearance/attractiveness of website/online booking portals	3.10
	Responsiveness of tourism website/internet booking portals	3.04
	Personalize package offering according to your requirement	2.86
Security	Secure payment while purchasing travel services through websites or online	2.18
	Privacy of personal information	1.96
	Protection of bank account and credit cards/visa etc. details	2.64
Serviceability	Confirmation E mail/Sms after booking	2.18
	Feedback & suggestions service availability	3.79
	Provide useful links to other related websites or portals	3.34

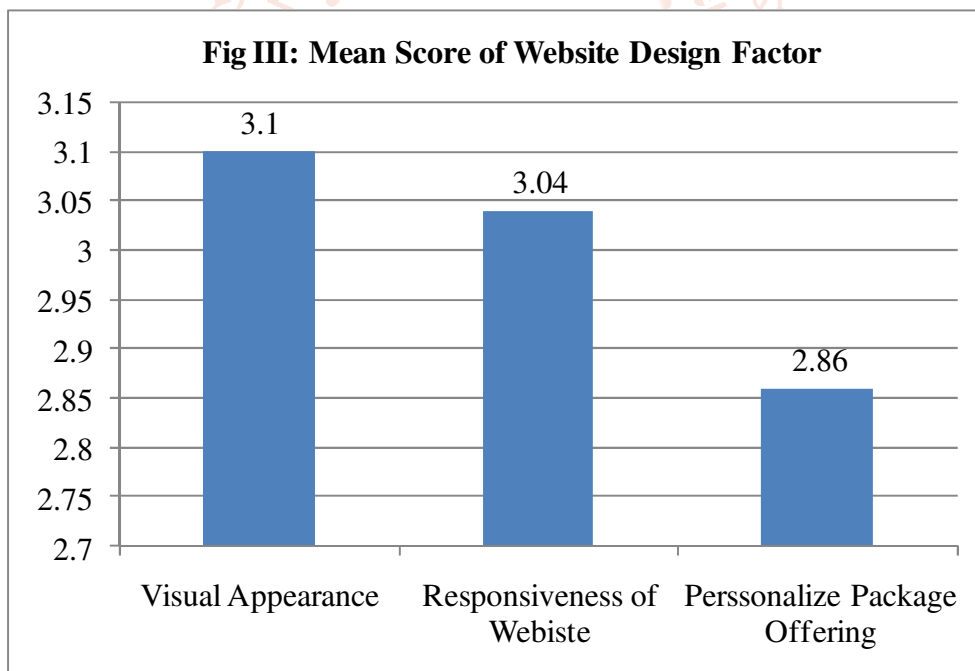
First of all in response to convenience factor the respondents were highly satisfied with 24/7 availability of online travel bookings with mean score of 4.24 followed by time efficiency of purchasing online travel service (mean=3.82) and moderately satisfied with ease & friendliness of online tourism websites by occupying mean score of 3.32.



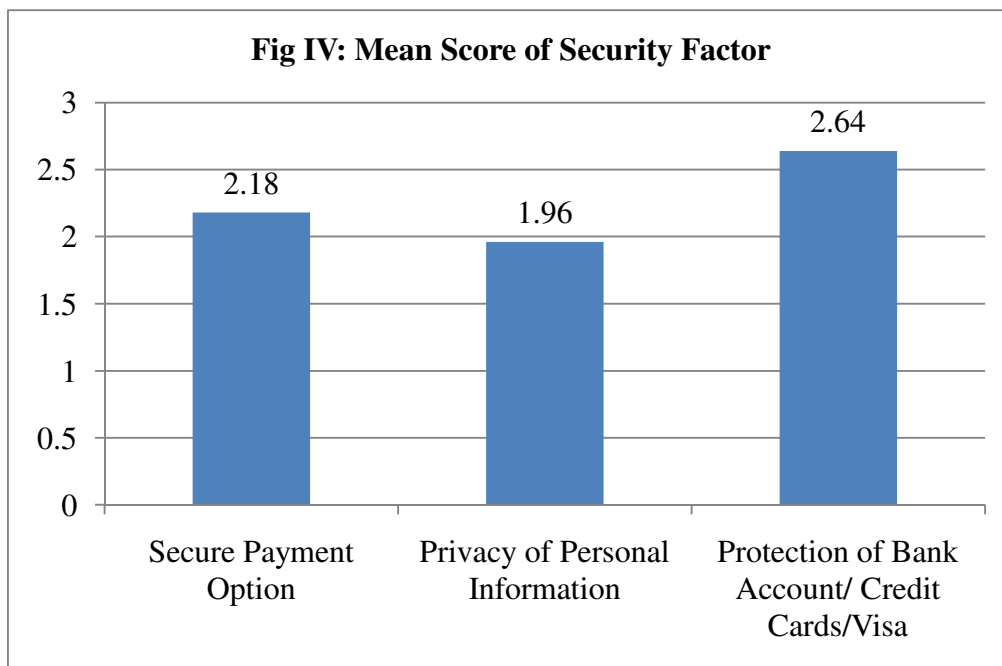
As far as merchandising factor is concerned the respondents were highly satisfied responses towards variety of tourism service available on internet for booking with mean score of 3.72. Respondents were moderately satisfied by cost efficiency of booking of tourism service through internet with mean score of 3.16 whereas the respondents were showing neutral responses with quality & relevance of tourism production information by scoring mean value of 2.90.



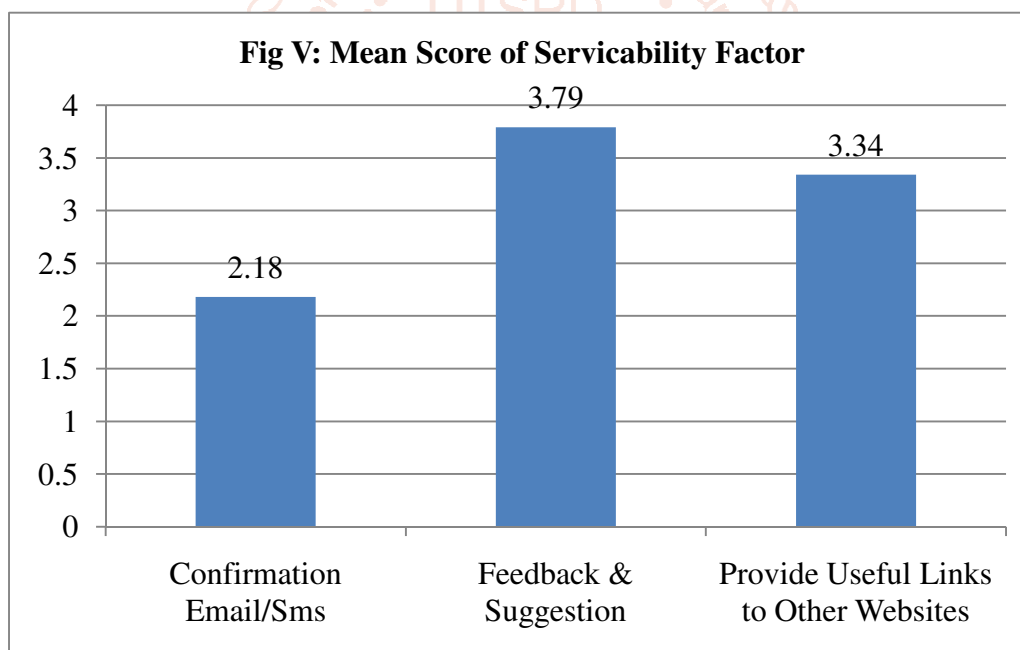
In association with Website Design satisfaction the respondents showed moderately satisfied responses towards visual appearance or attractiveness of online travel booking websites and responsiveness of online travel booking websites or portals with mean score of 3.10 and 3.04 respectively. The respondents were express neutral response with personalized package services offered through internet or websites with mean score of 2.86.



On security & safety factor the respondents were find it neutrally satisfied towards protection of bank accounts, credit cards and visa details with mean value of 2.64. The respondents were totally dissatisfied with secure payment options while online purchasing of travel services with mean value of 2.18 and extremely dissatisfied with privacy of personal information while online purchasing with mean score of 1.96.



On questioning about serviceability factor the respondents were highly satisfied with feedback & suggestion service available on online travel bookings or by websites by mean score of 3.79. Respondents were moderately satisfied towards providing useful links to other related websites or services with mean score of 3.34. The respondents were showing dissatisfied responses (mean=2.18) with the confirmation email or sms send after online purchasing of travel services.



**CONCLUSION**

The present study was aimed to measure the e-satisfaction based on five factors which affect satisfaction in on-line purchasing. The results of the analysis show that the factor “Convenience” has the greatest influence on user satisfaction of online services. Increasing time efficiency, possibility of purchase from anywhere, at any time and cost efficiency are some of the factors which can increase users’ convenience. Hence “convenience” can be introduced as the two most important factors of e-tourism. Discussions of merchandising factor in

tourism which is wider product offering and product information as well its cost efficiency. Although product offering and cost efficiency impacted e-satisfaction significantly however the product information, can be argued that the practical significance of these effects are not great. In response to serviceability of e-tourism it shows the satisfactory responses. Feedback and suggestions facility and by providing useful links jointly achieve the successful satisfaction rate whereas the e-tourism firms are lacking sending the emails and sms for confirming the booking or reservations to the clients. The influence of

site design on e-satisfaction is also remarkable through fast, friendly uncluttered sites. The personalization of package on websites is not significantly influence the e-satisfaction. Lack of Special offers and lack of complete packages from websites, comparing with travel agencies are some of the main reasons that people still have tendency to produce their packages by agencies. Website design should be improved in order to be faster and more user- friendly e-tourism. As far as security factor is concerned respondents were dissatisfied with it which indicated that while doing online purchasing customers were having fear for misuse of their personal information as well as worried about security of their bank accounts, visa and credit cards details etc. As the result showed, lack of security in the consumers, mind is a threat for the E-tourism firms; however it can be converted to an opportunity for E-tourism organizations to gain more online customers by ensuring better online payment as well protection of online passwords and account details and avoiding misuse of personal information of customers on internet as comparing with the traditional travel agencies.

The findings of the study can be helpful for managers of e-tourism firms and travel agencies who plan to enter the e-market. It highlighted the need for planning strategies in field of e-tourism, particularly in fields such as e-ticketing, e-reservation, online payment, multilingual and updated information websites. Moreover a complete and approachable way of delivering knowledge to customers via online sources will help to increase customer trust and keeping the existing customer satisfied and loyal as customer satisfaction has a direct impact on loyalty in e-tourism market. Finally, there is need to develop the e-tourism infrastructures in order to keep up with the competitiveness in the future.

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