

A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TOURISTS'
PREFERENCE OF MEDIA PLATFORMS AND THEIR
MOTIVATION IN ECOTOURISM PARTICIPATION: A
CASE STUDY OF SIKKIM

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Abstract

This study was a part of a research work with primary intention to explore the relation among the demographic profile of tourists, their preference of media platforms to receive the ecotourism related promotion and their primary motivation to participate in ecotourism. Further, this study attempted to dive deep into the media platforms choice of tourists to recommend most preferred medium for ecotourism promotion in the state of Sikkim. The primary data was collected during field survey through a set of questionnaire and cross-tabulation analysis was performed to analysed the data. The findings of this study suggested that, the most preferred medium for

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getting the ecotourism related promotion about a destination to travel was Facebook, while television ranked the last. Further, demographic factors showed noticeable influence in the choice of the media platform. Lastly, motivation to participate in tourism was significantly different in domestic and foreign tourists' which is another important indication that needs to be considered by those who are responsible to promote ecotourism in Sikkim as it is a major contributing factor in the selection of destination. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable information to better utilize the media as a marketing tool for the ecotourism promotion in the state of Sikkim.

1. Introduction

Ecotourism is an evolved practice in the domain of tourism which inherits the concept of inclusive development by empowering local communities in terms of greater monetary benefit, conservation of ecology and cultural integration. It propels a scenario where tourists inflow does not disturb the local customs & culture and also restricted as per the carrying capacity of the host communities. Tourist participation is also expected in a more responsible ways with primary intention to understand the culture and appreciate the nature of the destination.

The concept of ecotourism found its genesis first in the Brundtland Commission Report, 'Our Common Future' (1987) which coined the term sustainable development as "development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The subsequent deliberation in this regard reflected in a commitment which was declared through Agenda 21, an outcome of Earth Summit (Brazil,1992), which vows to maintain a synergy between development and ecology for a secure and prosperous future.

Tourism sector was considered as a potent tool in Agenda 21 which could have a substantial impact towards achieving the goal of sustainable development. It conceptualized sustainable tourism as something which will meet the needs of both tourists' and host communities in present without compromising the ability to meet their needs in future. (Kumar, 2017).

In 2017, a total of 1326 million international tourist travelled across the globe which was a healthy growth of 7.0% in comparison to previous year. (UNWTO, 2018). According to the report of World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism sector has become one of the world's largest economic sectors, helping in jobs creation and driving economy around the globe. In 2017, tourism sector accounts for 10.4% of global GDP and 313 million jobs, or 9.9% of total employment. (WTTC, 2018). The small Himalayan state of Sikkim has population of 6.11 lakh as per 2011 census. The projected population of Sikkim in 2017 was 6.43 lakh. In 2017, the number of domestic and foreign tourists' arrival in Sikkim was 1375854 and 49111 respectively, which is when combined together almost stands double of the state's own population. With such an encouraging trend it becomes important to communicate with this growing tribe of globetrotters about the responsible and sustainable way of travelling so that without compromising the interest of any stakeholders, everybody should ripe the benefit that tourism offers.

Tourism industry is thriving on the wings of media promotion. Earlier it was empowered by different form of print publications, radio spot and television programming. Now the enhanced power of social media is contributing to its growth like never before. The tourism industry statistics suggests that, social media has emerged as a major influencer in travel plans. More than 50% of travellers from the US, UK, Canada, and Australia confesses that social media content, promotions and deals influences their travel decision making. Reacting to these trends, travel brands are now spending 61% of their marketing budget on digital advertising. (Tourwriter, 2019). Considering these trends, it is important to analyze the visitor's profile and map it with their motivation to participate in ecotourism practices and their choice of media platforms.

Research Objective

The Indian state of Sikkim aims to promote ecotourism and also establish itself as a 365-day tourism destination. This study is part of a research work which is critically analysing the role of media in the promotion of ecotourism in the state of Sikkim. Media-induced tourism is one of the major focus area of tourism industry and researchers alike. There are several studies suggesting the positive impact of media-induced tourism, but the present study attempts to go further to explore the relation between tourists' profile their motivation towards responsible tourism and their choice of media platforms. Overall, this study proposes a novel approach for media planar and policy makers with a comprehensive set of results to consider. This study attempts to answer the following research questions particularly in the context of promoting ecotourism in the state of Sikkim, India:

- 1) How demographic profile affects the choice of media platforms?
- 2) How demographic profile affects the tourists' motivation to participate in ecotourism?
- 3) What are the most preferred media platforms for tourists to receive ecotourism related promotion?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this theory has been drawn from “Uses and gratifications theory” which focuses on the uses and functions of the media for individuals and society. This theory asserts that individuals actively seek out the media to gratify their needs with specific purposes. Also, when a medium offers gratification for a specific motive it will be used more for greater satisfaction.

Literature Review

A study was conducted to understand the ‘Influencing factorson tourists decision making process on choosing a destination’ in Azerbaijan. This study has used quantitative method and descriptive approach to analyze different variables and to establish a correlation among them. A set of questionnaires was used to collect the primary data which was analyzed through SPSS. The research data showed that demographic characteristics of respondents contributed a major role in articulating and influencing consumer behaviour. The researcher observed that there are four key

factors that affects consumer behaviour: personal factors, cultural factors, social factors and psychological factors. Subsequently suggestions were made to promote tourism in Azerbaijan.(Seyidov & Adomaitienė, 2016).

A group of researchers from three different continents undertook a study to explore the ‘Socio-demographic characteristics affecting sport tourism choices. A large sample of 9315 Slovenian sports tourists were analyzed in 2008. A research model based on four socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, level of education and income) was adopted. The research model was tested in two parts. The first part of research model which focussed on the ‘socio-demographic characteristics effects’ was tested with a linear regression. The second part of the model which focussed on the ‘selection of accommodation type and travel expenditure’ was tested with t-test. The result of the study suggests that the selected socio-demographic characteristics significantly affected a tourist’s choice of destination selection, accommodation selection and level of expenditure in relation to sports related travel. This study has contributed in understanding the segmentation and grouping of tourists according to travel motivation and behaviour patterns to create an effective marketing plan. (Valek, Shaw, & Bednarik, 2014)

A study was conducted to understand the ‘Influence of user-generated-content (UGC) on tourists’ choices. Snowball sampling method was used to select a sample of 607 Italian tourists, who were divided under three cluster: ‘digitally passive tourists’, ‘focussed tourists’ and ‘social tourist’. The primary data was collected through online questionnaire. The result of this study suggested that the final choices of respondents varies significantly and depends on the socio-demographic characteristics of travellers, their frequency of travel, usages of different types of travel applications and motivations for using the UGC on the Internet. For instance, young women who travel less frequently and use the Internet intensively prefers tourism-related social networks and may accurately described as ‘social tourist’. However, middle-aged women primarily considered as ‘focussed tourists’, travel frequently and prefers ‘online travel agencies’ and tourism-related blogs. On the other hand, middle-aged men who travel less frequently and use the internet intensively, prefers chat forum on the company’s website and ‘online travel agencies’ largely falls under ‘digitally passive tourist’. (Chiappa, Alarcón-del-Amo, & Lorenzo-Romero, 2015).

A study on 'Tourist information search behaviour and the role of online marketing in choice of destination' was conducted using qualitative interviews of 57 international tourists visiting Savonlinna, Finland. The results showed that banners and social media were not an important factor in targeting new customers rather content marketing, search engine optimisation and product quality were key factors for tourists. (Pesonen & Pasanen, 2017).

A study was conducted to examine that 'How much the different types of media affect a tourist's decision when choosing a destination to travel and also to investigate their impact on tourists' behavioral intentions. Three behavioral intentions; 'word-of-mouth', 'revisit intention', and 'willingness to pay more' was considered. For this study media was divided into two groups: 1. Print Media (book, magazine, newspaper, and brochure) and 2. Electronic (New) Media. Print media includes. Electronic media (television, film, Internet, social media, and mobile). The results of study showed the media preference of younger generation in following order: Internet, film, mobile, television, magazine, book, newspaper, and brochure, respectively. The result further showed that the younger respondents were more exposed to the new media while people of age group 36 years and older were distinctively influenced by newspaper and brochure. (Park, 2015)

2. Research Method

For this research work, primarily questionnaire-based survey approach has been adopted to collect the primary data. The survey was conducted in Gangtok, Sikkim. The sample size of 200 respondents were selected using purposive random sampling. Out of 200 respondents 165 were domestic tourists and 35 respondents were foreign residents. The cross-tabulation analysis was performed to analysed the data.

Geographical Setting

Sikkim is the second smallest state in India and covers 7096 sq. km area. To the north and northeast of Sikkim is Tibet, Bhutan is situated in the East, Nepal in the West and West Bengal in the South. According to census (2011), Sikkim is India's least populous state with 6.10 lakh population. Sikkim is one of the most literate states in India with a literacy rate of 82.2%. (Wikipedia, 2019)

3. Results and Analysis

The data collected were analyzed as per the objective of the study and using the cross-tabulation feature of SPSS. The respondents were divided into four segments according to their age. The travel frequency in general and ecotourism frequency in particular were analyzed as shown in Table 1. It is evident that in the age group of 41-60 almost 47% are willing to travel four times or more and 60.5% of them have indicated ecotourism as their preference, also those interested to travel three times in a year are 100% willing to participate in ecotourism.

Table 1: Tourists Travel Preference

| Attributes | | Age | | | | Total |
|---|---------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------|
| | | Under 20 | 21-40 Years | 41-60 Years | 61 and above | |
| How many times a year you go on holidays? | Once a Year | 5.6% | 38.9% | 55.6% | | 100.0% |
| | Twice a Year | 22.2% | 48.6% | 29.2% | | 100.0% |
| | Thrice a Year | 37.5% | 45.8% | 16.7% | | 100.0% |
| | Four times a year or more | 12.5% | 31.3% | 46.9% | 9.4% | 100.0% |
| How many times a year would you say that you participate in ecotourism, if at all | Once a year | 19.1% | 42.0% | 36.6% | 2.3% | 100.0% |
| | Twice a year | 14.8% | 66.7% | 18.5% | | 100.0% |
| | Thrice a year | | | 100.0% | | 100.0% |
| | Four times a year or more | 10.5% | 28.9% | 60.5% | | 100.0% |

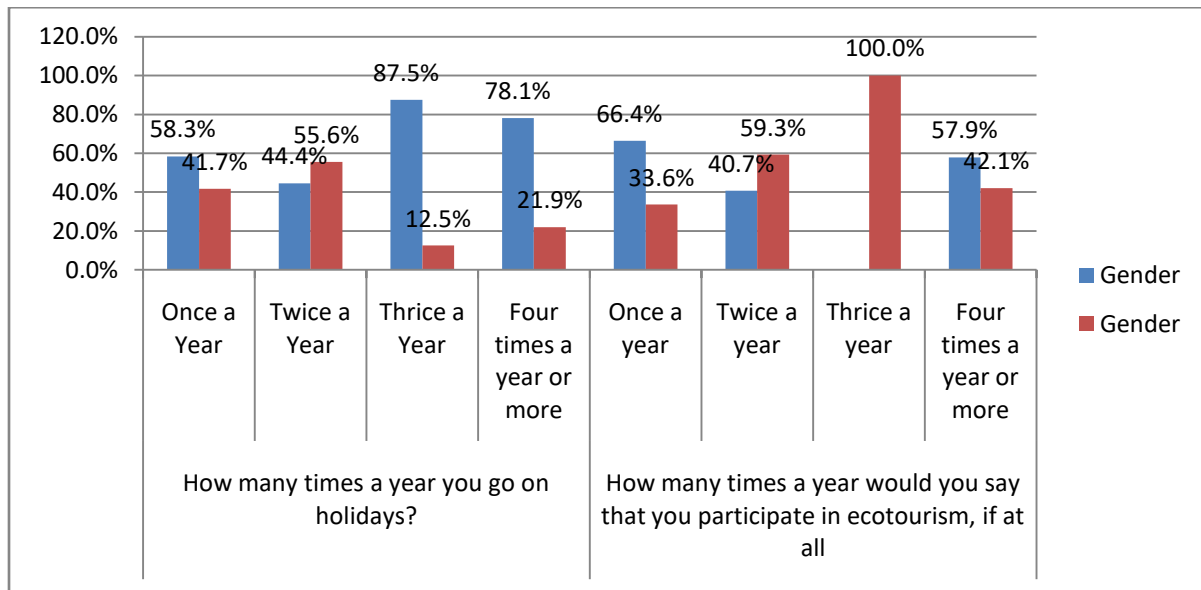
Data were also collected to understand the motivation of participating in ecotourism with different parameters like; 'environment conservation', 'wildlife protection', 'nature tourism', 'culture-community interaction' and 'participation in festivals/carnivals'. The result indicates that in the age group of 21-40 there are more willingness and motivation to participate in ecotourism. However, in the given motivations there were less awareness about wildlife protection and festival/carnival among respondents.

Table 2: Tourists' Motivation Factor in Ecotourism Participation

| Attributes | | Age | | | | Total |
|--|-----|----------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------|
| | | Under 20 | 21-40 Years | 41-60 Years | 61 and above | |
| Is environment conservation would encourage you to engage more in ecotourism? | Yes | 11.0% | 52.1% | 37.0% | | 100.0% |
| | No | 19.7% | 36.2% | 41.7% | 2.4% | 100.0% |
| Is wildlife protection would encourage you to engage more in ecotourism? | Yes | 27.4% | 29.0% | 38.7% | 4.8% | 100.0% |
| | No | 11.6% | 47.8% | 40.6% | | 100.0% |
| Is nature tourism would encourage you to engage more in ecotourism? | Yes | 14.4% | 44.2% | 38.5% | 2.9% | 100.0% |
| | No | 18.8% | 39.6% | 41.7% | | 100.0% |
| Is culture/community interaction would encourage you to engage more in ecotourism? | Yes | 7.8% | 58.8% | 27.5% | 5.9% | 100.0% |
| | No | 19.5% | 36.2% | 44.3% | | 100.0% |
| Is festival/carnival would encourage you to engage more in ecotourism? | Yes | 23.1% | 17.9% | 59.0% | | 100.0% |
| | No | 14.9% | 47.8% | 35.4% | 1.9% | 100.0% |

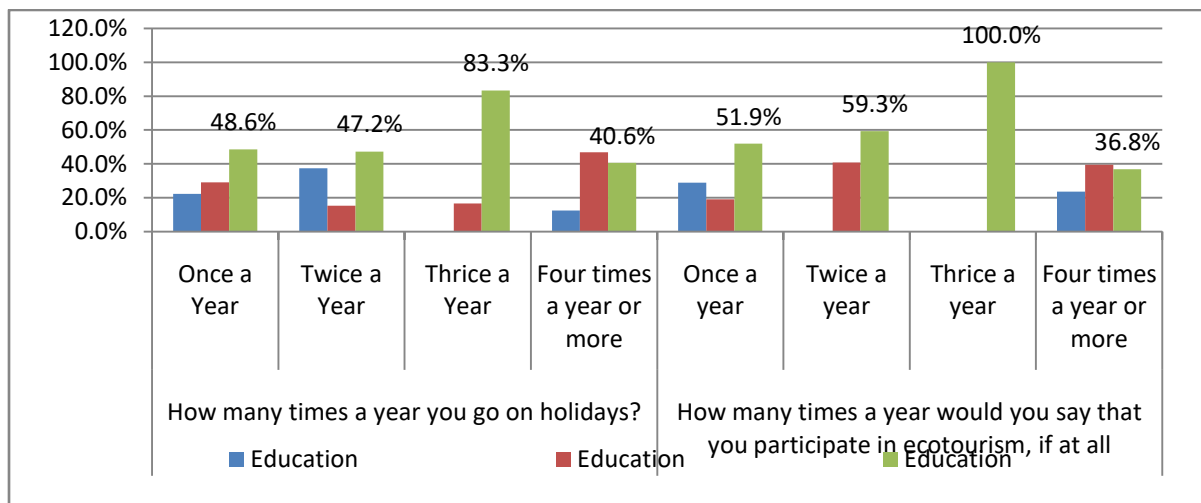
The data was also analyzed from gender perspective to understand to travel frequency and preference towards ecotourism. 78.1% male respondents were willing to travel four times or more in a year, and 57.9% of them were willing to participate in ecotourism. 100% female respondents have shown their inclination towards ecotourism participation three times a year.

Figure 1: Gender Wise Travel Preference



The respondents 'education level' and their willingness to travel and ecotourism participation were also analyzed. The result suggests that those who had qualification level till 'Graduation & Above' are willing to travel more (83%) and also more inclined towards ecotourism participation (100%).

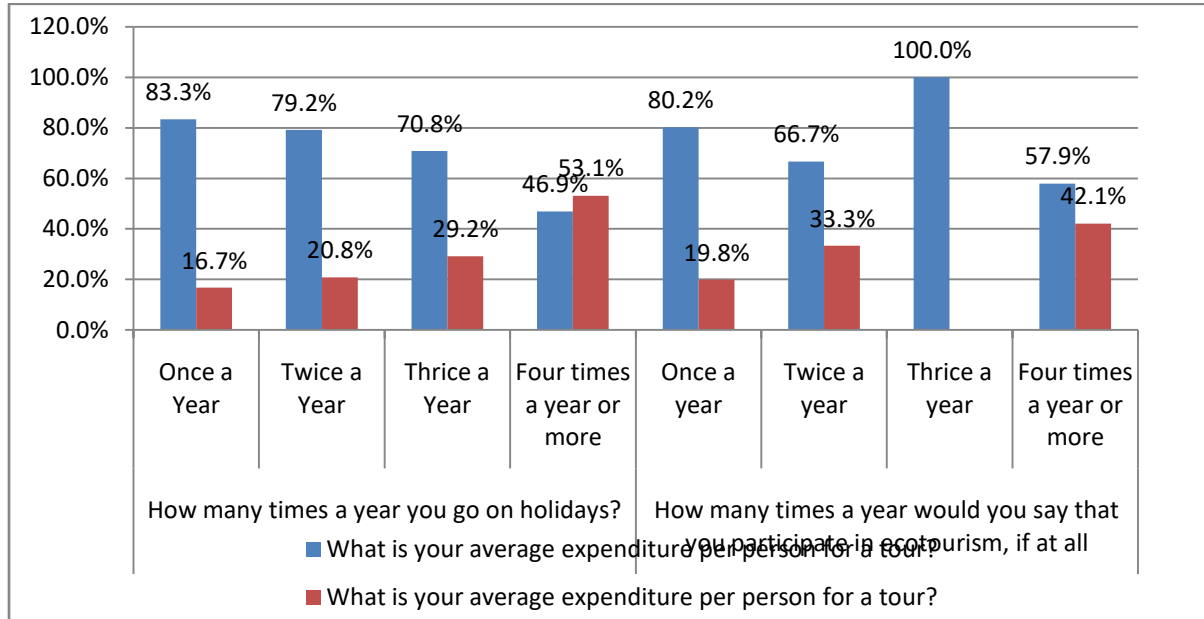
Figure 2: Travel Preference and Level of Education



To understand the average expenditure per person for a tour along with their travel frequency and willingness to participate in ecotourism data was further prodded. The result showed a clear pattern that those who are spending less than 300\$ per trip are travelling less frequently than those who are willing to spend more. 53.1% of tourists who are willing to spend up to 800\$ per person on a trip are also intended to travel four times or more in a year. This is a message for

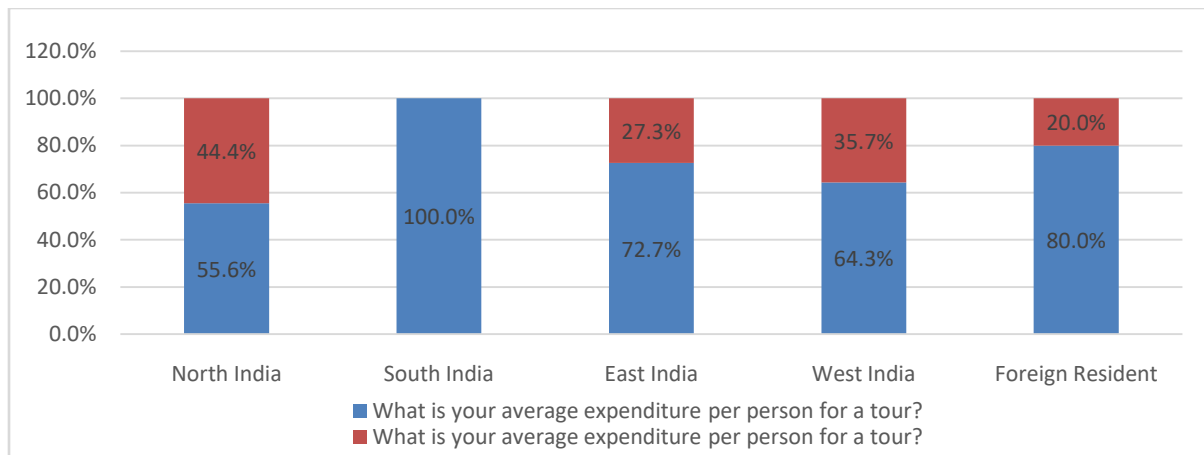
marketers that frequent travellers are spending more and willing to experiment more as our data suggested that 42.1% of them are intended towards ecotourism.

Figure 3: Tourists' Expenditure and Travel Preference



In order to understand the expenditure pattern of domestic and foreign tourists data were analyzed. It is evident that majority of foreign tourists (80%) visiting Sikkim are on tight budget and intends to spend less than 300\$ per person. Among Indian tourists, South Indian tourists are most budget conscious while tourists from North India followed by West India are willing to spend higher amount. This evidence is crucial to segment and target these tourists with better marketing initiatives.

Figure 4: Tourists' Expenditure Pattern



Data was further analyzed to understand the media preference of tourists for receiving the ecotourism related promotion of Sikkim.

Table 3: Media Preference of Tourists

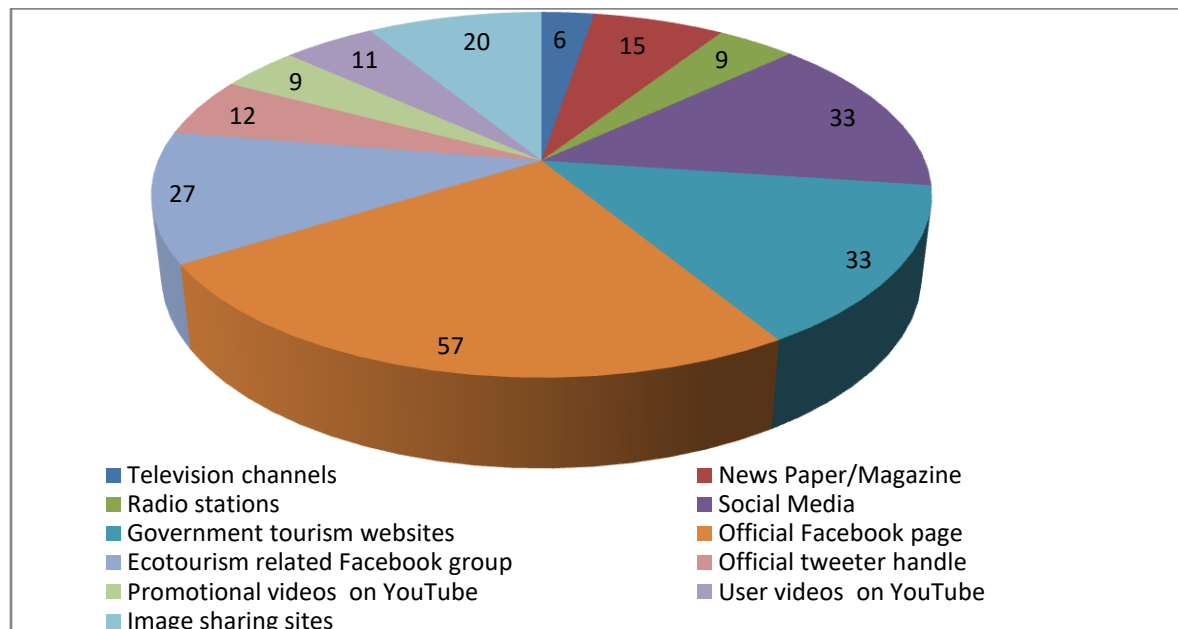
| Media Preference of the tourist to receive Ecotourism related promotional messages of Sikkim (Number & Percentage of Respondents) | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | Television channels | News Paper/Magazine | Radio stations | Social Media | Government tourism websites | Official Facebook page | Facebook group | Official twitter handle | Promotional videos on YouTube | User videos on YouTube | Image sharing sites |
| Strongly Agree | 12 (6%) | 30 (15%) | 18 (9%) | 65 (32.5%) | 65 (32.5%) | 114 (57%) | 53 (26.5%) | 24 (12%) | 18 (9%) | 21 (10.5%) | 40 (20%) |
| Partially Agree | 77 (38.5%) | 128 (64%) | 23 (11.5%) | 100 (50%) | 92 (46%) | 51 (25.5%) | 99 (49.5%) | 62 (31%) | 97 (48.5%) | 116 (58%) | 48 (24%) |
| Undecided | 27 (13.5%) | 22 (11%) | 20 (10%) | 19 (9.5%) | 27 (13.5%) | 17 (8.5%) | 22 (11%) | 83 (41.5%) | 39 (19.5%) | 28 (14%) | 67 (33.5%) |
| Partially Disagree | 59 (29.5%) | 16 (8%) | 77 (38.5%) | 11 (5.5%) | 5 (2.5%) | 13 (6.5%) | 9 (4.5%) | 10 (5%) | 21 (10.5%) | 24 (12%) | 27 (13.5%) |
| Strongly Disagree | 25 (12.5%) | 4 (2%) | 62 (31%) | 5 (2.5%) | 11 (5.5%) | 5 (2.5%) | 17 (8.5%) | 21 (10.5%) | 25 (12.5%) | 11 (5.5%) | 18 (9%) |

The result showed that the maximum number of respondents (57%) were 'strongly agree' about Facebook as their preferred media vehicle to receive ecotourism related promotion of Sikkim. This followed by social media in general (33%) and government tourism website (33%). The Facebook groups dedicated to ecotourism followed closely with 27% of respondents indicated as their preferred medium. Newspaper and magazines were appeared to be a more preferred choice than television channel which surprisingly came at last and also indicates a paradigm shift in user's preference that for audio-visual content internet powered medium are gradually replacing television, as far as receiving ecotourism related promotion concerns. Radio and YouTube promotional videos were preferred by equal number of respondents (18%) and scored well above Television (12%). Respondents preferred Twitter (24%) over Radio and Television. Another important indication was preference of image sharing sites like Instagram, Pinterest and Flickr to name a few, were preferred by 20% of the respondents which is equal to the combined total of

YouTube videos whether posted as a promotional content or simply user-generated content. The preference of image over video could be due to the poor quality of video/content or, due to more downloading/buffering time because of slow internet connection.

The data clearly indicate a paradigm shift in the user's media consumption preference from traditional media to social media as far as ecotourism promotion is concerned. The media planner needs to pay close attention to these facts while devising a strategy.

Figure 5: Media Preference of Tourists (Strongly Agree)



4. Conclusion

The result of the study provides valuable input to the policy makers, media planners, marketers and ecotourism practitioners to understand the impact of demography in tourism preference, media choice and motivation to participate in ecotourism related promotion. As per the findings of the study the age group of 21-40 are though more willing to participate in ecotourism but are less awareness about wildlife protection and ongoing festival/carnival in the state of Sikkim. Therefore, significant efforts are needed in this direction to get the desired result of promoting ecotourism in the state. The findings also suggested that those who have qualification Graduation and above are more motivated towards ecotourism, therefore a prolonged strategy can be devised by different stakeholders to make inroads in addressing this segment of tourists. More likely they will convert into the brand ambassador of ecotourism practices in due course of time. Also, it is

important to create budget facility for frequent travellers as findings suggested considering their expenditure pattern. As far as media preference is considered there are clear paradigm shift from traditional media to new media, while Facebook emerges as a most preferred choice by respondents to receive ecotourism related promotion. Media planers are needed to pay special attention to these findings while creating their marketing mix.

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