

Motives for information gathering, learning and online technology engagements of small and medium tourism enterprises in kerala

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Abstract

Considerable differences are acknowledged with regard to the nature of information, use of information and source of information between commercially oriented and non-commercially oriented SMTEs. While commercially, groups are more active in to the formal tourism forums and engage more with online source of information, non-commercially group are satisfied with the current learning environment and they are keener in making satisfied customers. However, both group seeks less information related to legal rather they concentrate more on fetching information related to marketing, sales, finance, and management. The present study is an attempt to gain insights upon the motives that drive small and medium tourism enterprises, understand the desired information and learning process needed to develop business, and to know the online Technology engagements in the development of business.

Keywords: Information Gathering; Learning Process; Online Technology Engagements.

1. Introduction

Kerala tourism enterprises consists mostly of small and medium enterprises. They contribute largely to the overall growth of the industry. Recent studies state that while comparing with larger enterprises, SMEs struggle to gain relevant information, lack sufficient resources including finance, and lack tactics to adapt technological changes [1], [2], [3]. Apparently, SMEs are accessed to immensely readily available information with imprecise advice or misplaced prospect. These factors may impede SMEs from building upon their motives, and learning capabilities. This paper primarily aims to gain insights about how the motives of SMTEs owners guide their approaches in acquiring information and knowledge that can support their decision-making and learning capabilities. Further it deals with deep understanding about the online technology based information sources and information gaining pattern of tourism enterprises by looking into their tactics of information gaining, learning, engagements and use of information channels. This research also given prominence on the role of technology and networks in framing information gaining behaviours, organisational learning, information management and engagement policies. Information gaining behaviour is observed as both active and passive human activity involving information seeking from various sources and channels and usage of gained information for further engagement activities [4]. Formation and establishment of information is the base for information management and under this learning is third dimension that concerned with analysis of information through uninterrupted discussion between implicit and explicit information. To understand more about the motives, behind information gathering and learning process and dimensions of online technology engagements, following objectives have been proposed.

- To identify the motives of small and medium tourism enterprises and its effect on the business practises and online technology engagements.
- To understand various technological sources of information to be used by SMTEs.
- To assess the learning behaviour of SMTEs
- To understand the problems associated with the learning process of SMTEs, and
- To suggest alternatives for utilising technology for propagating information by SMTEs.

The study starts with deep understanding of available literature pertaining to development of business motives that lead to information gathering, process of learning and online technological engagements of SMTEs. Further, through the application of appropriate research design data relating to the stated objectives has been collected, statistically analysed and interpreted to provide better insights for further improvements.

2. Literature review

Depending information technology for accurate and timely information access has been increased on a positive rate. In tourism sector, this has been used by owners/managers [5]. The impact of information technology in tourism enterprises to run the day to day operations is very crucial [6]. Using information technology, it helps managers/owners to provide better service to customers and advocate cost controls [7]. Information technology is reshaping the way in which the information is gathered and disseminated [8]. To enhance competitiveness in business, Information technology can play a major role [9]. Even if information technology has a major role in tourism industry, there are only few articles published with regards to usage of information technology to enhance information

requirements for managers [10]. It is necessary for tourism managers especially marketing managers to get updated about the current trends and enhancements in Information technology and its relationship with information requirements [11]. For information search, two “mega trends” that can significantly impact the tourism system are social media and search engine [12]. Considering the important role of social media in both travelers’ decision making as well as in tourism operations and management, a plethora of research on the application of social media in tourism and hospitality has been catalogued in refereed journals [13].

3. Research methods

The study reviewed available literature in connection with SMTEs growth and use of technology. Based on the variable identified interview and online survey has been administered and undertaken data analysis subsequently. Assistance and guidance were taken from domain expert groups throughout the study and administered time to time interventions based on the progressive findings of the study. The key concerns evident in the literature have been discussed during the interview and that helped in ensuring the validity of the items included in the questionnaire used for the online survey. Various types of questions included in the questionnaire to get conciseness about the key issues and to provide clarity to the respondents. Furthermore, the data derived from the questionnaire piloted and from the interview reviewed thoroughly and presented in this study. The online questionnaire has been distributed among various small and medium tourism enterprises across south Kerala by taking into consideration of all enterprises in the tourism industry irrespective of their nature of work. The questionnaire link has been attached to an email and sent to the available email ids of SMTEs in south Kerala. Irrespective of few limitations such as uninterrupted access to the questionnaire link attached to the email and reach of these links in the hands of prospective respondents, this was an effective method for distributing the questionnaire through online. By administering this method the researcher was able to collect 155 productive and properly filled questionnaire. These data were tabulated and analysed with SPSS software by using quantitative statistical tools such as multiple analyses of variance (MANOVAs), analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and t-tests. All the quantitative questions were statically tested and depicted in this study. The qualitative data generated out of open-ended questions were given deeper understanding about the key issues in the small and medium tourism enterprises related to generation of movies, learning process and online technology engagements in terms of information generation. All insights were also a point to be noted for further study.

4. Analysis and significant outcomes

One of the important differences noted among the respondents are in relation to the size of the business. Though they are similar in nature of work they vary due to their investment and establishment. Most of the respondents in the young age [55%] were choose tourism as their career as it is a growing industry in Kerala. Some of the respondents following their family business. Whereas, some of them are naturally became the part of tourism industry because of the locational advantage and leaving pattern. Such people are not running their business only for tourism but their lifestyle is supportive to the benefit of tourism industry. Based on the data received from the respondents, information related to sales and marketing is rated as top among type of information obtained through technology. Around 54.6 % of respondent seek marketing or sales related information through technology. It was also noted that the time spend to seek information is mostly between one and four hours per week [51.2%]. 30.8% of the total respondents spent four to eight hours or more than eight hours. As expected as explained in the literature majority of the respondents [64.3%] depending internet as their source of information for carrying out their day to day activities. Significantly 38.7% of them are depended on internet even for

their long term decisions. However, small and medium tourism enterprises also frequently depended on consultants, government officials, accounting experts, etc. for taking long-term decisions [31%]. Eventually, irrespective of the existing inconsistency and confusions regarding long and short term information merits, respondents are satisfied with the information gathered. On a scale of one to seven [one – dissatisfied and seven- highly satisfied] the average score were denoted between 4.34 and 4.64. Predictably, a strong relationship between the assessment and learning of information with the channel of information. However, the study reveals that the respondents does not follow a particular pattern for selecting a channel of information. Channel of information include predominant technology based information sources such as Websites, Google, Wikipedia, blogs, podcasts, webinars and all other internet oriented source of information. Satisfaction on the source which they use information was very evident in the data collected through questionnaire. On the other hand, ignorance or slow adoption of many of the technology in relation to the source of information was also obvious. This indication leading to a remarkable concern regarding technological engagements of small and medium tourism enterprises. Contrariwise, high mean score shown for Google and websites usage indicate that SMTEs are using technology to a certain extent but not ready to engage with all technology available to their concerned business.

Surprisingly, the results shown a low score for usage of social networks, blogs, webinars and podcasts. This low score affected the overall score for the online technology engagements. From the interview followed by a discussion on key issues revealed that owners use less social networks due to the structure and nature of business and they find these information are irrelevant for building motives or learning processes. Another reason was with regard to the time. Since they are not much acquainted with the technology they find difficulty in sourcing accurate and relevant information within a stipulated time frame. Rather spending time for searching and learning apt technology they could achieve the need manually. There were also a comment upon the abundance of information on internet and felt frustration while searching for a specific information. SMTEs in south Kerala face issues not only related to online technology engagements but also from various other reasons, which is out of the scope of present studies and providing insights for researchers indulge in related studies.

Further, respondents are generally less satisfied with electronic channels and use of personal contacts and shown a low mean score. However, results of t-tests stated that one among the three channels namely printed materials shown a significant differences while considering personal contacts [$F=2.567$]. While coming to the learning part, respondents prefer is to get access to a trainer who can answer for their questions immediately. 57.4% of the respondent prefer a formal structure for the learning process. Considerably the results shown online learning is less preferred by the respondent [22.5%]. For finding significant differences among the alternative approaches of learning process t-test with pairwise comparison had been administered at significance 0.05 and degree of freedom 222 [Table 1]. The results of the test indicated a significant strong inclination towards a learning environment that follow a question and answer mode of interaction followed by comments and discussion. On the other hand learning through online method is less preferred by the respondent and shown insignificance in the analysis. These results are reassuring to the earlier finding in relation to preferences towards the use of blogs, podcasts etc. respondents prefer a learning environment enabling more interactions and team activities with the guidance of an expert. The respondents [28.8%] are also willing to spend on learning process that are very essential for the development of their business. They value the materials provided by the experts and making best of the information gained. Most of the respondents value the quality of learning, trainer, and the formal structure of learning process. There exist a firm perception that the information provide in a formal learning environment is not accessible anywhere else and majority of the respondents are willing to spend on such learning process. However, 12% of the respondent

are not willing to undergo any of the learning processes, as they excelling in current business. Though there exist commonality among the nature of businesses of the respondents, it varies depending on the mode, circumstances motives, learning process and scope of business. To investigate into the motives of business eleven statements are left with respondent to mark their opinions. The statements are pertaining to the motives of establishing current business and future orientations. That are presented in Table 2. From the analysis conducted by administering non parametric KS test ($d = 0.55$, $sig = 0.05$), differences in the motives behind the business among the respondents. Some of them have motives depending upon their business establishment interest, whereas some of them are having general motives as it belongs to

their lifestyle and this group run their business not only for generating profit. It does not mean that this group are less focused on the establishment of their business instead majority exhibit high rate of commitment and passion towards tourism. Further, there were also a study in relation to the differences in attitude and actions pertaining to the memberships in various tourism related forums or community orientation of work they do and it was found less significant differences. However, significant differences shown in those respondents having commercial orientation in business and part of higher forum than that of non-participants of higher forums and non-commercial orientation.

Table 1: t-Test of Learning Process

t-Test results of differences between combinations of learning processes		A	B	C	D	E	F
A	I choose to be in a learning environments enabling live interaction with experts						
B	I choose an onsite learning rather than offsite	2.256					
C	I always Google for getting information	3.008	0.984				
D	I like to depend on my friends and colleagues rather than attending a formal session	3.945	2.074	0.713			
E	I like to be present in a formal learning environment with certification and validity.	4.110	1.872	1.067	0.411		
F	I prefer to learn from online than interaction with experts	5.252	4.013	3.277	2.587	1.764	

Significant values (<0.05) are in bold (degrees of freedom = 222).

Table 2: Motives Leading to Information Gathering, and Learning Process

ITEMS	Commercially oriented TEs n=119 [%]	Non commercially oriented TEs n=36 [%]	Total n=155[%]
Increase in number of customers	41	33	39
Profit maximization	33	28	31
Employment	1	nil	1
Increase in service quality	5	1	7
Business expansion	7	1	8
Achievement of goals	4	7	10
Work from home	1	8	10
Increase in quality of life	8	7	15
Attaining work life balance	4	8	14
Membership in local tourism forums	18	18	18
Membership in regional tourism forums	16	12	14
Membership in business networks	15	11	12
Membership in business networks online	11	7	7
No membership in any of the forums	14	29	26

$aw_2 = 3.079$, degrees of freedom (d. f.) = 1, $sig = 0.050$.

$bw_2 = 3.937$, d. f. = 1, $sig = 0.037$

Furthermore, multivariate analysis of variances test had been applied with regards to the difference in the various information used among respondents and found no significant differences. Conversely, the results of ANOVA stated that there is a significant differences in the use of information regarding marketing sales and management of business related information between commercially oriented and non-commercially oriented respondents. Commercially oriented people are more aggressive in fetching information from multiple sources as they are more focused into establishing businesses to earn profit. Further, the satisfaction level of respondent on the information have been tested by administering MANOVA and presented in Table 4 and revealed higher rate of satisfaction among the respondent commercially oriented [d.f. = 5, $sig = 0.000$, $F = 6.04$] than that of non-commercially oriented group. In ANOVA, it was found that information related to legal aspects are less significant to the respondent than that of information related to marketing, sales, finance and management. Moreover the analysis revealed a significant role of motives in leading the owners for fetching and utilising the relevant information.

Furthermore, the data presented in Table 5 state that the respondents are satisfied with the use of media. Additionally, a positive correlation is evident between use of media and its satisfaction level. While comparing among two groups, commercially oriented and non-commercially oriented, it was evident in the analysis that the commercially oriented group seek more information related to trade and they are more optimistic about the current media available. The relationships between use of media and the utilisation of the information gathered across two different groups are represented through an analysis in Table 6. KS test [$d = 0.500$, $sig = 0.038$] proven that there is a considerable differences in the usage of media between two groups. In addition, the results of T-tests indicated differences among the usefulness of various media taken into consideration for the study such as business magazines, tourism research centres, podcasts and interactions. It was very evident that commercially oriented group shown a positive response on all media except podcasts. Additionally, the non-commercially oriented group highly positive about on site learning than leaving their business area for a learning new skills. On the other hand commercially oriented group are open in terms of onsite or offsite learning processes.

Table 3: Use of Information

Information Types (MANOVA not significant)	Commercially oriented TEs n=119	Non commercially oriented TEs n=36	Total n=155	ANOVA sig.
Marketing/Sales	3.56	3.18	3.48	0.021
Management related	3.09	2.61	2.97	0.012
Legal aspects	2.72	2.72	2.72	0.725
Financial related	3.12	2.71	3.04	0.172
Related to Sustainability	2.87	2.79	2.85	0.653

ANOVA, analyses of variance; MANOVA, multiple analyses of variance.

Table 4: Satisfaction on Collected Information

Information type (MANOVA d.f. = 5, sig = 0.000, F = 6.04)	Commercially oriented TEs n=119	Non commercially oriented TEs n=36	Total n=155	ANOVA sig.
Marketing/Sales	4.42	3.92	4.31	0.000
Management related	4.28	3.56	4.11	0.000
Legal aspects	3.47	3.36	3.46	0.456
Financial related	4.17	3.57	4.06	0.000
Related to Sustainability	3.61	3.42	3.57	0.128

ANOVA, analyses of variance; MANOVA, multiple analyses of variance.

Table 5: Correlations of Usage versus Satisfaction of Information

Information type	Commercially oriented TEs n=119	Non commercially oriented TEs n=36	Total n=155
Marketing/Sales	0.462	0.697	0.534
Management related	0.368	0.594	0.453
Legal aspects	0.375	0.538	0.414
Financial related	0.418	0.547	0.467
Related to Sustainability	0.533	0.613	0.556

Table 6: Online Technology Engagements

Media Sources	t-Test sig.
brochures related to tourism	0.486
magazines and newspapers	0.003
Studies by research centers	0.001
Training, workshops and seminars	0.101
Business forums	0.113
Face-to-face discussion	0.004
Telephone contacts	0.898
Online newsletters	0.677
Websites	0.394
Online Seminars	0.242
Podcasts	0.037
Social networks	0.736
Internet search engines	0.055
Blogs/wikis	0.794

5. Discussion

The primary aim of the paper was to identify the motives behind information gathering, learning processes and online technology engagements of SMTEs in south Kerala. The data gathered from 155 respondents through questionnaire and interview method were analysed by using appropriate statistical tools. For the purpose of getting more insights on the key issues at a point the respondent were grouped into two categories as commercially oriented and non-commercially oriented people. Majority of the cases the response were similar among these groups except few areas. Commercially oriented people are more active in forums and keener to gather information pertaining to marketing, sales, finance, and management. They use multiple sources of information and gather more information that the other group. Since this group is more critic in nature they scrutiny each and every information that they gone through and the source of information as well and therefore their satisfaction with these information and source of media is not matching with the amount of information that they seek and the use of various source. Additionally, this group is ready for spending time and money for the learning process and they prefer both onsite and offsite learning processes. From this study it has been observed that majority of the respondents find difficulty in understanding the information fetched. Further they claimed that they are not getting apt environment for learning or proper assistance. Majority of the

respondents seeks information related marketing, sales, and management rather legal aspects and they spent around four to eight hours per week for fetching the information. Unsurprisingly it was evident from the results that majority of the respondents relay on internet to source information that are essential for operating day to day affairs. Despite of that respondents stated formal forums are more trustable source of information needed for a long term purpose. There were an indication regarding medium satisfaction level with regard to the information available. This brings a light to the need for improving available information and source of information to the tourism enterprises. In consistent with the previous studies, internet and interactions with experts found to be better and useful mechanisms in terms of generating information. Though the other studies stated high level online technological engagements by SMTEs, here the investigation revealed low level of technological engagements. They prefer to aquent with new information from a less formal learning environment that enable them to undertake interaction with experts. They are even more satisfied if they get on the spot guidance from an expert or through internet. This is an indication to the interested researchers to develop or to investigate more to providing a subtotal point of information needed to SMTEs in online or offline mode. Furthermore, some of the other findings out of the preview and scope of this study from the interview with the operators in the tourism industry are providing insights for further study. Some of them are discussed here. When compared to the non-commercially oriented TEs, commercially oriented operators are more ambitious and aggressive in nature. Majority of them are



actively involved in the public forums and social events and additionally they are vigorous in spending money for maintaining the position or power vested with them. On the other hand non-commercially oriented people interested in indulging in activities that create customer satisfaction and better tourism environment. They work on the basis of personal interest and tradition rather for generating commercial profit. They are more concentrating on creating satisfied customers, generating positive comments, and making substantial livelihood. These provides scope for further investigation by interested researchers in the field of tourism. This research has given insights regarding the motives of SMTEs behind information gathering and learning processes and their online technology engagements. It has been identified that the current information providers particularly government forums not in a position to provide all information that is needed by SMTEs to run or to expand their business. These throwing a light upon the scope for initiating a single point of information for SMTEs so that they could get accurate information in apt time and can flourish in their business. This will eventually contribute to the overall development of tourism industry in Kerala and will have a positive effect on the state economy.

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