

Digitization as Manifested in Travel: An Overview

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ABSTRACT--*Travel acknowledges the constant fluidity of the cognitive entities; the rejection of the familiar and the embrace of the unfamiliar. It is essential to explore the myriad ways through which digitization has penetrated the arena of Cultural Studies employing travel as a medium of intervention. In travel, cultures address each other, communicate and negotiate their perspectives sustained by digitization. The power relations as well as the history and socio-political perceptions of the participant cultures endorses a transmission that necessitates the emphasis of digitization in travel and its interrelated subfields. Travel that is reinforced by digitization holds the most common ground in our culture for the customary conversation which is arguably the most prevalent interaction of an individual. Digitization has leveraged the power of travel as well as its quotidian requirements. This paper explores the metamorphosis encountered by travel owing to digitization. The paper further acknowledges the role played out by travel in the formulation and sustenance of identity in a digital society.*

Keywords-- *Digitization, Travel, Identity, Digital Society*

I. INTRODUCTION

Digitization has revolutionized the scale and pace of development in the travel sector by revamping the stage setting of travel in metastatic proportions. It has empowered the customer with the autonomy in meeting the numerous travel products and requirements and fervently questioning the role of the intermediaries in the travel scenario. Customers in the travel segment are constantly on the seek for a higher quality and more value for money. Travel preoccupies an extensive and far reaching space in a digital society. It is notable that there is a persistent struggle by individuals to maintain the built up identity through establishing the connection between travel and digitization thereby further strengthening the role of a digital society in the present times. Digitization gives a the traveller a prime access to the various requirements for travel thereby eliminating the role of the middlemen or rather the travel agents during the planning and execution of a travel plan. Bygone are the days when one would step in and out of a travel agency or flip through the travel guide books before deciding upon a travel itinerary.

II. METHODOLOGY

The paper analyses the effects of digitization in the travel segment and the society as a whole. This is implemented using the survey method. The sample subjects belonged to varying age groups and social status. Pie charts and graphs are used to depict the preference levels of the subjects related to the impact of digitization during

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the planning, organising and the implementation of their travel itineraries. During the course of the research, the paper has come across certain questions; the discussions upon which have helped in the study and evaluation of a digital society. The following are the questions that have been encountered during the course of the research.

- How has digitization transformed the present day travel?
- Did digitization help improve organising travel?
- In what ways have travel and its interrelated subfields been subjected to digitization?
- Does travel empowered by digitization play any role in the formulation and sustenance of identity in a digital society?

III. ANALYSIS

According to bbc.com, digitalization has increased the profitability in the aviation as well as in the travel and tourism segments and has transferred the value from traditional players to the new competitors so that no segment of the travel ecosystem is left untouched by digitalization (bbc.com). This was catapulted by the advent of the smart phone and the predominance of the social media in the daily lives of the individuals.

Dileep in his work *Tourism: Concepts, Theory And Practice* argues that “Tourism and Information technology (IT) are intricately interdependent as both share a symbiotic relationship. International travel industry is a major user of data and information of all kinds. Developments in computing and telecommunication technology have radically altered the way in which multinational organizations operate their businesses. Some of the elements in tourism, like the airlines, are the pioneers in business application of information technology. Sheldon (2003) has opined that information technology is the life blood of the tourism industry as its components are at the forefront of users of modern information and communication technology. Tourism is a consumer of a diverse range of information, and IT has been immersed deeply into the whole system of tourism. Technology in the tourism industry is undoubtedly having an impact on tourism operations. The success of tourism industry to a great extent relies on its ability to efficiently deliver accurate, up-to date and relevant information to various stakeholders with information and communication technology” (Dileep, 2020, p.355).

Travel takes its origin when the proposed traveller conceives the idea of a journey in his mind. Digitization teams up with the traveller right from this conception stage itself. Using search applications, the traveller makes a virtual trip to the chosen destination or may even have a virtual scrutiny of numerous destinations thereby analysing the numerous feasibility factors related to the journey. Thus we may state that the travel planning begins at the fingertips of the traveller through digitization. Whether it is inbound travel or international travel, digitization has been certainly making its mark in the travel segment.

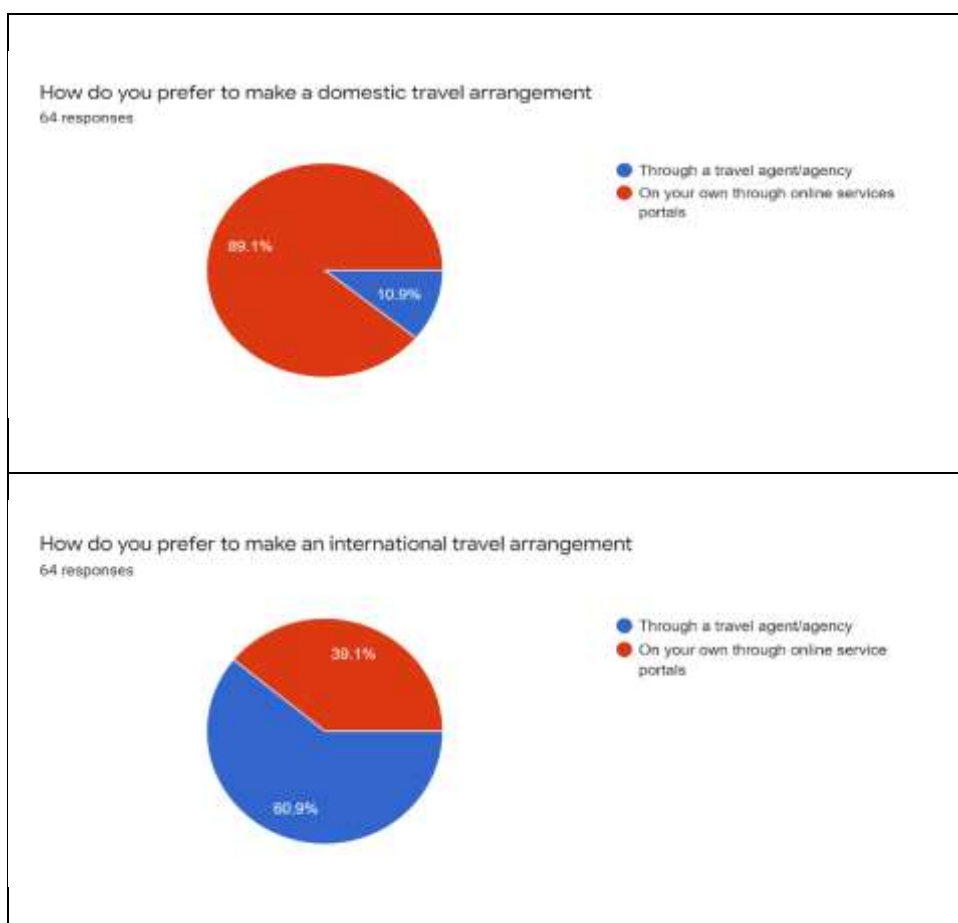
Online travel organising portals like MakeMyTrip, Trip Advisor, Trivago, Yatra, etc sustains the present day traveller in meeting the diverse travel requirements as well as helps in confirming early bookings at a concessional rate and in identifying the quality of the bookings. These portals integrate the various modes of transport as well as they enable the traveller in procuring a comparison amongst the plentiful operators in the travel segment so that they are able to select the options maintaining the preferred balance between economy and leisure.

The traveller is significantly supported by the various software applications in breaking the language barriers confronted during the course of the travel. It also uses software applications in order to eliminate the need to carry

maps during the travel as well as in getting directions in a very concise manner. This elimination of maps prevents the loss of time through the erroneous comprehension involved in map reading and takes care of the navigation.

The travel by road has been supported by the online cab services like Uber and OLA in countries across the world. The traveller can opt for a cashless payment mode too. All that is required is to download the concerned application on to your smart phone. These applications can also be linked to other applications like Alexa that enables you to book a cab on a verbal command. In the segment of international travel, digitization has eased up the procedural formalities involved in procuring the mandatory visas for the travel. This is substantiated by the fact that the Visas are applied online thereby eliminating the long queues at the Visa centres as well as it prevents the traveller from falling a victim to the forgeries that could develop due to the presence of the middlemen . Further during the course of the travel the traveller is exposed to the other formidable accomplishments of digitization. A reasonably good number of airline companies have implemented instruments like Online Check In and Self Check In to enhance their digital proficiency. The immigration departments at the airports all over the world too are exercising their priority for Biometric data collection which benefits them in the identification of the individuals.

The following pie charts reveal the results of the online opinion survey illustrating the impact of digitization in travel and its related subfields.



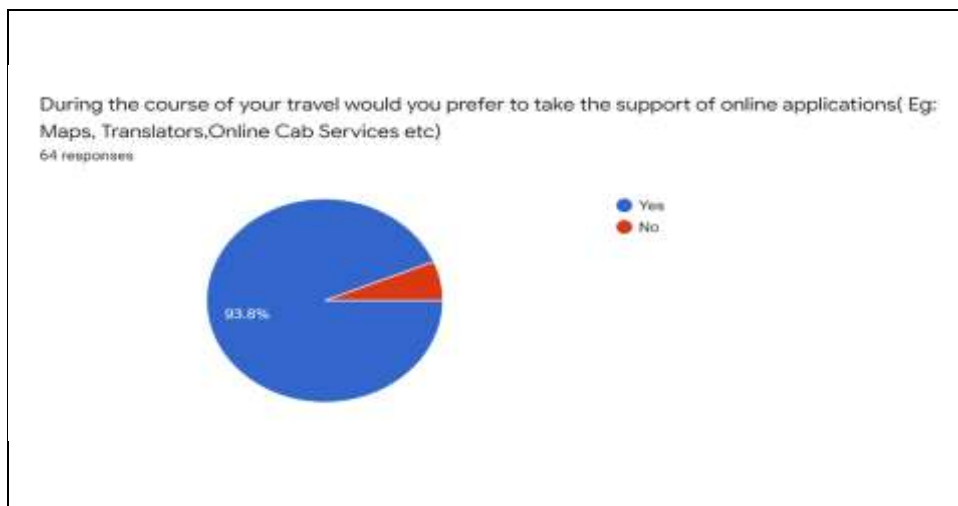


Figure 1: The results of the online opinion survey illustrating the impact of digitization in travel and its related subfields.

Ali (2015) proposes that “From the social, political, natural or environmental point of view, travel and tourism has proven its prominence which has been further emphasised by the support given by the digital platform. Travel has been identified as an industry which has maintained its potentiality as one of the major drivers of the economic growth. Irrespective of being developed, developing or underdeveloped; countries have taken interest in promoting the travel and tourism segment into a global concern” (Ali, 2015, p. 894).

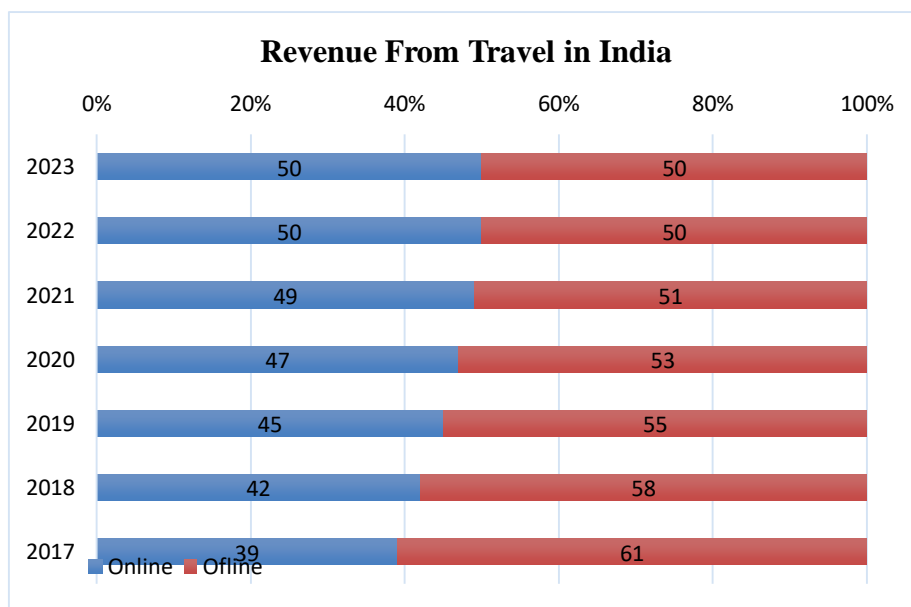


Figure 2: the travel and tourism segment

The above chart prepared from the statistics provided by “statista.com” clearly indicates the projected tendency among the Indian travellers in opting for the easier online services in travel.

According to Dileep (2020) “Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) is also used in tourism industry. It is defined as the electronic transmission of structured business documents in a predefined, machine readable format between trading partners’ internal computer systems. It involves capture and creation of documents in electronic form and their transmission electronically along with the organization, retrieval, synthesis, printing and display (Sheldon 2003). Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) enables electronic transfer of money from customers to service providers’ accounts through credit and debit card transactions” (Dileep, 2020, p.376).

Dileep (2020) further reveals about the various significant roles played out by the information technology as well as digitization in the terrain of travel and tourism. He proposes that “Digitization contributes to the growth of travel and tourism, acts as the creator, protector and as an enhancer of the travel experience. It has been evolving into the focal point of the travel experience and it also acts as a constructive tool of the travel and tourism industry” (Dileep, 2020, p.374).

The Social Network is gaining more and more importance in today’s world and has a deeper impact on the society as to the conventional media platforms (Gündüz, 2017). Expression, exploration and experimentation which come natural for the human experience are further enabled by the social media (Gündüz, 2017). The internet communities and the interactions they make among themselves are inspired by the agencies in real life (Gündüz, 2017).

It is extremely interesting to analyse how the members of a digital society formulates and sustains their identities through travel. In the present scenario the consummation of any form of travel is incomplete without an update on the social media. This can be in the form of a Facebook post, an Instagram story, a Whatsapp profile picture or a Whatsapp status update. Individuals feel that it is essential to persistently build up as well as boost an identity in a digital society. Travel forms an essential companion to the individual in this endeavour. The emergence of the social media has also enabled prospective travellers in anticipating and preparing for their needs and interests.

Gündüz (2017) suggests that “The social media platforms have a growing importance in our lives since they are the places where we “showcase” our living experiences. They also reflect a variety of dimensions regarding our position in the virtual and physical social life. Both of these factors make people to play certain characters in the social arena. They enable individuals to present themselves to others and determine the way they would like to be perceived in addition to helping them connect and interact with people, and participate in the activities they wish” (Gündüz, 2017).

The following pie charts reveal the results of the online opinion survey carried out to analyse how the social media operates as a tool in relating travel to a person’s identity in the virtual space.

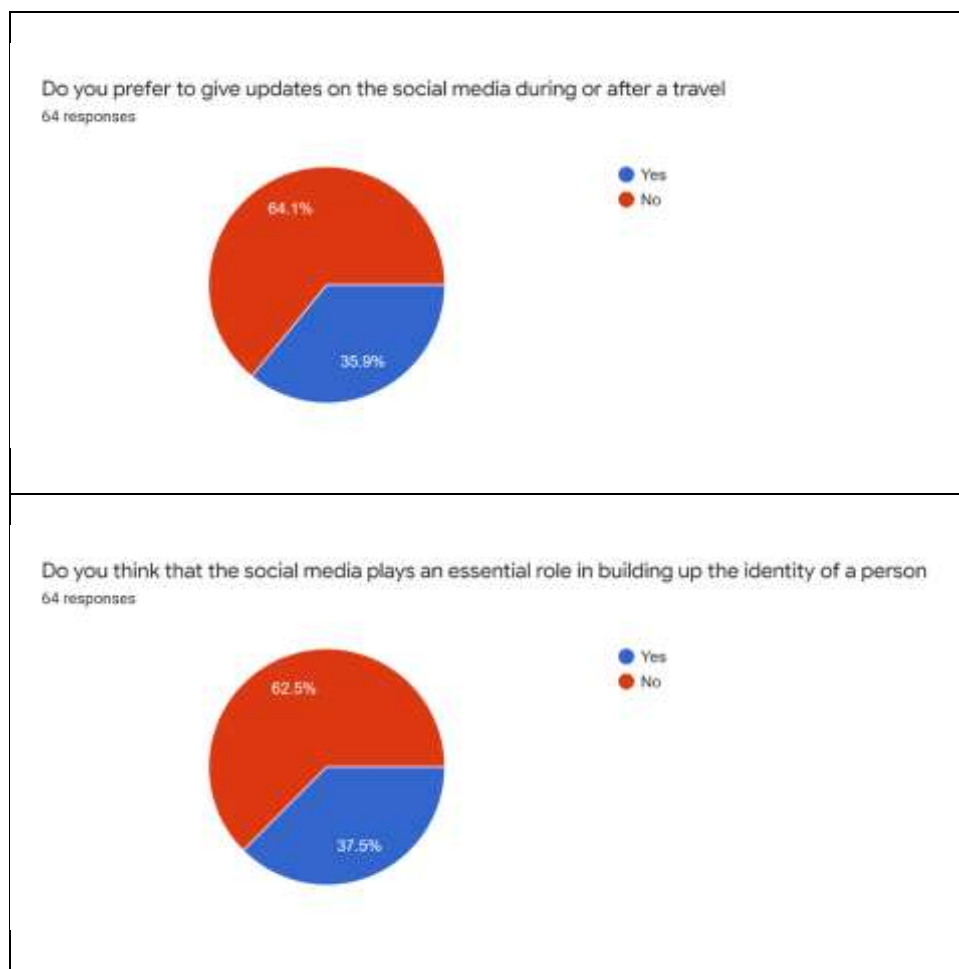


Figure 3: the social media operates as a tool in relating travel to a person's identity in the virtual space.

IV. CONCLUSION

Digitization has penetrated into the warp and weft of the fabric of the society in the same manner as it has spread its arms to reinforce the travel segment of the economy. The surveys conducted as a part of the study explicitly reveal that the society as a whole is moving towards a self-empowered travel that has been accompanied by digitization. The present day traveller gets to relish from a platter of enticing applications which metamorphoses the travel into an extraordinary experience. The experience is further elevated to a monumental status through digitization via the social media platforms. As we explore the digital innovations as manifested in travel we get an opportunity to contemplate upon the nuances of the behaviour of a society that takes pride in being technologically and digitally empowered.

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