

Relationship between Online Search Behavior and Demographic Characteristics of Travellers

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Abstract

Development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has transformed the contemporary business environment. The revolution in ICTs has deep implications for economic and social development. It has entered every aspect of human life whether it is health, economic, education, governance, entertainment etc. Diffusion, propagation and reach of these technologies are viewed to be integral to a country's development strategy. The Information Communications Technologies (ICT) have a major role to play in tourism, travel and hospitality industry. ICT facilitates an individual to acquire information about tourism product from anywhere any time. Tourism organisations can also access the targeted customers across the globe with a lot of ease and it has also led to changes in demand and supply. An elevated demand for flexible, individualized options and excellence of information has personalized leisure and tourism behavior, which is a resultant of increased ICT usage. Through the Internet, tourism marketers can augment the efficiency of distributing information and also selling products and services due to cost-effectiveness and immediate interactivity. Analysing tourist characteristics and their corresponding information search behaviour is very important for travel marketers, to design effective marketing communication campaign.

Keywords: Information Communication Technology, Destination, Hospitality industry, Information search behaviour, Leisure.

Introduction

Online information search usually refers to information search activity through the Internet. The Internet makes it possible for travelers to search and compare information at one sitting. Since the quality of travel product is not certain until it is experienced, travelers may want to make sure of the quality as much as possible before their departure. In this sense, it is not surprising that the travel industry has been identified as an industry greatly affected by the -advent of the Internet (Weber & Roehl, 1999).

The travelers can reduce the level of uncertainty and improve the quality of trip through information search since it is difficult to evaluate the quality before experiencing it (Fodness and Murray, 1997). Thus, the information search travelers undertake has significant implications for the purchases they eventually make (Money & Crotts, 2003). It is clear that online information search has greater influence on the reduction of uncertainty and the purchase decision (Fodness & Murray, 1997; Susskind, Bonn, & Dev. 2003). Consumers' online

search usually involves multiple selections of suppliers, comparisons of facilities, prices, and availability, so travelers can reach optimal decisions through more sufficient information than traditional sources present. The Internet offers a rich environment for the information and resources to travelers (Susskind et al., 2003). On the other hand, suppliers, or marketers, can also get useful information from travelers' search and purchase records.

Through the Internet, tourism marketers can enhance the efficiency of distributing information and selling products and services due to cost-effectiveness and immediate inter-activity as well (Connolly, Olsen, & Moore, 1998). The advantages include global accessibility, convenience in updating, real-time information service, interactive communications features, and unique customization capabilities (Bender, 1997). Buhalis (2000) expressed a similar opinion that using the Internet can enable travel destinations to enhance their competitiveness by increasing their visibility, reducing advertising costs and facilitating local cooperation. Research studies claim that website features are a significant . To build competitive websites, marketers should pay attention to specifying information such as product perceptions, shopping experience, customer service, and consumer risks (Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1997). Tierncy (2000) suggested that the types of information people need on the web include activities on the trip, travel regions/cities, sight-seeing, maps, insider tips, lodging, shopping, special events/festivals, and reservations.

The online consumer information search is still confined to a small segment of travelers as time goes by. The segment is more likely to grow because those that are young are expected to use Internet even when they are old, and people in the next decade are also expected to be more educated and more highly paid. Thus, more opportunities are coming on-line. In order to understand future opportunities better , it is currently of necessity to note the multidimensional relationships between the characteristics of travelers and their online search preference. The knowledge of the relationships can help expand the travel markets through the Internet.

Objective of the Study

To study the relationship between travellers demographic characteristics and their usage pattern of Internet.

Relevance of the Study

The rapid growth of the Internet has attracted many academic researchers and business practitioners, especially in marketing. With the development of information technology, on line information search has become very popular with the tourist. Analysing tourist characteristics and their corresponding information search behaviour is very important for travel marketers, to design effective marketing communication campaign.

Review of Literature

In their model, Berkman and Gilson (1986) posit that environmental influence and individual difference are two antecedents of consequent consumer behaviors during the entire consumption process. Environmental influence refers to the influence from the external environment of consumer such as culture, social status, and family, while individual difference is concerned with consumer's individual internal characteristics. Within the domain of environmental influence, the popularity of the Internet has become a remarkable cultural phenomenon from the end of the 20th century. It is profoundly changing the lifestyle of many people by offering new methods in communication and information provision and acquisition. The Internet as a cultural phenomenon has and will continue to have a major effect on consumer information search behavior (Peterson & Merino, 2003). The distinctive Internet user of the twentieth century is young, qualified, and well-off having high levels of earnings and education (Palumbo and Herbig, 1998). They give value to time more than money that automatically makes the working people and dual-income or single-parent families with paucity of time better candidates to be targeted by retailers with no stores (Burke, 1997). Both demographics and behavioural variables like opinion leadership or being evasive about risk are very significant factors that are to be considered in the studies making an effort to determine the background of Internet purchases (Kwak et al., 2002). Assenting work depicts that income and buying power have time and again been found to influence consumers' susceptibility to shift from actual shops to virtual shops (Co-mor, 2000).

Hypotheses

Online information Search and Demographic Characteristics

Information search behavior and tourist demographic characteristics are closely related. One of the earlier studies on the relationship found that people of higher socio-economic class preferred to use travel agents as an information source (Woodside & Ronkainen, 1980). Gitelson and Crompton (1983) also noted that older people were more likely to use travel agents for information and that college-educated individuals were more likely to use destination specific literature. The more recent literature showed that demographic characteristics kept its influence on information sources preferences and choices over years. Bonn, Furr, and Susskind (1998) suggested that gender, education, income, race, and occupation all have an influence on Internet usage. Luo, Feng and Chai (2004) suggested that only gender and household income have effect on internet usage for travel and tourism related search. To improve further understanding of these relationships, this study developed the first five hypotheses for empirical testing:

- H₁: The use of the Internet varies for different age-groups.
- H₂: The use of the Internet varies between female and male tourists.
- H₃: The use of the Internet varies among tourists with low, medium, and high levels of household income.

H₄: The use of the Internet varies between tourists with College degree/ Graduates and those Without a College degree / Class 12.

H₅: The use of the internet varies among tour-ists with different occupations.

Research Methodology

This field study has examined the online search behavior of tourists visiting Jaipur city with reference to their demographic characteristics

Research Design

The research design indicates the type of research methodology undertaken to collect the information for the study. A descriptive as well as exploratory type of research design is used for this research study. The main objective of using descriptive research is to describe the state of affairs as it exists at present. It mainly involves surveys and fact finding enquiries of different kinds.

Sample-size

A total of 414 travelers were surveyed. The travellers included Foreigner and Domestic travellers. In view of diversity of the universe the survey was conducted at three points.

- (i) Transport Terminals (Airport and Railway Station)
- (ii) Tourist Attractions
- (iii) Place of Accommodation

Sampling Technique

For sample selection random sampling was done to avoid over representation of any particular group.

Data Collection Method

A structured questionnaire was used for the survey. All the questionnaires were administered individually to the respondents in the presence of scholar herself thus reducing the possibility of any ambiguity or perceptual deviation.

Data Analysis

The responses collected through questionnaire were uploaded in excel sheets. The interpretation of the data was done using SPSS. Both graphical presentation and statistical tables were used. Chi-Square test was used for data analysis.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

Table 1. Medium of booking travel

Medium of booking travel	Number	Percentage
Only Internet	137	33.1%
Internet & others	203	49.0%
Only others	74	17.9%
Total	414	100%

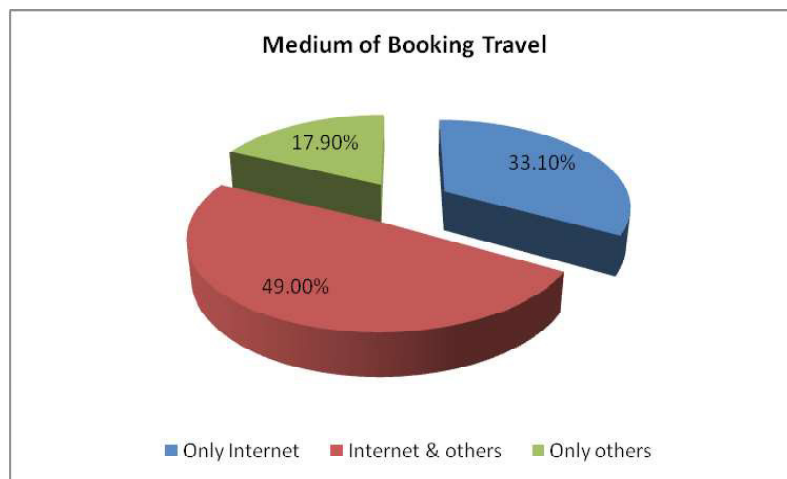


Figure 1

The above table indicates the medium used by the tourists for booking their travel. The tourists are categorized into three groups – tourists who use only internet for making bookings, that are 137(33.1%), who use internet and other sources as well like friends , travel agents etc, 203(49%) and all those tourists who use only aforementioned sources. Maximum percentage is of people who use a combination of internet and other sources . They are the ones who can be motivated to shift to only internet based bookings.

Table 2. Age wise distribution

Age Bracket	Number	Percentage
15-25 years	25	6.0%
26-35 years	138	33.3%
36-45 years	142	34.3%
51-56 years	64	15.5%
Above 56 years	45	10.9%
Total	414	100%

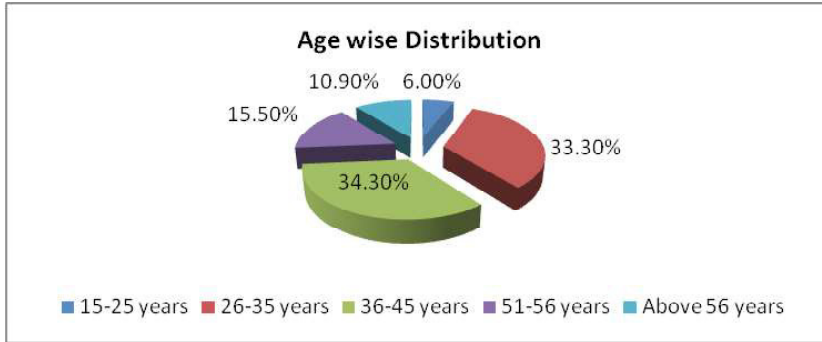


Figure 2

From the above table it is clearly evident that the maximum number of respondents are from the age bracket of 36-50 yrs 142(34.3%). The class that has respondents between 26-35 years is 138 (33.3%) and 51-56 is 64(15.5%). The rest of the respondents fall into the bracket of above 56 years 45(10.9%) and in 15-25 years which is 25(6.0%).

Table 3. Distribution according to the Occupation of Respondents

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Student	60	14.50%
Service	124	30.6%
Business	112	27.1%
Industrialist	60	14.5%
Agriculture	42	10.1%
Others	16	3.9%
Total	414	100%

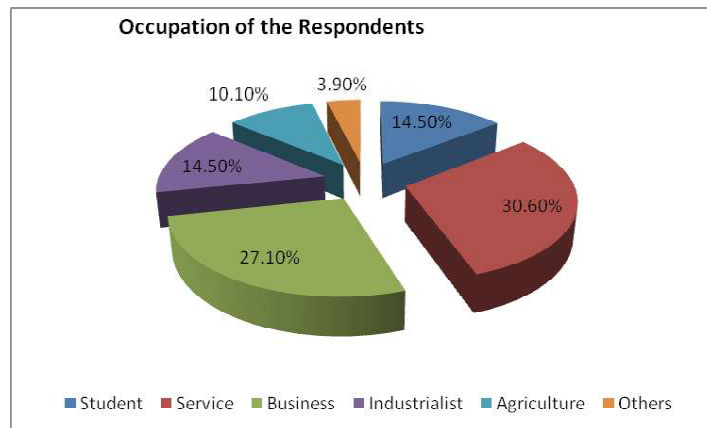


Figure 3.

The highest frequency of respondents 124 (30.6%) falls under the category wherein the tourists are into Service, followed closely by businessmen i.e. 112(27.1%). Equal percentage of respondents i.e 60 (14.5%) each is of Students and Industrialists. Categories of respondents that travel the least are Agriculturist 10.1% (42) and Others 16 (3.9%).

Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to the Annual income

Annual income	Number	Percentage
Low	99	23.9%
Medium	181	43.7%
High	134	32.4%
Total	414	100%

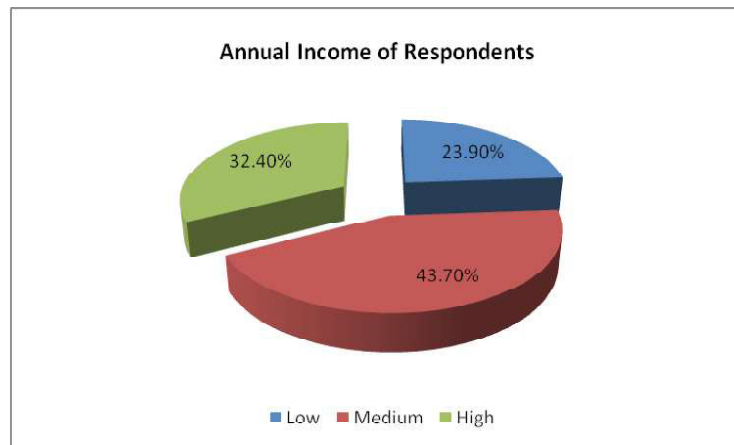


Figure 4.

According to the above table the maximum number of travellers are from the medium income group 181(43.7%) followed by travellers belonging to high income group with 134(32.4%) and least number of people are from the low income group 99(23.9%) which as the less disposable income.

Table 5. Gender wise distribution of respondents

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	239	57.7%
Female	175	42.3%
Total	414	100%

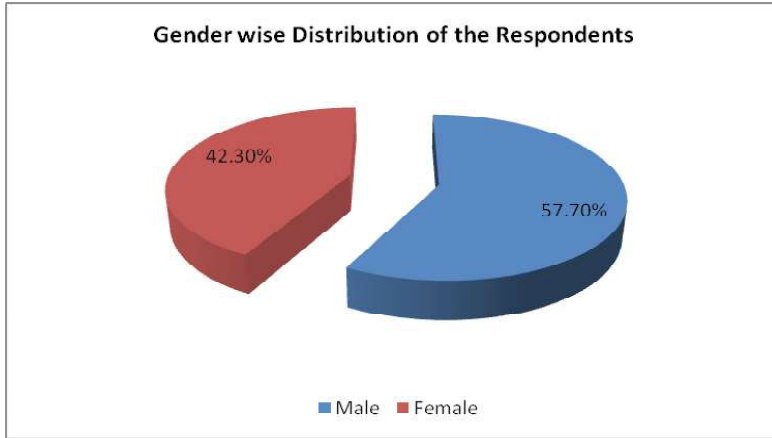


Figure 5.

From the above table we can deduce that majority of the respondents out of the total 414 are males 239(57.7%) as compared to the female respondents who are 175(42.3%).

Table 6.

Education	Number	Percentage
Without College degree / Class 12	196	47.30%
With College Degree/ Graduate	218	52.70%
Total	414	100%

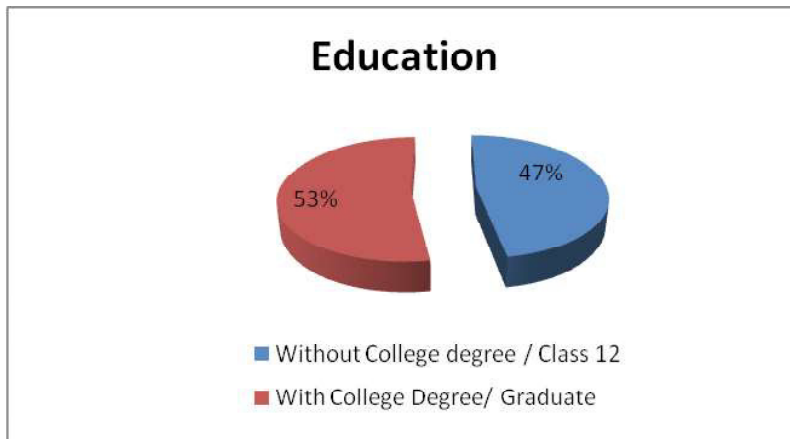


Figure 6.

The above table shows the distribution of respondents on the basis of their educational qualification .A larger percentage(53%) is of the respondents who are without a college degree in case of foreigners and who have passed class 12

in case of Indian travelers. The rest 47 % are better educated respondents with a college degree or are graduates.

Hypotheses Testing

H_1 : The use of Internet varies for different age group

Table 7.

Age Group		Only Internet	Internet and Others	Only others	Total
15-25 yrs.	Number	11	13	1	25
	% within the category	44.0%	52.0%	4.0%	100%
	% of total	2.7%	3.1%	2%	60%
26-35 yrs	Number	57	69	12	139
	% within the category	41.3%	50.0%	8.7%	100%
	% of total	13.8%	16.7%	2.9%	33.3%
36-50 yrs	Number	46	76	20	142
	% within the category	32.4%	53.5%	14.1%	100%
	% of total	11.1%	18.4%	4.8%	34.3%
51-60 yrs	Number	12	34	18	64
	% within the category	18.8%	53.1%	28.1%	100%
	% of total	2.9%	8.2%	4.3%	15.5%
Above 56 yrs	Number	11	11	23	45
	% within the category	24.4%	24.4%	51.1%	100%
	% of total	2.7%	2.7%	5.6%	10.9%
Total	Number	137	203	74	414
	% within the category	33.1%	49.0%	17.9%	100%
	% of total	33.1%	49.0%	17.9%	100%

Table 8. Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig
Pearson Chi-Square	57.060	8	.000

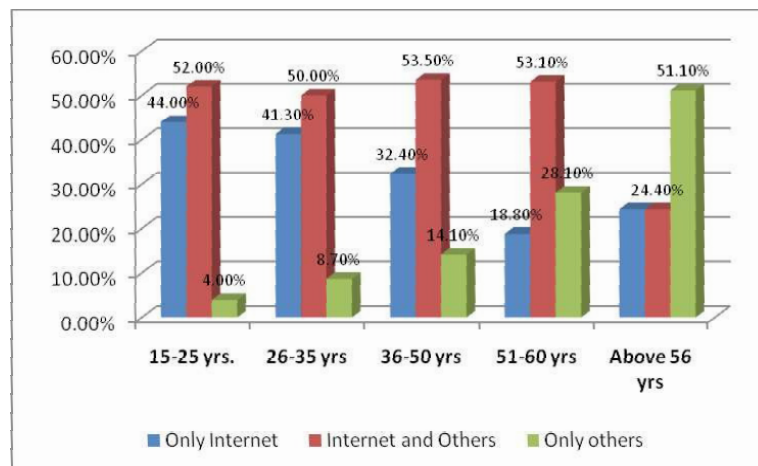


Figure 7.

The above table depicts the division of the respondents / tourists from different age groups into three categories - respondents who use only internet for information search/bookings, second category being respondents who use internet along with other sources like family, friends, travel agents (in person), brochure etc. and the third category has respondents who prefer to search for information or get a booking done through others sources mentioned above which are traditional sources. The table reflects that the major chunk of respondents who use only internet to search for travel related information fall in the age group between 15-35 yrs, very understandable because this is the generation that thrives on technology, followed by respondents in the age group 36-50 yrs wherein out of total 142 respondents almost 33% are using only internet. Above this age bracket only few respondents prefer to use only internet for bookings or search, the percentage is low probably because they are baby boomers who are not techno savvy and prefer to use traditional methods. The respondents who prefer to use a combination of internet as well as other sources are almost equally distributed in the four categories 15-25 yrs, 26-35 yrs, 36-50 yrs and 51-56 yrs which is almost 50% of total respondents in each of the category. If we look critically these are the people who need to be targeted by the marketers, they need to be motivated to shift to internet usage cause they are already oriented towards internet but are not using it totally because of some issues. The third category of respondents are searching for information through sources other than internet. Out of the total respondents in this category who have not adapted the use of internet, almost 50% are above the age of 56 years and 28% are between 51-56 years. The overall results clearly indicate that the younger generation (below 35 years) are the ones who are comfortably using internet for information search or booking their travel related products. It is the older generation which is sticking to usage of other traditional sources.

It is evident by the frequencies cross tabulated in the table, there is a significant relationship ($X^2 = 57.06$, $p < .05$) between different age groups and usage of different channels for information search or bookings (Only internet, internet and others and only others).

H₂: The use of Internet varies between female and male tourists

Table 9.

Gender		Only Internet	Internet and Others	Only others	Total
Male	Number	102	108	29	239
	% within the category	42.7%	45.2%	12.1%	100%
	% of total	24.6%	26.1%	7.0%	57.7%
Female	Number	35	95	45	175
	% within the category	20.0%	54.3%	25.7%	100%
	% of total	8.5%	22.9%	10.9%	42.3%
Total	Number	137	203	74	414
	% within the category	33.1%	49.0%	17.9%	100%
	% of total	33.1%	49.0%	17.9%	100%

Table 10. Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig
Pearson Chi-Square	27.830	2	.000

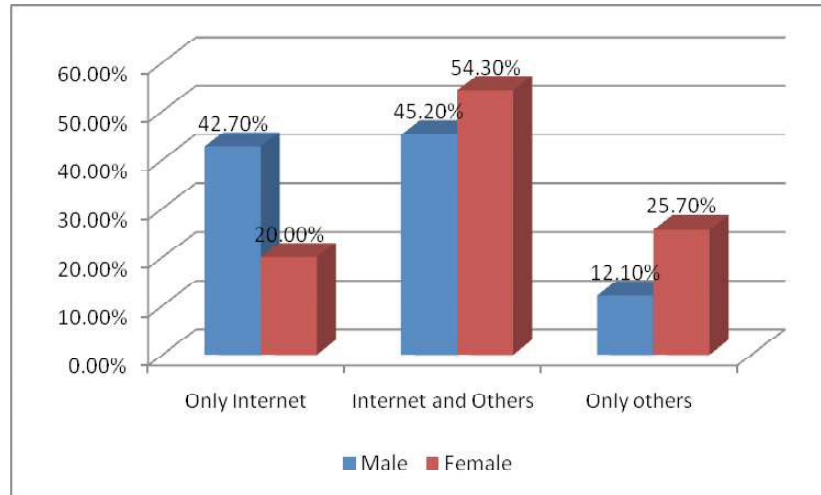


Figure 8.

The above table depicts the distribution of respondents on the basis of their gender. Amongst the total respondents around 58% are males and 42% are females. In the category of male respondents the maximum number uses internet along with other sources (45.2%) closely followed by only internet user (42.7%) but a very small percentage rely on other traditional sources. If we take into consideration the female respondents, very similar to their male counter parts most of them (54.3%) prefer to use internet and other sources too, around 20% are comfortable in using the internet and 26% still prefer family, friends, brochures and travel agents. We can draw an inference from the above depiction that males are more comfortable and frequent is using technology for information search/booking. The data reflects that females are probably a little reluctant in adopting usage of internet. But this is a probable group that can be motivated to adopt internet because a big chunk (54.3%) uses internet along with other sources, if the apprehensions and insecurities of the respondents could be dealt with, this group can be motivated to use only internet.

It is evident by the frequencies cross tabulated in the table, there is a significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 27.83$, $p < .05$) between respondents of Male or Female gender and usage of different channels for information search or bookings (Only internet, internet and others and only others).

H₃: The use of Internet varies among tourists with low, medium and high levels of household income

Table 11.

Annual Income		Only Internet	Internet and Others	Only others	Total
Low	Number	18	65	16	99
	% within the category	18.2%	65.7%	16.2%	100%
	% of total	4.35	15.70	3.86	23.91
Medium	Number	57	91	33	181
	% within the category	31.5%	50.3%	18.2%	100%
	% of total	13.8%	22.0%	8.0%	43.7%
High	Number	62	47	25	134
	% within the category	46.3%	35.1%	18.7%	100%
	% of total	15.0%	11.4%	6.0%	32.4%
Total	Number	137	203	74	414
	% within the category	33.1%	49.0%	17.9%	100%
	% of total	33.1%	49.0%	17.9%	100%

Table 12. Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig
Pearson Chi-Square	25.004	4	.000

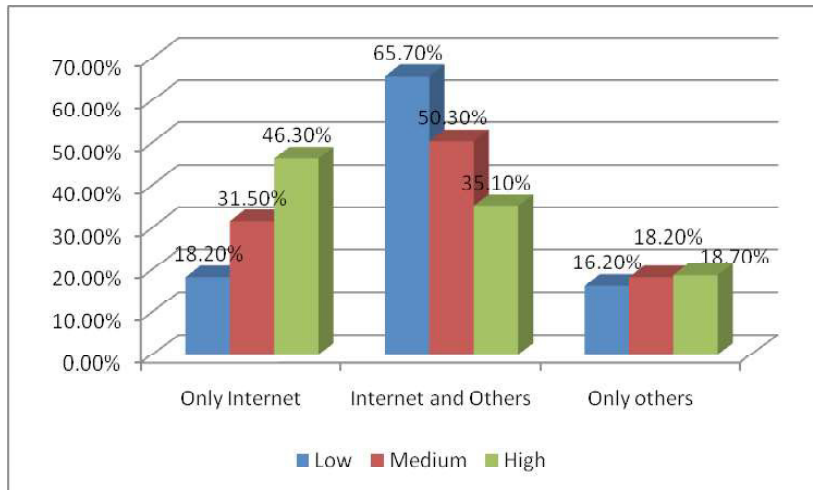


Figure 9.

The above distribution table illustrates the division of respondents on the basis of their overall household income. Tourism is an activity that depends upon a person's disposable income, money being one of the essentials for taking up any kind of touristic activity. Out of the total sample the maximum respondents are from the medium income group, they are the ones taking up maximum travel. Amongst these around 50% prefer to use internet and other sources as well for bookings, a very encouraging 32% rely only on internet and a very small percentage resort to using other sources only. In the category of high income respondents. More of them are using only internet (46%), 35% are using both the sources and the rest rely only on the other sources. This trend indicates that the high income group is more technologically savvy and booking as well probably the reason may be because they are monetarily sound, so the technology is more easily accessible to them. Most of the respondents prefer internet along with other sources as well, very meager percentage of people are using only internet. Overall analysis shows that almost 50% respondents who prefer internet and others can be converted to only internet users, especially the middle income group needs to be targeted, counseled and facilitated so that they can confidently use internet for information search and bookings.

It is evident by the frequencies cross tabulated in the table, there is a significant relationship ($X^2 = 25.00$, $p < .05$) between Low, medium and high level of income and usage of different channels for information search or bookings (Only internet, internet and others and only others).

H₄: The use of Internet varies between Tourists without a College degree/Class 12 and Tourists With College degree/ Graduates

Table 13.

Education		Only Internet	Internet and Others	Only Others	Total
Without College Degree/ Class XII	Number	66	95	35	196
	% of Respondents	15.9%	22.9%	8.5%	47.3%
With College Degree/ Graduate	Number	71	108	39	218
	% of Respondents	17.1%	26.1%	9.4%	52.7%
Total	Number	137	203	74	414
	% of Respondents	33.1%	49.0%	17.9%	100.0%

Table 14. Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig
Pearson Chi-Square	0.062	2	.969

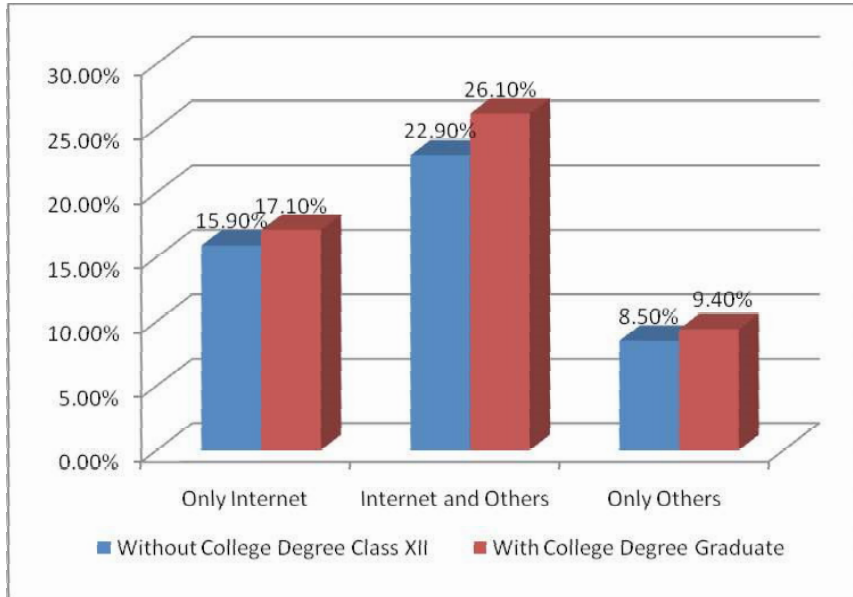


Figure 10.

The above table reflects the distribution according to the educational background and the channel that the respondents choose to search for travel related information or to get their bookings done. The data shows that out of the total respondents in both the categories, most of them use both the sources internet and others as well. Respondents using only other channels are very less and almost equal to the percentage of the only internet category.

It is evident by the frequencies cross tabulated in the table, there is no significant relationship ($\chi^2 = .062, p > .05$) between respondents with a College degree and without a College degree and usage of different channels for information search or bookings (Only internet, internet and others and only others).

H₃: The use of internet varies among tourists with different occupations

Table 15.

Occupation		Only Internet	Internet and Others	Only others	Total
Student	Number	27	27	9	60
	% within the category	40.0%	45.0%	15.0%	100%
	% of total	5.8%	6.5%	2.2%	14.5%
Service	Number	40	65	19	124
	% within the category	32.3%	52.4%	15.3%	100%
	% of total	9.7%	15.7%	4.6%	30.6%
Business	Number	40	49	23	112
	% within the category	35.7%	43.8%	20.5%	100%
	% of total	9.7%	11.8%	5.6%	27.1%
Industrialist	Number	18	29	13	60
	% within the category	30.0%	48.3%	21.71%	100%
	% of total	4.3%	7.0%	3.1%	14.5%
Agriculture	Number	8	27	7	42
	% within the category	19.0%	64.3%	16.7%	100%
	% of total	1.9%	6.5%	1.7%	10.1%
Others	Number	7	6	3	16
	% within the category	43.8%	37.5%	18.8%	100%
	% of total	1.7%	1.4%	7%	3.9%
Total	Number	137	203	74	414
	% within the category	33.1%	49.0%	17.9%	100%
	% of total	33.1%	49.0%	17.9%	100%

Table 16. Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig
Pearson Chi-Square	9.606	10	.476

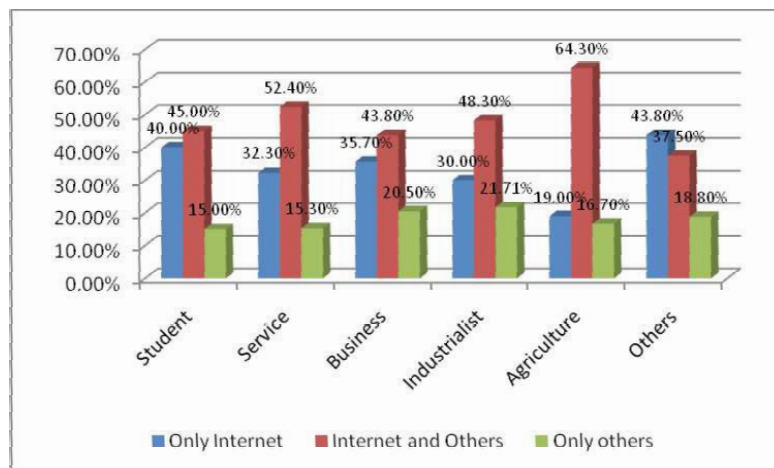


Figure 11.

The above table depicts the categorization of the respondents according to their occupation or vocation followed. In case of students most of them prefer internet and other sources whereas almost same percentage is using only internet, very few are using just other sources. Similar is the case with Business class. In the service class category more than 50% prefer combination of internet and other sources people who are into agriculture are using internet minimally. Considering the overall data, almost 50% of the total respondents still prefer to use internet and other sources as well. Maximum representation in the category of only internet users is of Service and Business class.

It is evident by the frequencies cross tabulated, there does not exist a significant relationship ($X^2 = 9.60, p > .05$) between occupations and usage of different channels for information search or bookings (Only internet, internet and others and only others).

Findings

This study has made methodological research of Information Search Behavior of Travellers with Special Reference to Jaipur. The endeavour behind this research was to explore the Information search behavior of tourists, to understand how demographic characteristics influence travellers' choice of information sources and channels, when planning a travel.

- The research findings reflect that the major chunk of respondents using only internet to search for travel related information fall in the age group of 15-35 yrs, because this is the generation that thrives on technology, followed by the age group 36-50 yrs using only internet. Above this age group only a few are using only internet, the percentage is low probably because they are not techno savvy or may be they are wary because of privacy and security issues. The respondents who prefer to use a combination of channels are almost equally distributed in the four categories 15-56 yrs. If we look critically these are the people who need to be targeted by the marketers, they need to be motivated to shift to using only internet cause they are already oriented towards it. Marketers need to convert these probable users to active users. The respondents who prefer other than internet viz. family, friends, phones, advertisements, brochures etc are the ones who have not adapted the use of internet.
- Tourists who use only other sources but not internet 58% are males and 42% are females. Amongst male respondents the maximum use internet along with other sources (45.2%) followed by only internet user (42.7%) but a very small percentage rely on traditional sources whereas considering the female respondents, similar to their male counter parts most of them prefer to use internet and other sources too. We infer that males are more comfortable using internet. The females are reluctant in adopting the technological advances, like usage of internet. But this is a probable group that can be motivated to adopt internet because a big chunk (54.3%) uses internet along with other sources.

- Tourism depends upon a person's disposable income. Out of the total sample the maximum respondents are from the medium income group, amongst these 50% prefer to use internet and other sources, a very encouraging 32% rely only on internet and a small percentage resort to using other sources only. Amongst high income respondents most are using only internet (46%), 35% are using both the sources indicating that the high income group is more technologically savvy, may be because they are monetarily sound, so the technology is easily accessible. In the low group most of the respondents prefer internet along with other sources. Overall analysis shows that almost 50% respondents who prefer internet and others can be converted to only internet users, especially the middle income group needs to be targeted, counseled and facilitated.
- The study depicts the relationship between search behavior and their occupation. Most of the students prefer internet and other sources, whereas almost same percentage is using only internet, very few resort to using only other sources. Similar is the case with Business class. In the service class more than 50% prefer combination of internet and other sources, people who are into agriculture are using internet minimally. Considering the overall data, almost 50% of the total respondents still prefer to use internet and other sources wherein maximum representation is of Service and Business class.

Table 17.

Research Hypothesis	Variable	Conclusion
H1	Age	Accepted
H2	Gender	Accepted
H3	Income	Accepted
H4	Education	Rejected
H5	Occupation	Rejected

Conclusion

The findings of the study confirm that the Age, Gender and Income of the tourist are related to their Information source preference. Destination marketers should therefore take into consideration the characteristics associated with these three demographics.

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