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Sustainable Tourism: A Review of Current Practices and Future Directions-Coalescence of Social media and E-commerce

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ABSTRACT:

Sustainable tourism has drawn more attention in recent years as a means to promote economic development while protecting the environment and local cultures. This paper reviews current practices and future trends in sustainable tourism, focusing on the key issues of environmental conservation, social responsibility, and economic viability. In addition to examining the elements that affect travelers' views and behaviors towards sustainable tourism, the study looks into current trends and practices in promoting sustainable tourism using social media. Planned and sustained development of tourism industry in the form of eco and responsible tourism would lead the country to everlasting prosperity in all aspects. E-Commerce can also contribute for the sustainable tourism development. The analysis highlights the best practices and challenges of promoting sustainable tourism through social media, including the need for effective storytelling, engagement, and collaboration among stakeholders. The study also identifies opportunities to leverage new social media technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, to create more immersive and engaging sustainable tourism experiences. The results of this study have repercussions for tourism businesses and destination marketing organizations looking to promote sustainable tourism methods and develop sustainable tourism experiences. Social media is an effective tool for promoting ecotourism, interacting with visitors and local communities, and forging deep bonds between people and the environment. Overall, this paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on sustainable tourism and provide insights into the current state and future growth of sustainable tourism practices.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Marketing, E-commerce, Social Media & Technology, Travel vlogs etc.

Introduction

Tourism is a significant driver of economic development and job creation in many regions of the world. However, its rapid expansion has also resulted in negative impacts on the environment, local cultures, and social structures. Sustainable tourism has become recognized as a viable remedy for these issues since it tries to balance economic, environmental, and social factors.

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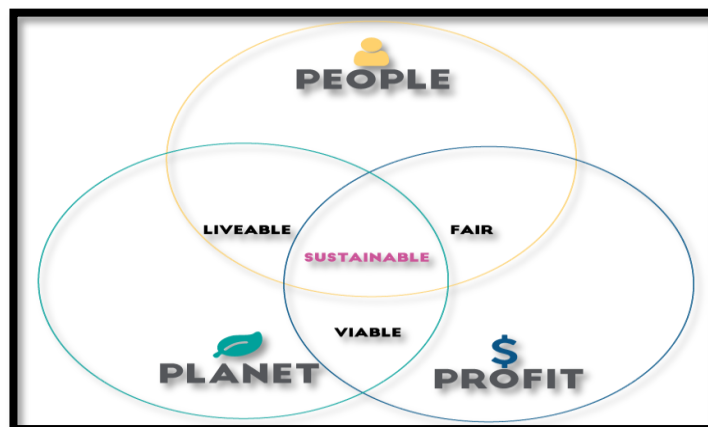
The three P model is a paradigm for sustainable tourism that emphasizes the need to balance the three main sustainability components of profit, planet, and people in the growth of tourism. These three facets are often referred to as the triple bottom line or the three pillars of sustainability. The People

component refers to the social and cultural impacts of tourism on local communities and individual. This includes promoting local participation and ownership in tourism development, respecting and preserving cultural heritage, and creating opportunities for local employment and economic benefits and the Planet component focuses on the environmental impacts of tourism on natural resources and ecosystems. This includes reducing carbon emissions, protecting biodiversity, and minimizing waste and pollution whereas the Profit component of sustainable tourism addresses the economic viability of tourism development, including the financial benefits for tourism operators and local businesses, and the contribution of tourism to the overall economy. The model emphasizes the interdependence of these three dimensions of sustainability and the need to balance them in order to achieve sustainable tourism development. By taking a holistic approach to tourism development, the model can help ensure that tourism is beneficial for both the destination and the visitors, while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and local communities.

INBOUND TOURISM: FOREIGN TOURIST ARRIVALS (FTAs), ARRIVALS OF NON-RESIDENT INDIANS (NRIs) AND INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS (ITAs) 1981, 1991, 2001 & 2011-2021

Year	FTA in India (in Millions)	Percentage (%) Change over Previous Year	NRIs arrivals in India (in Millions)	Percentage (%) Change over Previous Year	International Tourists Arrivals in India (in Millions)	Percentage (%) Change over Previous Year
1981	1.28	2.0	-	-	-	-
1991	1.68	-1.7	-	-	-	-
2001	2.54	-4.2	-	-	-	-
2011	6.31	9.2	-	-	-	-
2012	6.58	4.3	-	-	-	-
2013	6.97	5.9	-	-	-	-
2014	7.68	10.2	5.43	-	13.11	-
2015	8.03	4.6	5.74	5.7	13.76	5.0
2016	8.80	9.6	6.22	8.4	15.03	9.2
2017	10.04	14.1	6.77	8.8	16.81	11.8
2018	10.56	5.2	6.87	1.5	17.42	3.6
2019	10.93	3.5	6.98	1.6	17.91	2.8
2020	2.74	-74.9	3.59	-48.6	6.33	-64.7
2021	1.52	-44.5	5.48	52.6	7.00	10.6

Source: Bureau of Immigration, Govt. of India

In 2022, India had an increase of 305.4% over the same period the previous year in foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) to an estimated 6.19 million and a growth of 106.77% in foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) to an estimated Rs. 1,35,543 crores. Additionally, based on data provided by state and governments and other information held by the Ministry of Tourism, there were 677.63 million domestic tourist visits (DTVs) made throughout the nation in 202
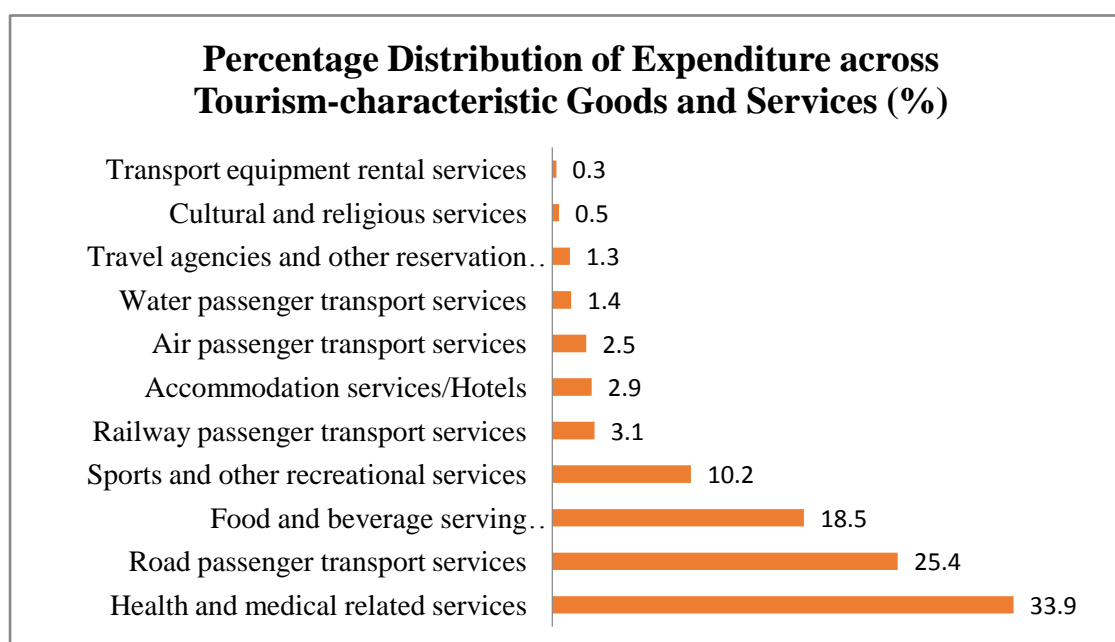
Source: NCAER computation

Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) Arrivals 2019-2021
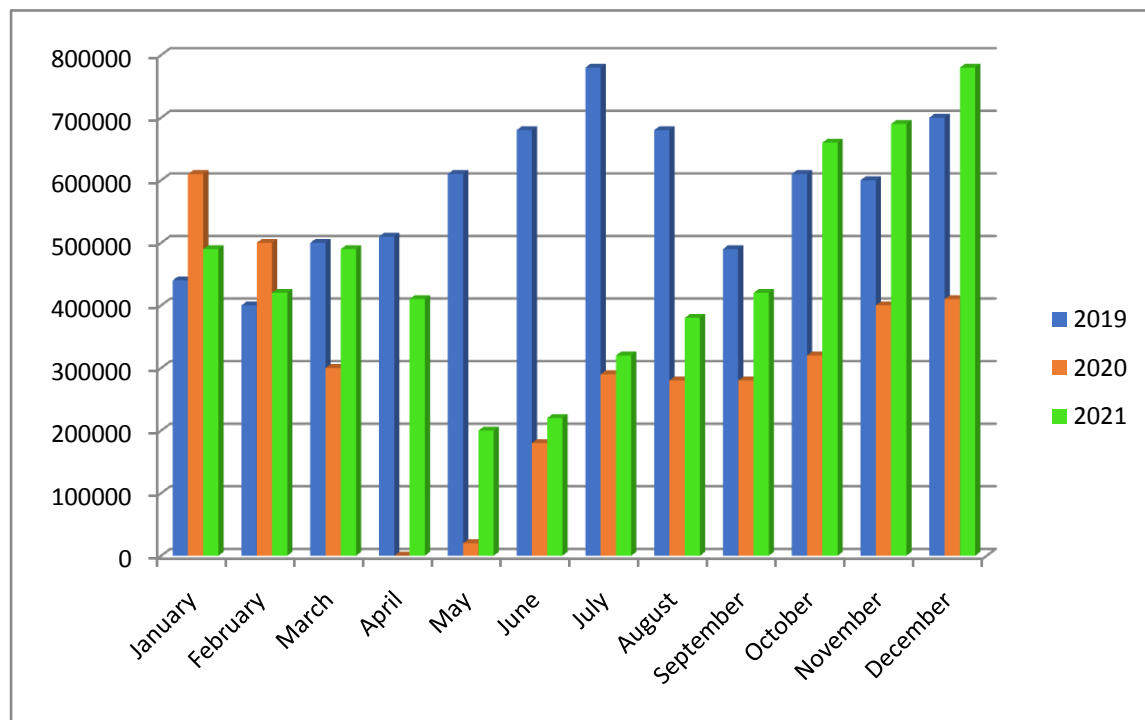
Source: India Tourism Statistics 2022

Sustainable tourism seeks to maximize advantageous economic and social outcomes while minimizing detrimental effects on the environment and local populations. In recent years, social media has given sustainable tourism a boost and developed into an important tool for promoting and increasing awareness of sustainable tourism practices. By providing a platform for information sharing and educating travelers about sustainable tourism practices, it encourages sustainable tourism. Tourists can use social media to research and plan trips that align with their values and to learn about local cultures and environmental initiative

Social media used by travelers to learn about local cultures and environmental projects, plan vacations that are in line with their principles, and do their work. Tourism businesses can use social media to advertise sustainable tourism practices, such as ecotourism and responsible travel, and to highlight their initiatives that minimize their environmental impact and assist local people.

Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube have made it possible for travelers, travel vloggers, tour operators, and businesses to exchange knowledge, experiences, and best practices about sustainable tourism. This has helped the development of sustainable tourism by raising awareness of sustainable tourism destinations and practices and by making it easier for stakeholders to communicate and work together. The trend towards online reputation and the significance of reputation, Inversini (2019). As social media continues to evolve, there are opportunities to leverage these technologies to enhance sustainable tourism practices and create more immersive and engaging experiences (Kim et al., 2020; Lu &Stepchenkova, 2021; Park et al., 2020). The paper will examine the current practices challenges, and opportunities associated with sustainable tourism and provide perspectives on the ways in which the industry can move towards a more sustainable future.

Review of Literature

Due to concerns about the environmental, social, and economic effects of tourism on destinations and local communities, sustainable tourism has become a key idea in the tourism industry in recent years. Scholars and practitioners have investigated several aspects of sustainable tourism, such as its definition, implementation, and evaluation. Rajasekharan Pillai (2006) identified a direct link between travel and job opportunities. A vast cross-section of low-skilled, intermediate-skilled, and highly trained professionals can find work in the tourism sector. Due to its ability to help marketers maintain fruitful connections with clients, social media has developed into an essential platform for businesses. On blogs, visual communities, and social networks, users publish their own reviews, providing a venue for others to share any audio, video, photo, or other media assets on YouTube, Flickr, and the internet (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010; Panetal, 2007).

Schmallegger and Carson (2008) assert that social media has been employed as a marketing tool for interactive marketing by sustainable tourist destinations. When compared to traditional media techniques, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) discovered that using social media platforms, tourist destinations can reach out to potential visitors more effectively and at a lesser cost. The research makes it clear that social media serves as a means of

engagement with significant cost advantages for all the stakeholders. In addition, tourism has boosted India's socioeconomic development through the expansion of its infrastructure, the creation of jobs, and the improvement of its workforce, among other things.

According to Yadav and Arora (2012), social media is an essential tool for tourist marketing that can improve the reputation of the destination. Social networking sites must be viewed as playing a vital role in marketing plans for travel companies. Chalip and Costa (2012) have promoted ecotourism as a strategy for fostering rural development. According to Nunkoo and Gursoy (2012), the economic impact of tourism is the main component that will enable the host community to become self-sufficient. Irandu and Shah (2014) looked at how eco-tourism might give Kenyan rural women participants' alternate and sustainable means of sustaining their lives. The authors contend that the creation of income-generating activities for women through eco-tourism and rural tourism helps alleviate poverty, raises women's status, and encourages the sustainable growth of local communities. Therefore, by luring new enterprises through investment opportunities, sustainable tourism boosts the local economy. It improves the standard of living and raises income levels at the local level while also empowering women. Kim and Ko (2020) advance the ways that social media platforms are being utilised to promote sustainable tourism and discuss their potential for future expansion. Hossain et al. (2021) analysis, essential methods for promoting sustainable tourism that are in line with the SDGs are identified, as are the ways that sustainable tourism can help reach the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Objectives

To explore the key opportunities associated with sustainable tourism, review the current practices and future directions in sustainable tourism.

Research Methodology

To examine the present trends and potential future of sustainable tourism, a descriptive study design was employed. Through an extensive literature review of scholarly journals, articles, books, and reports, secondary data is used and gathered. The research will offer information that may be used to guide policy and practice in the tourism sector, encourage sustainable tourism entrepreneurship, and increase awareness and understanding of sustainable tourism among travelers, businesses, and policymakers.

Current Practices Review

The Ministry of Tourism launched two significant projects in 2014–15 to develop the nation's tourism infrastructure, including historical sites and heritage cities: PRASHAD, the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive, and Swadesh Darshan, an integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits. The programme, now known as Swadesh Darshan 2.0, has been updated with the slogan "vocal for local." Since the program's start, the Ministry has approved 76 projects under 13 themes for a total of Rs 5315.59 crore in revised approved costs and has released Rs 4734.11 crore (until December 31, 2022).

Before Covid, 1.09 crore international visitors came to India in 2019, up from 76.8 lakh in 2014. Despite being the industry most severely impacted by the epidemic, tourism, the number has climbed to 61 lakh in 2022. "India is seeing a rapid revival of foreign tourist arrivals post-covid," claimed Union Tourism Minister G. Kishan Reddy. The first Global Tourism Investors' Summit will take place from May 17–19, 2023, and will highlight investment opportunities and projects in India's tourism and hospitality industries. India's G20 Presidency this year serves as the backdrop for the event's planning. India is commemorating "Visit India Year 2023," a global initiative that encourages travellers to experience India in "Tourism in Mission Mode" in 2023. The "Best Tourism Village Competition Portal," the "Rural Tourism Portal," and the "Global Tourism Investor Summit 2023 Portal" were all introduced as part of a novel effort.
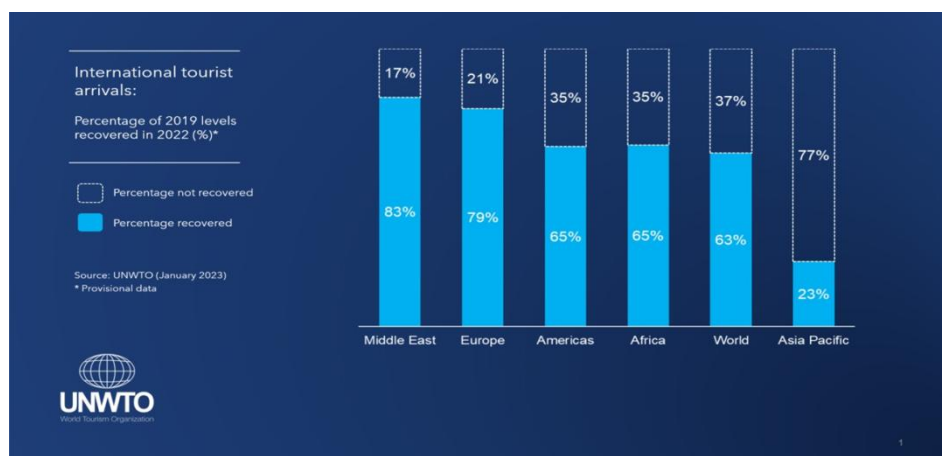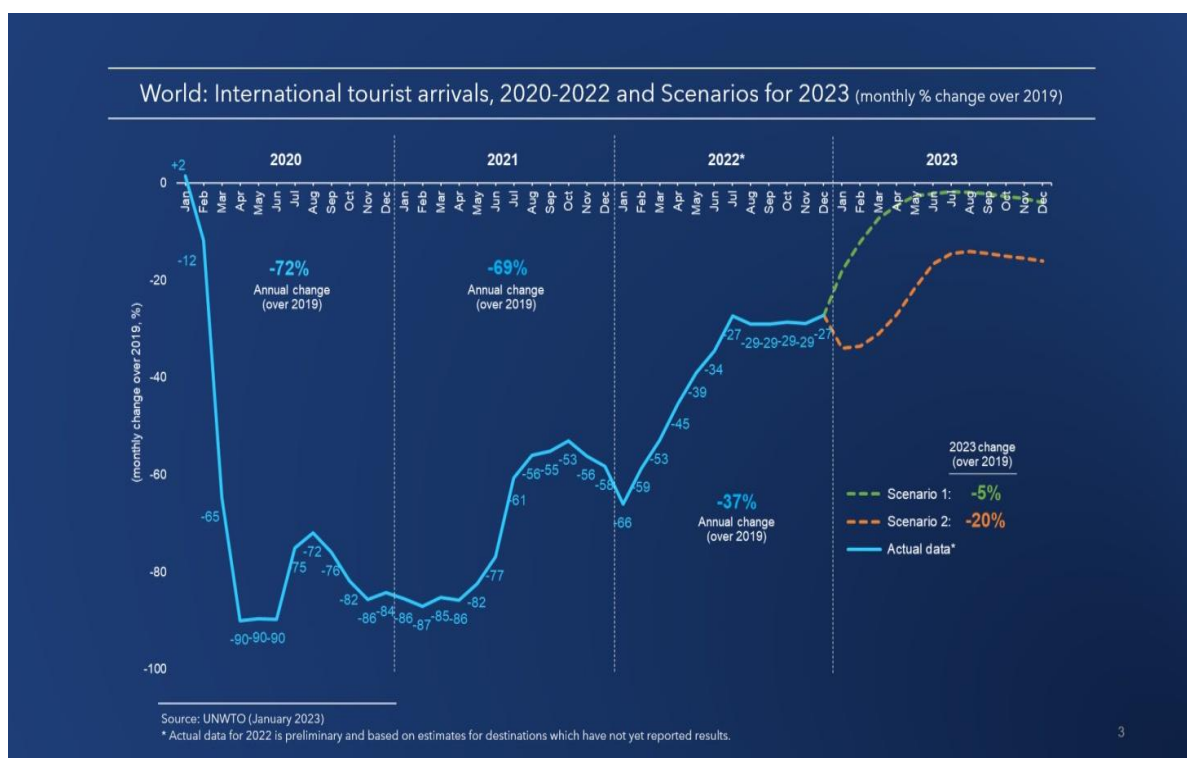

Source: UNWTO (January 2023)

The Indian government has launched a number of steps to increase domestic tourism and international arrivals and recover from COVID-19's negative effects. One of the major campaigns started was the "Dekho Apna Desh" project, which received significant publicity on the Ministry's social media accounts, website, and by Domestic India Tourism offices. It was introduced by the Ministry of Tourism in January 2020. In order to stay in touch with the stakeholders and promote domestic travel, the Ministry has been holding webinars, quizzes, and pledge discussions. To enable and aid domestic and international travelers with information on travelling in India and to give them a feeling of safety and security, the Live-Chat and Toll-Free Multilingual Tourist Information Helpline with a 24*7 hour service in 12 languages, including Hindi and English, was launched in February 2016.

For the purpose of publicizing and promoting the 'Dekho Apna Desh' and 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' initiatives at various locations and cities across the nation, the Ministry organised a number of domestic events, submissions, and webinars through its social media handles. Under the post-Covid marketing campaign, there is a tagline, "India is a Safe and Secure Tourist Destination, Ready to Welcome Global Tourists." The ministry produced two audiovisual works, including films in English, Hindi, and nine other languages. The Ministry's various social media accounts were used for the majority of the promotion. To ensure a strong online presence, the Ministry of Tourism currently has two sets of social media handles, @incredibleindia and @tourismgoi, each with accounts on six different social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and KOO for the Ministry of Tourism, and Facebook, Twitter, and KOO for Incredible India.

Diverse tourism-related items and themes, including heritage tourism, UNESCO World Heritage sites, weekend getaways, culinary tourism, and lesser-known Indian places, have been promoted on social media. Specialties in tourism include leisure travel, food travel, handicraft travel, adventure travel, sustainable travel, wildlife travel, season travel, fairs and festivals, etc. Successful efforts were made to engage influencers through virtual live sessions in order to increase the reach and highlight different tourism products and locations. Additionally, steps were taken to plan 'Videography Contests' and 'Photography Contests' on a number of occasions in order to boost engagement, make Social Media pages more dynamic, and present the unique user-generated content. Further, all promotional activities were streamed live on all of the company's social media accounts. The Social Media handle would aid in forming the proper culture among the youth and would create awareness and knowledge about tourism opportunities at an early stage. It will educate youth about the country's various cultures and geographical regions. An increase in followers and engagements has been seen as a result of a consistent social media outreach programme conducted through the Ministry's SM handles.

Source: UNWTO (January 2023)

The Ministry is putting into practice a number of strategies to encourage sustainability in the travel and tourism sector. In addition, eco-friendly accommodations like house stays and eco-resorts are becoming more popular among tourists visiting India. These lodgings encourage environmentally friendly behaviors like recycling, composting, and the use of renewable energy sources while still giving visitors an authentic experience of Indian culture. Wildlife conservation is an important aspect of sustainable tourism in India. In India, community-based tourism is becoming more and more well-liked as a means of fostering sustainable travel and assisting regional communities. While participating in activities like farming, cooking, and handicraft creation, tourists can learn about the local way of life and culture.

Sustainable tourism has a number of drawbacks despite its potential advantages. These issues include the challenge of striking a balance between economic development, environmental protection, community involvement in tourist development, and social considerations (Hall, 2019), as well as

the high expense of adopting sustainable practices. Its adoption and implementation may be hampered by the lack of knowledge and understanding of sustainable tourism among travelers, businesses, and governments (Buckley, 2012). The implementation of sustainable tourism may also be hampered by a lack of resources, legal obstacles, and stakeholder conflicts (Fennell, 2015).

E-Commerce and Sustainable Tourism Development:

E-commerce can be used as a platform for the sustainable tourism development. Travel, tourism and hospitality sector comprises of many organizations such as tour operations, travel agency, hotels, resorts, DMO, Event Managements and so on. All these organization can contribute for sustainable tourism development through e-business or e-commerce.

1) Government Initiatives: Government is embracing e-commerce digital platforms to transform and organize traditional offline markets. It is taking various initiatives to boost the e-commerce sector in the country such as Start-up India, Digital India, Skill India, Innovation Fund and BharatNet(to grow rural broadband penetration). Various regulatory reforms such as new draft ecommerce policy, the national retail policy and consumer protection rules 2020 showcase the government's inclination towards building this sector further.

2) Evolution Of The Digital Economy Concept: Since first coined in the mid-1990s, the definition of the digital economy has evolved, reflecting the rapidly changing nature of technology and its use by tourism enterprises and consumers.

3) The industry Goes omni-channel: The changing mindset of consumers and greater competition, Hotel industries launches their omni-channel strategies and websites. With the onset of lockdowns, multiple small and medium industries are also ramping up their online presence, Adoption of the omni-channel strategy can help the organized retailers and online players to connect with customers seamlessly through their channel of preference.

4) Increasing use of Deep Tech: E-commerce players continue to invest in technology to cater to the growing number of customers. Some service provider like Agoda, Goibibo, make my trip etc using cutting-edge technologies such as AI/ML, IoT and big data analytics, are helping in application of chatbots, image recognition and recommendation engines which are contributing towards better customer services. Voice/image enabled search is helping to tap the local masses who are not fluent in English language.

5) The Emergence of Super Apps: Leading internet players are looking to transform into super apps, by bringing multiple segments on to a single platform which acts as a gateway to consumers, encouraging consistent customer interaction with the platform, by offering solutions to their daily needs. Indian super app space is being explored by global players, home-grown start-ups as well as established conglomerates such as the Tata Group and Reliance as they foray into multiple consumer segments including e-commerce, fintech, telemedicine and digital services.

6) Continued Consolidation: Consolidation appears to be the theme running across e-commerce companies serving different sectors. Inorganic growth through partnerships, acquisitions and alliances have helped industry players plug digitization gaps, enter new markets, diversify their service offerings and acqui-hire for talent. The industry witnessed reduced M&A activity in 2020 due to the COVID impacted corporate spending.

Future Directions:

Although sustainable tourism in India has advanced significantly in recent years, much more has to be done to assure its long-term viability. It can be put into practice through a variety of techniques, such as certification programme, green projects, and sustainable tourist planning. A framework for evaluating the sustainability of tourism operations and destinations is provided by certification programme like the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's (GSTC) Criteria for Sustainable Tourism (GSTC, 2021).

Encouraging community-based tourism: In addition to promoting cultural preservation, community-based tourism can help local communities economically. By involving them, we can develop and empower them to share their customs and lifestyles with travelers, enriching a greater sense of acknowledgement and respect for local cultures and communities.

Fostering responsible tourism practices is one way to lessen the detrimental effects of tourism on the environment and communities by encouraging travelers to practice responsible tourism behaviors, including recycling, water and energy conservation, and respecting local customs.

Investing in sustainable infrastructure can aid in lowering its carbon footprint and promoting eco-friendly practices. Investments in technologies for water conservation, waste management, and renewable energy, for instance, can support India's tourism industry's sustainable growth.

Promoting public-private partnerships can aid in the development of sustainable tourism by bringing together local communities, tourism firms, and government organizations to collaborate towards a common objective. These collaborations can aid in developing sustainable tourism experiences and products that benefit both visitors and local populations.

Technology's involvement has a major role to play in promoting sustainable tourism in India.E-commerce helps in creating attractive websites that helps destination to attract the tourists.The number of internet users gradually increasing and the number of internet users around the world is estimated to be over 3.5 billion in 2015.This will contribute to the online travel revenues. Ecommerce tools not only connects consumers with suppliers but also creates bridges among consumers and provide pl atform for information exchange (Edgell, 2016).Tourism companies can assess their carbon footprints, pinpoint areas for development, and make better informed sustainability decisions by utilizing technology like big data, AI, and block chain.

Sustainable tourism can support India's economic growth while maintaining its rich cultural and ecological legacy with coordinated efforts from all stakeholders.

Conclusion

A paradigm shift in the patterns of global consumption has been caused by the internet's advancement over time. E-commerce or e-tourism helps in reducing the use of paper, reduce carbon emission, educate tourists about environment conservation, effective marketing strategy tool for community-based tourism. From the review it is evident that e-commerce helps in reducing the consumption of material i.e. by booking tickets online it will reduce the consumption of paper. Growth of e-commerce also influencing travel automation to come up with sustainable mode of transportation that will reduce the carbon emission. The local populace benefits from and is empowered by tourism, a significant revenue-generating sector. The detrimental effects of tourism on the environment, regional cultures, and economy have given rise to the idea of sustainable tourism as a potential remedy. Through the adoption of sustainable practices such as environmental preservation, social responsibility, and economic viability, tourism may be a beneficial force for both economic development and environmental protection. The two main approaches towards social goals were the reduction of poverty and the empowerment of women. Social media has significantly contributed to the promotion of sustainable tourism and its further expansion. Social media has aided in increasing knowledge of sustainable tourism practices, promoting sustainable tourism destinations, and inspiring travelers to make sustainable decisions by offering a forum for communication, education, and collaboration. With the continued development of social media, there are opportunities to use these tools to improve sustainable tourism practices and to develop more immersive and interesting sustainable tourism experiences. For instance, mobile applications can give travelers real-time information on sustainable tourism options and environmental conditions, while virtual and augmented reality technology can offer immersive experiences of sustainable tourism sites and activities. Social media is crucial for tourism marketing because it encourages travelers to select sustainable options and helps promote sustainable tourist destinations. Therefore, if it is marketed, targeting the upper and middle classes would be more fruitful.

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