

# Management of Travel Booking in the Light of Destination Marketing : Evidence from an Alpine Indian State - Sikkim

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## Abstract

India has many idyllic Himalayan hill stations. The formulation of appropriate development and marketing strategy for all those destinations is the need of the hour. Sikkim is a small hilly state with immense potentiality. It is bounded by vast stretches of Tibetan plateau in the North, the Chumbi Valley and the kingdom Bhutan in the East, the kingdom of Nepal in the west, and Darjeeling (West Bengal) in the South. The study has touched upon a number of theoretical and empirical issues relating to the formulation of travel booking and thereby contributing to the destination marketing strategies for the appropriate development of tourism in Sikkim in the backdrop of the present market conditions in India and abroad.

**Keywords:** destination, tourism marketing mix, information management, optional excursion, booking, tourism marketing strategy

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Sikkim is a small hilly state bounded by stretches of Tibetan plateau in the North, the Chumbi Valley and the kingdom of Bhutan in the East, the kingdom of Nepal in the West, and Darjeeling (West Bengal) in the South. Its latitude is 27°30' north and the longitude is 88°30' east. Sikkim is famous for scenic valleys, forests, snow clad mountains, magnificent Buddhist culture and heritage, and peace-loving people. Though small, the environmental, social, and cultural diversities are not so. Some scholars believe that the word Sikkim involves Nepalese dialect, and it refers to a 'new place' or the term has been derived from a Sanskrit word which means a 'mountain crest'. The people of Sikkim have ethnic diversity. The Bhutias came from Tibet, the Lepchas were the aboriginal community, and the Nepalese came from Nepal. When Sikkim was an independent state and faced many invasions by its neighboring countries, the then king took the help of British India to save the State from invasions, and later, gifted some of its region, including Darjeeling to the British Government.

Sikkim is politically divided into four Districts, North (Mangan) being away from a large market of West Bengal, but with immense tourism potentialities. The capital city of Gangtok enjoys the development of infrastructure, all modern civil amenities, access to health and educational facilities, and employment opportunities compared to all other three Districts, South (Namchi), West (Gyashing), and East (Gangtok). North Sikkim is replete with idyllic scenic beauties with mountain stretches; East Sikkim receives a maximum number of tourists, and attractions are Gangtok, Rumtek, Somogo Lake on the way to Nathu La. South Sikkim is famous for its culture and heritage with Samudraptse. Pelling is situated in West Sikkim from where the majestic Kanchendzonga (or Kanchenjunga) can be seen.

This 22nd Indian State (joined the Indian Union in 1975) has over 81% of the total geographical area under the administrative managerial control of the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India. Over 45% of the total geographical area of the State is under tree cover, and nearly 34% of the geographical area is set aside as protected-area network in the form of national park and wildlife sanctuary. Besides, the State is having a wide range of species ranging from 144 species of mammals, 550 bird species, 650 butterflies and moths species, 550 orchids to over 4000 species of flowering plants, and 300 ferns and allies (Economic Survey, Govt. of Sikkim, 2007). The maximum summer temperature is 28 degrees celsius, and the minimum winter temperature is 0 degree celsius. Sikkim has a variety of mineral resources, including coal, limestone, iron ore, graphite, pyrite, and so forth. The temperature at the

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bottom of the valleys (up to 600 meters) situated at lower elevations, particularly during summers, is similar to the monsoon climate. Sikkim is an ecologically fragile region. The State has the responsibility to conserve its rich biological diversity that includes coexistence and protection of over 5000 species of angiosperm (one third of the total national angiosperms). Again, this place has multi-ethnic communities. So, the need for conserving ecological, cultural, and social diversities is not only essential, but imperative as well. All these natural, cultural, and social resources are directly contributing to the unique selling proposition (USP) of destination marketing on which almost all market planning and strategic orientation depends. Tourism as a product has been defined as an amalgam of three main components: The attractions of the destination, the facilities at the destination, and the accessibilities of it (Buhalis, 2000). The core products of Sikkim are presented in the Exhibit 1.

**Exhibit 1. Tourism Product Mix Contributing to the Search for Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of Sikkim**

Product Mix of Sikkim				
..... Move towards sustainable development approaches.....				
Leisure and Recreation	Heritage, pilgrimage and tradition	Adventure and Sports	Alternative forms of tourism	Special interest tourism
- Holidays and relaxation	-Buddhist pilgrimage	-River rafting	-Ecotourism	-Fairs and festivals
- Increasing trend of MICE tourism in Sikkim as a resort area	-Exotic, quaint Buddhist heritage, culture, and traditions	-Mountaineering and rock climbing -Kayaking	-Rural tourism -Sustainable tourism	-Researchers, scholars, students or such other tourists in groups or individually
-Pleasure, entertainment, and sightseeing	-Buddhist village areas, its uniqueness	-Trekking, camping		-Ethnic tourism

Source: P.R. Kotler, J.T. Bowen, & J. Makins (2002). Marketing for hospitality and tourism. New Jersey : Prentice Hall.

The planning and development of a destination are involved in a large degree in the physical resource or product components of tourism. Equally important are analyses of potential visitors, costs of development, pricing policies, competitive destinations, and other financial aspects to analyze feasibilities of development. Effective destination marketing is also considering the environmental, cultural, and social aspects. Destination marketing considers almost all steps involved in the market planning process, but factors involved in each process are different and often varied, keeping in view its relevance and importance.

Sikkim has given a nod for the construction of two additional rooms in 720 houses in the entire four districts primarily to promote village tourism and home-stay facility. For the construction of each room, ₹ 7 lakhs is to be spent, and this scheme will boost village tourism. After becoming the 22nd State of the Union Government of India in the year 1975, rapid developmental activities ushered in a new era of tourism in Sikkim. Increased accessibility by roadways and air transport, rapid socioeconomic development, competitive advantages both from the side of the destination and geographical proximity to tourist generating states contributed to the development of tourism in Sikkim. After 2008 onwards (Table 1), foreign tourist arrivals in Sikkim experienced a small downfall and was supposed to recover in the coming years. However, the domestic tourist market has been growing with small fluctuations as compared to the national figures.

Recognizing the increased tourist arrivals, accommodation units were set up in Gangtok and a few towns mostly by outsiders without proper land-use planning and architectural design. Today, the local entrepreneurs are interested to invest in accommodation. Most of the hotels in Sikkim are not classified by star categories, though the market for high-quality hotels and conference hotels has been increasing. Mayfare Hotel (five star), Elgin Hotels & Resorts (mostly four star or three star), Ginger Hotels of Taj Group, Hotel Central, Hotel Rendezvous, Tashi Delek, Saikripa and its group (three star) with MICE tourism facility are making good business, and their customers are up-growing high class Indians and foreign tourists. Almost ever increasing tourist arrivals till 2008-09 (Table 1) and increasing dependence on tourism as a powerful industry and employment generating source, restoration of peace and harmony, hospitable people, plenty of diversified natural and cultural resources, and typical interest of the people of India to discover the unknown hidden State of Sikkim brought about a new dimension for the development and marketing of tourism in Sikkim.

**Table 1: Inflow of Foreign and Domestic Tourists in Sikkim**

Year	Foreign Tourist	Domestic Tourist Arrivals	Total tourist Arrivals
1991	6187	61360	67547
1992	6761	68146	74907
1993	7132	75091	82223
1994	6888	92435	99323
1995	5866	98555	104421
1996	8642	145256	153898
1997	8068	116500	124568
1998	6111	133158	139269
1999	8563	139085	147648
2000	8794	144203	152997
2001	7757	146923	154680
2002	8433	160789	169222
2003	10954	176759	187713
2004	13528	233285	246813
2005	16518	251744	268262
2006	18049	302486	320535
2007	17837	331182	349019
2008	21162	615668	636830
2009	17730	615628	633358
2010	20757	700011	720768
2011	23945	552453	576398

Source: Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation, Government of Sikkim

## Literature Review

Greater customer satisfaction might result in a greater intention to repurchase or return and recommend. A destination and its marketing is largely reflected in booking and its sector specific analysis. It will largely cover the strategies of NTOs, DTOs, and so forth. Buhalis (2000) defined the term destination as an amalgamation of tourism products offering an integrated experience to consumers. Wahab and Pigram (2005) described tourism destination marketing as a management process through which the national tourist organizations and/or tourist enterprises identify their selected tourists, actual and potential, communicate with them to ascertain and influence their wishes, needs, motivations, likes and dislikes on local, regional, national, and international levels, and formulate and adapt their tourist products accordingly in view of achieving optimal tourist satisfaction and thereby fulfilling their objectives. Tourism destination marketing has traditionally been heavily oriented towards the promotion function, and the same tendency will, no doubt, continue well into the future. However, growing recognition of the need for a more holistic approach to destination management in the era of "new tourism" (Poon, 1998) has led destination marketing organizations to focus on achieving greater destination competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003) in order to improve the probability of success on a sustainable basis. Destination marketing mix is a mixture of destination elements, which interact and complement each other to produce targeted results, may be as authentic visitor experience, or high profitability, or some other broad objectives. That is why destination marketing is unlike product marketing and is not easily achievable or controllable as far as its planning, control, and other marketing management issues are concerned.

Place marketing consists of multifunctional functionalities and comprises attractions; and so do a hotel/guest house, the transport sector, and so forth (Howie, 2003). Howie (2003) also intended to stratify the destination elements in explaining place marketing. Pike (2002) opined that tourism is just one function within the multi-functional place to be managed on the basis of professionally determined norms and political decisions about the role it should play in the

wider spatial setting for the attainment of municipal goals. According to the author, there are several philosophies for place management. Preservationist philosophy emphasizes the natural and cultural resources and their intrinsic values in determining the nature of the place; their preservation is a measure of success. Redistribution philosophy asserts the unacceptability of social exclusion, that is, the existence of a sizable percentage of the place's population who are excluded from social and other basic 'rights' on account of limited educational and other opportunities, which determine their earning power. The marketing philosophy is superficially similar to that of planning, but is expressed in this way (Fuchs & Ashworth, 2004).

Srivastava and Mishra (2012) differently analyzed the nature and scope of traditional and modern internet marketing, as Internet marketing primarily does not accept the geographical barrier. Though cost-effective, the budget has been increasing year after year in many business houses. In their study, the researchers studied Internet awareness, consumer decision making processes, reliability of Internet advertisements, and its relevance at present. In his article "Word of Mouth in the World of Marketing," Arora (2007) provided an understanding of its positive and adverse effects with the proportionate formal and informal communications in most of the business firms. The management and control within and outside a business organization is found to be very important here. He also addressed the factors responsible for word of mouth communication with the combined effects through a model integrating marketing activity.

According to Tata's consultancy report (2005), the tourism master plan for the State projected a gradual growth of tourism-related activities until 2011, though the projected figure for domestic travelers has already exceeded. However, the foreign tourist arrivals did not show any significant progress as compared to their domestic counterparts. The growing concern was the impact of the accelerated tourist flow with an ill-equipped infrastructural status. The report expressed concern about the State receiving more low-end budget tourists. Atreya, S. (2009) disclosed that Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has asked the Forest Department of Sikkim to improve its absorption capacity, otherwise the projected ₹ 357-crore loan for sustainable development of Sikkim forest resources could be cut down by half. The official of JICA said that the non-availability of geographical information such as scientific data or maps in Sikkim and poor maintenance and operation of assets are important reasons for such a decision. He highlighted the non-eligible financing components of JICA for the proposed project - such as payment for land acquisitions, resettlement, military components for big constructions inside national parks besides general administration expenses, taxes and duties, compensation and other indirect items, and such technical issues for reducing the funds. The JICA official also stressed the need to have private sector participation in the promotion of Sikkim Tourism.

The access to information and communication system, convenience in retrieving information, degree of reliability, degree of friendliness with a specific type of mode providing information need to be evaluated and interpreted while formulating travel booking strategies for a destination. A destination is composed of several elements, that is, attraction, accommodation, transportation, and other services. So, booking for a destination or a specific element therein needs to be addressed. Travel booking is the core area of revenue for the tourism business. This area has been changing with the changes in technology, marketing processes, product features, attributes of personnel, and so forth. Booking has acquired an increased importance in modern days with scientific customer contacts and relationship management.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are as follows :

- 1) To identify the tourists' preference(s) of travelling to Sikkim.
- 2) To measure the differences between domestic tourists and their foreign counterparts with regard to the preferences for the duration of trip, purpose of visit, optional excursion, and pricing.
- 3) To identify and measure the preference given to various sources of information tourists considered before visiting Sikkim.

## Methodology

For collecting the data from primary sources, two sets of structured questionnaires were made both for tourists and for community members belonging to Gangtok, Namchi, and Mangan representing three districts of Sikkim. Observations, schedules, and interview methods were followed for the abovementioned purpose. A total of 475 customers were contacted, and the overall response rate was 42.32% (we received 201 completed, usable questionnaires). Secondary data was collected from the reports of Department of Tourism, Govt. of India, and those of Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation (STDC). The time period of the study was from 2008 - 2012.

As a method to test the consumers' preference for selecting various sources of information regarding Sikkim, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic is  $(D) = \max [F_o(x) - S_n(x)]$ .  $F_o(x)$  indicates the cumulative frequency distribution under null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and  $S_n(x)$  is the observed cumulative frequency distribution, with a random sample of  $n$  observations. Here, we determine the cumulative theoretical distribution under the null hypothesis and arrange the observed frequencies as a cumulative distribution by pairing each value of  $S_n(x)$  with comparable  $F_o(x)$ . For each pair of the cumulative distributions, determine  $[F_o(x) - S_n(x)]$ . For a given level of significance, determine the critical value for  $D$ , and reject the null hypothesis if the calculated value of  $D$  is greater than the critical value of  $D$ .

Kendall's coefficient of concordance, a non-parametric test is used to determine the degree of association among several ( $k$ ) sets of ranking of  $N$  objects or individual tourists. It is considered an appropriate measure of studying the degree of association among three or more sets of rankings. This descriptive measure of the agreement has special applications in providing a standard method of ordering objects according to consensus when we do not have an objective order of the objects. The basis of this test is to imagine how the given data would look if there were no agreement among the several sets of rankings, and then to imagine how it would look if there were perfect agreement among all the sets. In the present study, the consistency of ranks (Maximum disagreement = 0 and Minimum is 1) were tested several times with the appropriate  $p$ -value. While computing Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance ( $W$ ), the mean of rank ( $R_j$ ) was taken into note with appropriate consistency.

Here,

$$s = (R_j - \bar{R}_j)^2$$

$$W = \frac{\frac{s}{12k^2(N^3 - N)}}{12}$$

$k$  = no. of sets of rankings, that is, the number of respondents,

$N$  = number of objects ranked,

$\frac{1}{12k^2(N^3 - N)}$  = maximum possible sum of square deviations, that is, the sum  $s$  which would occur with perfect agreement among  $k$  rankings.

## Hypotheses

To understand the changing aspects of travel booking management and destination marketing, the first and foremost question is to know whether a preference exists or not. More specifically, the null hypotheses are:-

**$H_{01}$ : There is no preference of tourists as and when selecting Sikkim as a tourist destination.**

**$H_{02}$ : There is no preference for selecting a source of information before visiting Sikkim.**

## Empirical Results and Discussion

The analysis of booking management and destination marketing strategy is broadly divided into three parts contributing to the effective equilibrium. These areas are the preference of tourists for core attraction, source of information and its access and use, and travel booking and its distribution.



➤ **Preferences for the Purpose of Visit :** When tourists were asked to put their opinion on the basis of a simple rank to know the reasons for traveling to Sikkim, majority of the tourists unanimously accepted leisure and recreation as the first and foremost reason behind their visit. It was further strengthened with a non-parametric Kolmogorov - Smirnov test to verify whether there was any preference with respect to activity for which they (the tourists) visited Sikkim. The result is positive, and hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. The “preference” of tourists was ascertained with the value of  $D$  (i.e. 0.348 for leisure and recreation). As  $n$  is larger than 35, the critical value of  $D$  is given by  $D^* = 0.096$ , which is greater than the tabulated value. The second priority was also given to the same reason - to accompany friends and relatives during the trip. This is because of a significant trend among the domestic tourists - they accompany their relatives and family members or friends and jointly bear the travel expenditure. Besides, a significant number of tourists travel to Sikkim for ecotourism (11.44%) and adventure tourism (9.95%), and these preferences were placed at the third and fourth positions respectively. This market trend clearly advocates a leisure-centric, institutionalized form of development that may result in a radiation of mass tourism into other parts of the State. So, there is a high possibility of the same development-replica in other areas considered for tourism development.

Another significant noticeable trend came to light with the mean of rank (Table 2) for recording the respondents' purpose of travelling to Sikkim. The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was “individual wise ranks are consistent”. The result ( $p$  value = 1.000) of ranks given by all 201 respondents was highly insignificant. The same was true for all such tests conducted separately for domestic tourists and international tourists respectively, but the purpose(s) of travelling to Sikkim considered by foreign tourists were different. Foreign tourists visited Sikkim for ecotourism, adventure tourism, special interest tourism, and to visit Buddhist heritage sites, and for pilgrimage. The opinion survey also indicated that most of the foreign tourists considered Sikkim as one of the cheap destinations, but in the same vein, they felt that the costs of services and facilities were inflated and were not at par with their expectations.

**Table 2. Mean of Ranks Showing the Reasons for Travelling to Sikkim**

Purpose	All tourists		Domestic Tourists		Foreign Tourists	
	Mean of Ranks	Ranks	Mean of Ranks	Ranks	Mean of Ranks	Ranks
Holidaying, leisure, and recreation	1.64	1	1.49	1	3.09	2
Social (visiting friends and relatives, for a wedding etc.)	5.89	8	5.71	7	7.28	8
Religious and pilgrimage	5.82	7	5.79	8	5.84	6
Adventure and sports	4.17	4	4.35	4	3.13	3
Providing holiday opportunity to spouse/ family/attendant	4.11	3	3.76	2	6.30	7
Eco tourism	3.89	2	4.06	3	3.19	4
Rural tourism	5.47	6	5.54	6	4.28	5
Special interest	5	5	5.29	5	2.89	1

Source: Field Survey Note: Statistical analysis has been made using SPSS statistical package

The preference was also noticeable when tourists were asked to pick the most preferred type of tour from among three mostly used options, that is, independent travel, inclusive travel (with transportation and accommodation only), and all inclusive travel. Tourists selected inclusive travel as their best option. The same (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) test was used with the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) that 'there is no preference of tour packages among tourists'. The value of  $D$  for inclusive travel is 0.109, which is greater than the tabulated value. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

➤ **Sources of Information and Preferences :** As a majority among all destination stakeholders, tourists were asked as to how they collected information regarding their trip beforehand. Interesting results were observed - the maximum number of tourists (33.83%, 29.85%, and 34.83%) depended upon the Internet and use-net facility as a source of updated, reliable information for accommodation, transportation, and attraction respectively. Informal destination information (IDI) or information gathered from friends, relatives, and other visitors was the next most preferred source of information with 26.86% (21.89%+ 4.97%), 31.84% (20.9%+ 10.94%), and 22.88% (12.93% + 9.95%) for accommodation, transportation, and attraction respectively. This clearly shows that the tourists relied more on informal sources of information for their accommodation than any other source. The Internet was found to be the single

**Table 3. Distribution of Various Sources of Information**

Source of Information	Transportation	Accommodation	Attraction
Guide Book	56 (27.86)	54 (26.87)	58 (28.86)
Print Media	2 (.99)	5 (2.49)	2 (.99)
Television/Radio	5 (2.49)	2 (.99)	3 (1.49)
Internet	68 (33.83)	60 (29.85)	70 (34.83)
Relatives/ Friends	44 ( 21.89)	42 ( 20.9)	26 (12.93)
People Visited (other than Friends/Relatives)	10 (4.97)	22 (10.94)	20 (9.95)
Tourism Department( Offices)	16 (7.96)	16 (7.96)	22 (10.94)

Source: Field Survey Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage of respondents marking the concerned source of information as 1 (being the most important).

**Table 4. Calculated Value of  $D$  for the Priority of Source of Information**

Difference	Guide Book	Print Media	T.V./Radio	Internet	Relatives/ Friends	People already Visited	Tourism Department (Offices)
$[F_0(x) - S_n(x)]$ for Accommodation	0.136	0.002	0.115.	0.081	0.157	0.064	0
$[F_0(x) - S_n(x)]$ for Transportation	0.126	0.008	0.125	0.031	0.097	0.063	0
$[F_0(x) - S_n(x)]$ for Attraction	0.146	0.013	0.115	0.091	0.077	0.034	0

Source: Field Survey. Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage of respondents marking the concerned source of information as 1 (being the most important).

largest source of information for attraction, with a response rate of 34.83% followed by guidebook; friends, relatives, other visitors; and the offices of the department of tourism with percentage scores of 28.86%, 22.88%, and 10.94% respectively. Keeping in view the importance of each source of information, the strategy for sustainable marketing and promotion shall revolve around the weight introduced by percentages (Table 3). Tourists were asked to rank the source of information separately for each principal/ service provider to know their preference and access to the source. This was important for identifying the appropriate mean to use and accordingly give the correct weight. Apparently, it appears that the maximum number of people used the Internet as an appropriate source of information even for all major principals of tourism products in Sikkim. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was done by setting the null hypothesis, that 'there is no preference for selecting a source of information before visiting Sikkim'. Here, we used the same test statistics separately for accommodation, transportation, and attraction. The calculated value of mode is given in the Table 4.

Considering the maximum value of  $D$  in each case, we can conclude that the respondents accorded a priority for the selection of an appropriate source of information when planning to visit Sikkim. However, which one, two, or more sources were given priority for each case cannot be computed by the K-Smirnov test, and as such, mean of ranks ( $\bar{R}_j$ ) was used to compute further ranks for each component of travel from Kendall's coefficient of concordance. The mean of ranks ( $\bar{R}_j$ ) for different sources of information separately for attraction, accommodation, and transportation are given in the Table 5.

Though the number of Internet users in our country is significantly low, yet, the same is not true for the tourism industry and as such, the use of the Internet was the most widely used and preferable source of firsthand information for travellers before visiting Sikkim. The second most user friendly source of prior information was a guidebook for all cases of attraction, accommodation, and transportation. Interestingly, the third rank (3.19) for the source of information regarding accommodation was given to relatives and friends, while the same rank was given to the offices of tourism department(s) for attraction and transportation respectively. For transport and accommodation-related information in or around Sikkim, tourists depended on relatives and friends (3.71) and experienced people (4.05), who were accorded the fourth rank in either case. But the same rank was given to the guidebook as a source of attraction.

**Table 5. Mean of Ranks for Various Sources of Information Collected by Tourists for Visiting Sikkim**

Source of Information	Attraction		Accommodation		Transportation	
	Mean of Ranks	Ranks	Mean of Ranks f	Ranks	Mean of Ranks	Ranks
Guide book	2.5	2	2.89	2	2.64	2
Print media	4.56	5	4.86	6	4.84	5.5
TV/ Radio	5.52	7	6.13	7	5.81	7
Internet	2.36	1	2.56	1	2.50	1
Relatives and Friends	4.35	4	3.19	3	3.71	4
People already Visited	4.92	6	4.05	5	4.84	5.5
Offices of Tourism Department	3.78	3	4.33	4	3.66	3

Source: Field Survey Note: Statistical analysis has been made using SPSS statistical package

The fifth rank was given to print media, people who had already visited Sikkim, and both (5.5) for attraction, accommodation, and transportation respectively.

➤ **Booking and Travel Distribution :** Here, the area is significantly addressing the distribution-related issues and its strategy while justifying convenient points of sales and suitable access to tourists visiting Sikkim. Considering the major problems of other Indian hill stations, four most important problems were incorporated and studied with respect to attraction (place), accommodation, and transportation respectively. The first approach over here was to identify whether an important problem area exists among these four issues or not (Table 6). We used the same test statistic separately for accommodation, transportation, and attraction (Table 7).

The maximum computed value for  $D$  was greater only in the case of attraction, and it expresses that there was a comparative severity. Surprisingly, the maximum values for other cases were less than the critical value (0.096), and as such, we conclude that there was no comparative severity in either case of accommodation and transportation. Kendall's coefficient of concordance was used to test the consistency of ranks at the individual level. Here, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was 'individual wise, the ranks are consistent'. The null hypothesis was accepted as the  $p$ -value was greater than 0.10. The Table 8 depicts the mean of ranks ( $R_j$ ) computed to test consistency of ranks provided by Kendall's coefficient of concordance (Table 8).

It was found that unreliable and misleading information, inhospitable staff, and inaccessible booking counters were among the major problems that were encountered by the tourists. Considering all possible sources of information for

**Table 6. The Severity Rank for Problem(s) Encountered During Booking**

Variables	Unreliable information	Inaccessible booking counter	Unreliable travel agency services	Inhospitable staff
<b>Component with rank one</b>				
Attraction	75	32	74	20
Accommodation	52	58	50	41
Cab/ Coach	43	64	62	32

Source: Field Survey Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage of respondents marking the concerned problem of booking as 1 (being the severest).

**Table 7. Calculated Value of  $D$  w.r.t. Booking Problems Faced by Respondents While Visiting Sikkim**

Difference	Booking Problems While Visiting Sikkim			
	Unreliable information	Inaccessible booking counter	Unreliable travel agency services	Inhospitable staff
$[F_0(x) - S_n(x)]$ for Attraction	0.123	0.032	0.15	0
$[F_0(x) - S_n(x)]$ for Accommodation	0.009	0.047	0.046	0
$[F_0(x) - S_n(x)]$ for Cab/Coach	0.036	0.032	0.091	0

Source: Field Survey



**Table 8. Mean of Ranks for the Problems Faced While Making Bookings While Travelling Through Sikkim**

Booking Problems	Attraction		Accommodation		Cab/Coaches	
	Mean of Ranks	Ranks	Mean of Ranks	Ranks	Mean of Ranks	Ranks
Unreliable information	2.05	1	2.5	3	2.7	3
Inaccessible Booking Counter	2.45	3	2.4	2	1.99	1
Inhospitable Staff	2.32	2	2.28	1	2.29	2
Unreliable Travel Agency Services	3.17	4	2.82	4	3.03	4

Source: Field Survey

Note: Statistical analysis has been made using SPSS statistical Package

attraction, tourists emphasized more on unreliable information as there was a significant gap between the information they were provided and information based on which they actually experienced the visit. For accommodation, inhospitable staff were found to be the major problem as the 'moments of truth' or the process of services provided by the staff of the hotels/resorts was found to be very poor. This is not because the intention of the staff was as such, but because they were not provided the required education and training to handle guests. On the other hand, there is an urgent need for recruiting well trained employees for conducting tours and customer interaction. Adequate number of booking counters were not found in all areas of Sikkim as the development of tourism principal suppliers is largely Gangtok-centric, positioned along very few routes in the State. The tourists were also asked to consider booking counters in West Bengal and other neighboring states. A significant number of respondents combined two or more problems or directly mentioned new problems such as poor guide facility, poor quality of food and beverages, poor hygienic conditions, and other basic infrastructure related problems along with these distribution strategy related issues.

## Conclusion

The preference tests were made separately for the purposes of visit, accommodation, trip pattern (inclusive and independent), and information availability. The preference is found in each case. The mean of ranks ( $\bar{R}_j$ ) were then considered using Kendell's coefficient of concordance separately at each case to measure consistency. Though leisure and recreation were found to be the most important reasons for visiting Sikkim by domestic tourists, the second priority was given to providing company to friends and relatives during the trip. This is because of a significant trend among the domestic tourists, who travel to provide company to their relatives and family members or friends, and jointly shared the expenditure of the trip. This tourist segment largely aggravates the way of high-profit tourism as it is a trap of poor low-profit tourism with less use of sustainable tourism. Though a significant number of tourists traveled to Sikkim for ecotourism (11.44%) and adventure tourism (9.95%) with these being placed at the third and fourth positions respectively, yet, the number is considerably less as compared to the earlier segments. This market trend clearly advocates a leisure-centric, institutionalized form of development that may result in a radiation of mass tourism into other parts of the State with predominating domestic tourist arrivals. So, there is a high possibility of the same development-replica in other areas considered for tourism development.

Another significant noticeable trend came to light with the Kendall's coefficient of concordance. Foreign tourists visited Sikkim for ecotourism, adventure tourism, and special interest tourism and for pilgrimage and visiting Buddhist heritage sites respectively. The opinion survey also indicates that most of the foreign tourists considered Sikkim as one of the cheap destinations, but at the same time, they were of the opinion that costs of services and facilities were inflated and were not as per their expectations. It was noticed that the maximum number of tourists depended on the Internet and use-net facility as a source of updated, reliable information for accommodation, transportation, and attraction respectively. Again, informal destination information was given the second most preference for accommodation, transportation, and attraction respectively. The Internet was found to be the single largest source of information for attraction followed by guidebook, friends, relatives, and other visitors, and the offices of the department of tourism respectively.

Considering all possible sources of information for attraction, tourists emphasized more on unreliable information

as there is a significant gap between the information they are provided with and information based on which they have actually experienced the visit. For accommodation, inhospitable staff were found to be the major problem, and the services provided by the hotels/resorts were found to be very poor. On the other hand, we felt that there is a need for recruiting professionally qualified staff responsible for conducting tours and for customer interaction. Adequate number of booking counters were not found in all areas of Sikkim as the development of tourism principal suppliers were largely Gangtok-centric, positioned along very few routes in the State.

## Managerial Implications

The State needs to incorporate a marketing strategy to target high-class mass/ alternative/adventuresome/ MICE tourists with sustainable orientation. A separate arrival strategy to increase more number of foreign tourists is needed immediately to develop other types of tourism. Marketing strategies should also target true and reliable information equally for all tourism components. Awareness campaigning - that provides details of tourist contact employees/ agents - needs to be done apart from the recruitment of trained tourism or hospitality professionals. A proactive role of the Sikkim tourism department is needed to open new booking counters or information kiosks in Sikkim and other Indian cities in strategic locations to promote new circuits, that is, trek circuits, cultural circuits, and so forth in Sikkim. Finally, to enhance the quality of information that is available, an online grievance cell with help lines needs to be established that will also be watchful and authorized to protect tourists within the purview of common law and some established tourism legislations of the State.

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