PREFERENCE OF TRAVEL COMPANION IN TOUR PLANNING FROM CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR PERSPECTIVE

Sanjukta Ganguly*

Abstract

The main aim of this study is to understand the consumer preference of the travel companion while planning a trip which has a profound impact on his/her decision making while purchasing a travel related product and/or service. The analysis shows family occupies the topmost rank amongst all the available options for an Indian traveller when it comes to choosing travel companion while planning a trip. Therefore, at different stages of decision making, tastes, preferences, safety and security requirements of the family members also play crucial roles. The preference to travel with friends occupies the second rung on the preference ladder for the traveller. Another important observation is the increasing preference of the travellers to travel alone which has given rise to a number of solo travellers. This study also confirms the growing importance of such solo travellers in the tourism industry who need to be catered based on their tastes, preferences, needs and requirements.

Keywords: *Tourism Industry, Consumer Sentiment, Consumer Preference, Travel Companion, Tourism Marketing*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most thriving industries in the world, contributing significantly to the world's overall GDP. Each year, millions of people from across the globe travel several miles away from their homes, in order to see the distant lands, explore the unexplored, gather new experiences and get a taste of their culture. The tourism industry exists in some form or the other in every part of the world, and tourists are found traveling to some of the seemingly most inaccessible places. The entire activity of travelling by a tourist involves a distinct planning process involving recognition of the need for travel, detailed search for information about the various aspects of travel, evaluation of alternatives, decision making/purchasing the tourism products and services (booking tickets/accommodation etc.) based on the five-stage model of consumer behaviour (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). According to vacayholics website, tourism infrastructure has also developed to a huge extent over the years, thus, making it possible to reach and explore the difficult parts of the world (Vacayholics, 2018).

According to the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AIEST), tourism comprises of three distinct elements, viz.

- Involvement in travel of non-residents.
- Stay of temporary nature in the area visited.
- Stay not connected with any activity involving earnings.

The aim of carrying out a particular tourism activity is also of considerable importance. Broadly, based on the aim, tourism can be divided into two categories- educational and leisure. Nevertheless, the line of distinction between the two seems to go on blurring when a visit to an unknown place makes a person learn and enjoy, both at the same time. In a country like India, the different types of tourism that are generally observed includes adventure tourism, business tourism, culinary tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, medical tourism, religious tourism, sports tourism and wellness tourism. However, when looked at from a global perspective, in many other countries of the world, apart from the types already mentioned, the other types of tourism that can be found are birth tourism, dark tourism, doom tourism, drug tourism, genealogy tourism, LGBT tourism, nautical tourism, sex tourism, slum tourism, space tourism, virtual tourism and war tourism (Vacayholics, 2018).

India's Travel & Tourism sector ranks 7th in the world in terms of its total contribution to the country's GDP, as per

* Ph.D. Scholar at Department of Business Management, University of Calcutta, West Bengal, India.
Email: sanjukta.ganguly@gmail.com,

a report by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) published in 2017. In fact, according to the data available with WTTC, Travel & Tourism generated Rs 14.1 trillion (USD208.9 billion) in 2016, which is the world's 7th largest in terms of absolute size, the sum is equivalent to 9.6% of India's GDP (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017).

In consonance with the data stated above, a growing percentage of the Indian travellers are planning and accordingly making the necessary bookings for their holidays/travel much in advance. A major shift in the travel dynamics is also being observed with the change in taste and preferences of the travellers not only in India but across the world as individuals are going beyond the conventional ideas of travelling with a travel partner/partners and are preferring to travel alone in many cases (Goyal, 2017). The fact is further corroborated by various surveys where it has been seen that the trend is particularly gaining popularity among the Indian women (PTI, 2016). This, in fact, is prompting the travel product/service providers to rethink their sales and marketing strategies and redesign as well as customise their products/services along with the changing taste of the consumers.

A recent report published in June 2017 by the Google India and BCG shows that, for a majority of Indian consumers, a vacation is well-thought out event, planning for which begins several weeks in advance. On an average, the travel consumers spend 49 minutes spread over 46 days, visiting as many as 17 different online touchpoints to plan, research, and make a booking. These touchpoints majorly include online travel aggregators aka OTAs (64% reach), search engines (33% reach), and maps (26% reach). 76% gain inspiration to travel from family and friends and word-of-mouth form an important input when it comes to travel bookings. Reviews and ratings from other users also are the single most important criteria to select a certain booking channel.

A survey carried out by Google and BCG for this report further shows that, consumers use a mix of online and offline sources of information during their booking journeys. However, only 12% of the consumers prefer to use offline sources for research. A total of 57% of the consumers believe that online channels give them better deals, while 41% find it more convenient to book online (The Boston Consulting Group & Google, June, 2017). As such, search engines have become a powerful interface that serves as the ''gateway'' to travel-related information as well as an important marketing channel through which destinations and tourism enterprises can reach and persuade potential visitors (Xiang, Wö ber, & Fesenmaier, 2008). Hence, it becomes essential for the travel products/service providers to understand the customer psyche and preferences to design their offerings to suit the customer taste. Once a potential traveller recognises his need or longing for travel, the planning process starts.

This research work primarily aims to understand the preference of companions by the Indian travellers while planning to go on a trip. The study would be helpful in understanding the preferences of the consumer based on which marketing campaigns and product/service offerings can be designed and re-designed.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature available on this topic is largely insufficient as not much research work has been carried out in this area to understand the tourist's choice of travel companion which in turn, determines his choice of purchase of a particular tourism product/service. However, Susan Horner and John Swarbrooke (2016) have written that the tourism product must be designed or amended to reflect consumers' needs and wants. One of the key objectives for any tourism organisation is the product positioning. The way in which a particular product or service is defined by consumers on important attributes, it occupies a place in the consumers' minds according to that (Kotler & Armstrong, 2004). Hence, an organisation must understand its consumers' needs and wants before it can correctly position its products and services in relation to competitors' products (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2016).

Tourism is predominantly a service industry; therefore, there are inherent challenges of service marketing that affect how the tourism product is communicated to the consumer public. The tourism and hospitality aspects have become key global economic activities as expectations with regard to the consumer's use of leisure time have evolved, attributing greater meaning to the consumer's free time. As a result, marketing has potentially greater importance in tourism than in other industries but this potential is not always fulfilled. A major reason for such unfulfilled potential lies in most tourism marketing focusing on the destination or outlet (in other words the products being offered) and lacking focus on the consumer (Seba, 2012).

Studies revealed that a destination choice by the tourists depends on the interaction of an individual's beliefs about a destination's attributes and his or her motives for pleasure travel and constraint factors. The beliefs about a destination's attributes that satisfy a potential traveller's specific motives are the 'facilitators' while those which are not congruent with his or her motives are seen as 'constraints' or 'inhibitors' (Chon, Pizam, & Mansfeld, 2000).

Luiz Moutinho in his paper titled 'Consumer Behaviour in Tourism' published in the European Journal of Marketing (1987) has also opined that the analysis of consumer behaviour requires the consideration of various processes internal and external to the individual. To understand behaviour, it is necessary to examine the complex interaction

of many influencing elements which include determinants of behaviour, culture and reference group influences, the relationships between individuals and their environments, perceived risks, and family decision processes (Moutinho, 1987). Another study has claimed that Consumer perceptions and preferences should be the basis for marketing and consumer policy. Vacations as a 'product' are partly 'given' and partly man-made. A recommended approach is to study the behaviour of tourists: decision-making, vacation activities, and/or complaining behaviour (Raaij, 1986).

On a broader perspective, consumer choice is portrayed as an ego-involving sequence of cognitive, affective and conative changes, which precedes and predetermines the purchase/no purchase outcome on which an individual's mood, emotions and attitude have major roles to play. Travelling companions and other passengers seem to influence an individual's mood, emotions and attitude towards travel service experiences to a considerable extent (Crouch, Perdue, Timmermans, & Uysal, 2004). However, apparently there is a dearth of any existing literature on the preference of travel companion of a traveller during his travel planning stage which influences the traveller's decision making regarding various aspects which include his/her destination choice, accommodation choice, transport choice, preference of food, preference of tourist activities, his/her need for safety and security etc.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Understanding companion preference of the traveller while planning a tour is one of the most important factors instrumental in studying the consumer preferences, which have important marketing implications. This is particularly helpful in designing effective tourism information systems and for implementing successful marketing campaigns. Moreover, knowledge about the tourist preferences can help the marketers add value to their offerings by incorporating the preferred combination of features. This will in turn, facilitate delivery of high customer value and satisfaction (Seba, 2012). In addition, while the tourism boards are already using a number of planned and controlled marketing activities, this study also aims to provide some useful insights about the customer/tourist preferences and help them deliver the desired product/service package.

One important limitation in the existing literature on tourist preferences is the lack of understanding of the traveller's preference of companion while planning a trip. This being an influencing factor determining the travellers' decision making while purchasing a tourism product/service, the current study is also aimed at providing important insights in developing marketing strategies for specific tourism products/services.

OBJECTIVE & METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to understand the traveller's preference of travel companion while planning a trip which in turn influences the traveller's decision making in purchasing the tourism products and/or services.

The research methodology was developed after considering the research objectives and the purpose of research. A closed ended questionnaire was formulated to collect primary data from the travellers/consumers. For this research purpose, a combination of both primary and secondary data have been used.

The data collection was that of survey research. To gain professional insights for this research, primary data was collected from 250 respondents living across different metro cities in India who are consumers of tourism products/ services and have social media presence. These respondents belong to different age groups ranging from 20-30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60 and 60+. The survey tool primarily used for collection of the responses was a questionnaire floated on www.surveymonkey.com. A structured closed-ended questionnaire was sent to the respondents and responses were collected over a period ranging from February 1, 2018-February 28, 2018. The sampling technique utilised for this study is simple random sampling (SRS).

Data was collected from respondents via www.surveymonkey.com where the respondent had to click on a questionnaire link generated by surveymonkey. The link was sent to the respondents via Email, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. Data has been presented in this study using pie charts, bar charts, percentage distribution and statistical tables. Some data for this study have been collected as Likert-type item data. Likert-type items involve single questions that use some aspect of the original Likert response alternatives. While multiple questions may be used in a research instrument, there is no attempt to combine the responses from the items into a composite scale (Boone & Boone, 2012).

FINDINGS

The findings of this research project reveals important information about the travel consumer's choices and thereby helps in understanding consumer sentiments.

In order to understand the traveller's preference of travel companion, it was necessary to know whom the traveller normally prefers as a travel companion during his travel planning. Each respondent was presented with five options-family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and alone to which

the respondents were given options to respond against one or more than one options. Out of all the combinations possible, the respondents were found to respond against only 14 combinations (Fig. 1). An interesting trend shows, most of the travellers prefer to travel with their family and friends which constitute 34% of the total responses. This is followed by 30% respondents who prefer to travel only with their families while 9% said, they prefer to travel with family, friends, colleagues as well as alone. Those who chose to travel with family, friends, colleagues and neighbours comprises 8% respondents, whereas 6% travel with family,

friends and colleagues and 4% prefer to travel with family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and alone. Those who chose to travel with family, friends and alone constituted 3% of the total respondents. On the other hand, those who chose to travel with family and alone stood at 2%. The share of only lone travellers amongst the total respondents stood at 2% and those who chose to travel only with friends was also at 2%. Respondents who travel with family, friends and neighbours as well as those who travel with family and colleagues each stand at 1%.
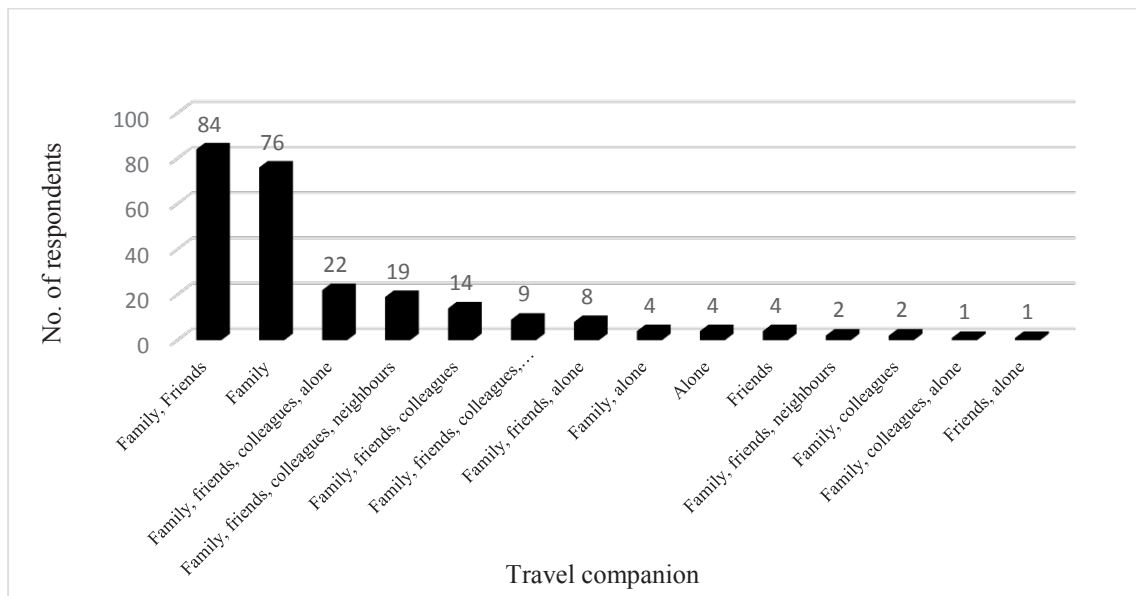

Fig. 1: Preference of Travel Companion

When analysed taking individual options into consideration irrespective of the different combinations they appear in, it is observed that while choosing travel partners, consumers generally prefer to travel with family (31%) the most, while

25% preference is given to friends as travel partners (Table 1). A very interesting observation shows that, in 19% of cases the travellers prefer to travel alone, followed by colleagues (17%) and neighbours (8%).

Table 1: Respondents' Preferred Compositions of Travel Companion and Analysis of Preferred Companion Choice

Preferred Combinations	No. of Respondents	In %	a	b	c	d	e
ab	84	33.60%	a	b			
a	76	30.40%	a				
abce	22	8.80%	a	b	c		e
abcd	19	7.60%	a	b	c	d	
abc	14	5.60%	a	b	c		
abcde	9	3.60%	a	b	c	d	e
abe	8	3.20%	a	b			e
ae	4	1.60%	a				e
e	4	1.60%					e
b	4	1.60%		b			

Preferred Combinations	No. of Respondents	In %	a	b	c	d	e
abd	2	0.80%	a	b		d	
ac	2	0.80%	a		c		
ace	1	0.40%	a		C		e
be	1	0.40%		b			e
Preferred cases (%)			11 (31%)	9 (25%)	6 (17%)	3 (8%)	7 (19%)
Order of preference			1	2	4	5	3

a) With family; b) With friends; c) With colleagues; d) With neighbours; e) Alone.

Since, the preference of companion during travel for a consumer may depend on a number of factors, the respondents were posed with a question to rate five most important factors that influence their decision to prefer a particular travel companion/s or prompt them to travel alone. These five factors were purpose of travel (whether leisure or business tour), age (traveller's own age and age of companion/s), taste and temperament compatibility (whether the traveller and his/her companion/s harbour similar tastes and preferences), social values compatibility and custom (whether the tour being planned is a routine holiday or a religious tour or a ritualistic tour). The ratings were to be made on a five-point scale where 1 corresponds to 'Influences completely', 2 stands for 'Influences very much', 3 means 'May or may not influence', 4 means 'Doesn't influence much' and 5 means 'Doesn't influence at all'.

The data is collected as Likert-type items as single questions that use some aspect of the original Likert response alternatives. Analysis of the data collected from the respondents are summarised and furnished in Table 2:

Table 2: Analysis of Ratings Given by the Respondents to the Factors Influencing their Preference of Travel Companion/ No Companion (In Percentage)

Factors of Influence	Influences completely	Influences very much	May or may not influence	Doesn't influence much	Doesn't influence at all
Purpose of Travel (leisure/professional)	36%	29%	19%	9%	7%
Age (Own age and age of travel companion)	32%	36%	16%	9%	7%
Taste and temperament compatibility	34%	32%	17%	9%	9%
Social values compatibility	29%	32%	18%	12%	10%
Custom (Eg., Routine holiday/religious tour/ritualistic tour etc)	38%	30%	17%	8%	7%

When asked to rate on a five-point scale about how much influence the *purpose of travel* has on a travel consumer's companion choice, 36% of the total respondents said, their choice is completely dependent upon the travel purpose, primarily whether they are going for a leisure holiday or a business tour, etc. A total of 29% respondents said, the purpose of travel influences very much their choice of the travel companion or no companion while 19% said, the purpose of travel may or may not influence their choice. A comparatively lesser number of respondents constituting 9% of the total sample said, the purpose doesn't influence their choice much while 7% said, they are not influenced at all by the purpose of travel factor.

When it comes to choosing travel companion, *age* also plays a pivotal role in many cases, which involves age of the traveller as well as the age of the travel companion. Out of the total sample, 32% said age influences their decision completely, 36% said, age influences their choice very much while 16% said, age may or may not play any significant role in influencing their travel companion. 9% said, age doesn't influence their decision much while 7% said age doesn't influence their decision at all.

When asked to rate *taste and temperament* compatibility as a factor on a five point scale, 34% respondents opined that this factor influences them completely to decide on their companion/s or no companion. 32% said, that this factor influences them very much, 17% said, this factor may or may not influence them, 9% said, this factor does not influence them much while another 9% said, it does not influence them at all.

So far as *compatibility of social values* are concerned, 29% said they completely consider compatibility of social values while choosing a travel companion, 32% said this factor influences them very much, 18% said, this may or may not influence them, 12% said this factor doesn't influence much while 10% said, this doesn't influence their decision at all.

Custom also is considered an important factor, which includes whether it is a routine holiday tour, or a religious tour or ritualistic tour etc. Ratings show, 38% people decide who their travel companion will be or if they want to travel solo based completely on the custom factor. 30% respondents said, this factor influences them very much,

17% said, this factor may or may not influence, 8% said, this doesn't influence much while remaining 7% said, this factor doesn't influence them at all. Considering data of complete sample of all respondents, descriptive statistics parameter scores are calculated and tabulated below (Table 3).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics Scores Measuring the Amount of Influence of the Various Factors on the Travel Consumers

	Purpose of Travel	Age	Taste and temperament compatibility	Social values compatibility	Custom
Mean	2.232	2.236	2.284	2.416	2.168
Median	2	2	2	2	2
Mode	1	2	1	2	1
Standard Deviation	1.230	1.201	1.269	1.281	1.221
Kurtosis	-0.333	-0.121	-0.366	-0.661	-0.111
Skewness	0.790	0.868	0.808	0.639	0.904

From Table 3, it is observed that, modal score of purpose of travel factor is 1 with skewness of 0.790 which indicates a complete influence. Mean and median values of 2.232 and 2, respectively also support this value. For the age factor, modal value is 2 with mean and median values of 2.236 and 2 with skewness 0.868 which all hint towards this factor having a heavy influence on the consumers. In case of taste and temperament compatibility, again the modal value is 1 with mean and median values of 2.284 and 2, respectively with a positive skewness of 0.808 which all support the fact that taste and temperament compatibility is indeed a very influencing factor for the consumers in their decision making. Again, social values compatibility factor has a modal value of 2. The mean and median scores stand at 2.416 and 2 for this factor while skewness score is 0.639. This indicates that, while choosing a travel companion, compatibility of social values is also an important factor for the traveller. Descriptive statistic scores for the custom factor shows modal value at 1 and mean and median scores at 2.168 and 2, respectively with skewness 0.904 which also indicates this factor to be an important influencing factor in his/her decision making.

OBSERVATIONS

It is clear from the analysis that, so far as the Indian social structure is concerned, travelling with family and friends still remains to be the most preferred option for the Indian tourists while planning a trip. In fact, an average Indian traveller considers his/her family members to be the most preferred travel companions even if the traditional joint family has significantly disintegrated over the recent decades, followed by friends. In Indian context, the family structure includes spouse and children. In many cases, it includes parents, in-laws as well as close relatives. Indians are found to be the most family-oriented travellers globally

who prefer destinations that offer fun activities for all, according to a British Airways survey. As per this survey, "Sixty-four per cent Indians feel the availability of family fun activities is the most important factor when choosing a holiday destination," the 'Travel Habit Survey' by British Airways has revealed (PTI, 2016).

The most striking observation seems to be the surge in the number of lone/solo travellers, which ranks 3rd so far as the consumer preference is concerned. In keeping with the trend noticed on a global basis, number of lone travellers in India has also risen significantly over the years. Solo Travel statistics and trends based on statistics drawn from a variety of travel industry studies mentioned in *Solotravelworld* website shows, in the world, roughly one in four people wishes to travel alone in 2018. This is according to a survey of 2,300 people by marketing firm MMGY Global (Solo Travel Statistics and Data : 2017-2018, 2018). Between 2013 and 2015, the percentage of people polled who travelled on their own grew from 15% to 24% according to the Visa Global Travel Intentions Study 2015 (Dempsey, 2015). In India, this trend is also noteworthy and particularly seen to be growing among women. Solo travel has emerged as one of the most favourable options for Indian women travellers over the last two years with more and more Indian women opting to travel alone (PTI, 2016). This is commensurate with the fact that, the data collected for the research being discussed shows, out of the total number of women travellers who responded to this survey, about 18% revealed that they prefer to travel alone.

Out of the total number of respondents, 17% preferred to travel with colleagues. The reason for this can be accounted for by the fact that in business tours, individuals generally travel with colleagues and in some cases alone. However, with long working hours taking over the modern lifestyle, people are spending more time at their workplaces now-a-

days. Chances of bonding with colleagues on a professional and personal level are also increasing. Therefore, travelling with colleagues occupies a significant fourth position in the list of travel partner preference. However, travelling with neighbours occupies the lowest rung of the preference ladder because in the first place neighbours are almost always a heterogeneous lot often differing drastically in tastes, preferences and choices for food, modes of travel, spots to visit and even time to be spent at various places and several other apparently insignificant but crucial factors. Secondly, travellers would not like to stake a simmering sustained bitterness with neighbours arising out of a few days' tour because one can hardly change one's neighbours for every reason or other even if the reason is valid. More often than not, there is also a further factor of privacy which deters the introvert and the privacy-seeking travellers as much as the caste, community sensitive people to prefer their family as company rather than the neighbours.

Other important observations were made while analysing the factors influencing the consumer's preference for a particular companion/s or his/her choice of travelling solo. It was found that primarily his/her choice of companion or no companion depends on whether it is a holiday trip pertaining to leisure purpose or it is a business tour. In case of leisure trips, travellers usually prefer to travel with family and/or friends while in case of business tours, mostly the travel companions are the colleagues. In many cases, people travel alone when they travel for professional purpose.

Age on the other hand, is an important deciding factor for choosing the companion for travel as people of all age groups generally look for people of contemporary age groups as travel companion. On the other hand, those belonging to older age groups often seek to travel in a group which may comprise of companions of younger age groups as well which make them feel safe and secured. In fact, lack of a travel partner or travel companion may pose an important barrier to travel for older tourists (Vigolo, 2017).

People generally like to travel with companions who harbour similar tastes, preferences and temperament. This helps them to bond better and have enriching experiences during the travel. On the other hand, people with dissimilar taste and preferences can lead to unnecessary difference of opinion and chaos, which thereby may cause disharmony among the travellers. Hence, a major portion of the respondents have opined that, they are highly influenced by this factor while deciding their travel companion. However, absence of such travel partners with similar taste also lead some travellers to opt for travelling solo.

When deciding whom to travel with, social values also play an important role for many tourists. An individual with similar social values, which include similar moral values, trustworthiness, sense of integrity etc. is considered to be a better travel partner by many. Hence, about 32% respondents said, this factor influences them very much while choosing travel companions.

One interesting observation is, custom acts as a very important factor for majority of the travellers when it comes to choosing a travel partner. Studies revealed that, a large number of people go on routine holidays each year. In such cases, family is the most preferred travel companion. However, preferences vary depending on the type of custom as many go on religious tours, ritualistic tours etc. where the travel companions may be different. Hence, this factor plays a pivotal role behind the consumer's choice.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

The most important conclusion that may be drawn from this research study is, in India, people still believe in 'family first' psychology when it comes to choosing travel partners while planning a trip. Hence, customised family holidays designed to suit the taste, preference and requirements of the family should be the most important concern for the marketers when designing their marketing strategies and campaigns.

The other striking observation being the sizeable number of people preferring to travel alone, a major portion of whom constitute women which clearly indicates towards women economic empowerment in the Indian society. Hence, with the evolving taste, economic capability and preferences of this rapidly growing population of lone travellers, marketing strategies and product/service offerings must be designed accordingly. As the composition of travel companion changes for a traveller, his/her requirement set also changes. On the other hand, the travel companion has a major influence on an individual's mood, emotions and attitude towards travel service experiences which governs the traveller's post-purchase behaviour as well.

Hence, it is imperative for the marketer to decide his offerings based on the needs and requirements of not only the traveller alone but his/her travel companions as well to provide an overall satisfying travel experience to the traveller/consumer. Similarly, with lone travel concept gaining popularity across the country, marketers must design special travel packages for them keeping their priorities and needs in mind. Marketers may also take initiatives to identify the various issues faced by the lone travellers while travelling. Plugging those issues with special travel assistance solutions may lead to more opportunities for the marketer as well as encourage the solo travellers to go for more solo travels leading to a win-win situation for both the marketer and the traveller.

Most Indians prefer to go on vacations with their families. Therefore, the marketers as well as product/service providers need to keep in mind the diverse age-related safety and security factors of the consumer while designing

their product/service offerings. This research study leads to the following implications regarding marketing strategy formulation:

- Product/service customisations are to be made based on family compositions.

- Pricing strategies may be designed keeping in mind the consumer preferences. Special discounts may be offered on family bookings.

- With the surge in number of lone travellers across the country, marketers should design campaigns promoting the concept. As Janice Leith Waugh has written in her book 'The Solo Traveller's Handbook: For Those who Love And Those Who Long to go Solo' that solo travel lets one explore who he/she is when no one is looking. At home, family, friends, employers and colleagues influence one's actions. Travelling alone, one can escape the influence of others and live free to make his/her own choices. As one makes one's choices, he/she learns about oneself: how one likes to spend one's time, how one feels about things, his/her personal rhythm. One gets to know oneself better and discover new passions as well as strengths one didn't know he/she had. Along the way one may collect a few souvenirs like new skills and self-confidence (Waugh, 2012). Here, too, the safety, security factors are to be given importance while designing product/service offerings. The travel product/service providers need to seek newer ways to make the travel experiences of lone traveller more interesting, safe and enriching. With a huge market for lone travellers hitherto remaining untapped, there remains an immense potential for the marketers and tourism product/service providers to enter this emerging market. It is also to be noticed that, the economic liberalisation of women has opened up a new horizon for the tourism sector. With more and more women joining the workforce and economic empowerment of women gradually rising, share of women in the group of lone travellers is also taking a leap. Hence, customised offerings for solo women travellers can prove to be particularly beneficial for the travel companies. Tailor-made domestic as well as international holiday packages for solo female travellers keeping their safety and security aspects in view can be designed based on their tastes and preferences.

- Marketing campaigns and strategies should be prepared keeping in mind the factors that influence the travellers' choice of companions, which govern their decision making to a considerable extent.

LIMITATIONS

A few limitations of this research study are summarised as follows:

- Sample size was limited and was restricted to only the metro cities of India due to time and resource constraints.

- When the respondents were presented with the options to respond against the question 'whom does he/she prefer as a travel companion', the option 'family' included spouse, child/children and parents. The study was restricted to India and was conducted on only Indian population where the social structure of family includes spouse, children as well as parents. In western countries, the characteristics of family would differ slightly.

- The respondents were not given options of expressing their preference to travel 'only with spouse' or 'child/children' or 'parents' when they expressed preference to travel with 'family'. Here 'family' is considered as a whole unit, which may include spouse, child, parents or a combination of any of them in Indian perspective. This could have led to collection of more in-depth information about the consumer preferences.

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