

Effectiveness of Digital Marketing: Tourism Websites Comparative Analytics Based on AIDA Model

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Abstract

Tourism has become a priority sector in the world with its contribution towards the economic development of the nations. Globally, Kerala is known for its exotic places and their efforts to promote Kerala as a tourist destination. The state as well as the private organisations are taking vigorous promotional efforts to attract large number of visitors throughout the year. At this context, present study was done to compare the Kerala tourism website of the government with its competitors to evaluate the promotional efforts taken by them. The study has adopted AIDA model in digital marketing for measuring the promotional efforts of these websites. For comparison, the web analytics was done using the analytical softwares Alexa and SEMrush. The findings of the study revealed the importance of considering different key performance indicators in AIDA such as number of visitors, unique visitors, bounce rate, average duration of visit, most visited pages and click-through rate to improve the quality of the websites.

Keywords: Kerala tourism, AIDA, Digital marketing, Web analytics, Websites

1.1 Introduction

The revolution in the internet and world wide web began many years ago, which was a breath-taking phenomenon for many. The powerful smartphones, internet and other technologies have given birth to a digital era. There are many giant multinational corporations that came into existence during this era like Amazon, Google, Facebook, Instagram, Uber and so on, who has highlighted the importance of digital relationship with customers. Every day the consumer is bombarded with lots of messages and advertisements through digital platforms and it has become difficult and important for the business to stand out and to get the attention of the audience. The digital platforms are assumed to increase the efficiencies in the consumers information search cost (*Barwise et al, 2002*). Internet- of- things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence etc is expected to make significant transformation in the near future (*Kannan P.K and Li. Hongshuang, 2017*).

Tourism is one among the most prominent industry, where the destinations are promoted through digital platforms. According to the predictions of (GOK, 2012), Asia is expected to have the fastest growing tourist population. In Asia, Kerala has grown as a global tourism destination and has strong potential to attract more tourists to the state (National Geographic Traveller, 2010). Lately, the online digital media has revolutionized the marketing of tourism destinations (Sotiriadis, M.D. and van Zyl, C, 2013). There are many predominant websites like lonely planet, trip advisor, make my trip etc which provides the travellers useful information regarding the various destinations in the world. The tourist arrival has increased over the last few years and the tourism destinations and suppliers depends largely on the precise predictions of the tourism demand (Höpken et al, 2017). These websites were thus able to generate demand for a destination consciously or unconsciously.

There are many travellers who decides on their travel plans using websites like government website, review websites, travel agency websites, accommodation websites and destination organisations websites. So, it is important to compare and analyse the performance of the tourism website of the Kerala government with its competitor's websites. This is because (Porter, 2001) states that as with every tool, internet is also having its own strength, limitations and weaknesses. One of the major problem is that organisations are confused by the excitement of the new medium and they believe that business through internet is about buying and selling. This is not true. They should also explore the issues that are related to their websites and should compare their website with that of its competitors. The performance of the website can be evaluate using different models. One such important model is Attention, Interest, Desire, Action (AIDA) model, which has been widely accepted and adopted among marketing scholars and practitioners in traditional as well as online marketing activities. However, its applicability in online context needs extensive research (Hassan et al, 2015).

There are many online marketing efforts done by the Kerala tourism department. In this context, it is of at most importance to compare and evaluate the performance of the tourism website of the government of Kerala with its competitors. Such an evaluation will definitely give a lot of feedbacks to government to strengthen their web-based marketing and to have improved results. There could be many factors that makes the data analysis difficult (Bansal P et al, 2016). The challenge is to evaluate the difficult data. This raised the interest in the researchers as to compare and evaluate the performance of the Kerala tourism website with its competitors. As the world moves towards internet and digitalization, the e-commerce literature has rarely addressed the measurement of website performance. This paper aims to provide an insight on how tourism website of the Kerala government performs compared to its competitors in the digital platform using the AIDA model. The performance is evaluated using the Website Analytical Tool- SEMrush and Alexa.

1.2 Literature Review

The changes in marketing communication form print media to digital media was drastic. Now people not only use digital medium to shop online but also to get information about the products through various reviews.

1.2.1 AIDA Model

It was in 1898, a theory of communication was developed as Attention, Interest, Desire, Action (AIDA). This study was conducted in life insurance industry and found that there exist four cognitive phases experienced by individual after seeing new idea or new product (*Elmo, 1898*). The first stage is attention. This stage is about creating awareness about the brand in the minds of the consumers. A study was conducted by (*Adrian Durow, 2014*) who used eye tracking hardware to understand the search lists which is getting more attention. He found that the domain names, prominent keywords, award winning, word class and numbers were getting more attention from viewers. The next step is to generate interest in them. For generating interest, it is important to set the target audience, specific information and unique content. Desire is the stage that the customers are convinced that the product/service will satisfy their needs. It is the stage where the trust is created among consumers in the form of user generated reviews, case studies, testimonials and discussions in the forums. Finally, the desire should lead them to action i.e., actual purchase or action in anyway. It is important to make it hassle-free so that the customers will come back (*Bourne, 2015*). In the consumer's buying behavioural model awareness of a product/ service will translate into buying or possessing of the product (*Saxena, 2009*).

This theory was developed many years ago and is widely accepted among researchers even today (*Michaelson and Stacks, 2011; Kojima et al., 2010; Clemente, 2002*). Then the theory was extended to the digital marketing platform (*Ashcroft and Hoey, 2001; Flores, 2014*). AIDA model was applied and studied in the context of social media marketing by researchers such as (*Hassan et al, 2014*). He proposed a strategy for using social media as a marketing tool for small business. AIDA theory was studied on e- banking services at China Construction Bank (CCB) and introduced a new marketing model which presents a new value proposition focusing on practical- teaching innovation and job competency improvement (*Li and H.Yu, 2013*).

1.2.2 Website evaluation

Mostly the studies in website evaluation, has taken into consideration the attitude towards the website. This is the most widely accepted measurement of website effectiveness (*Coyle and Thorson 2001; McMillan et al. 2003*). Moreover, it is also important to check the involvement of the users and many studies like (*Hwang and McMillan 2002*) found a positive relationship between involvement and attitude. For respondents with extensive internet experience, websites can create a strong consumer-

brand relationships (*Thorbjornsen et al, 2002*). It is important to search for algorithms, customer clicks, page views etc which can be called as performance marketing (*Tonkin, Whitmore and Cutroni, 2010*).

Some studies such as (*Cano and Prentice, 1998; Standing and Vasudavan, 2000*) has proposed design and management of tourism websites. If a tourist needs to visit the destination, it is important that the destination should be appealing. Apart from the word- of- mouth of travellers who have visited the destination, internet is the platform where the intended travellers search for the information about the destination. The importance of internet in making the destination appealing was also suggested by (*Uysal, 1994*). There are a set of criteria's that a website should possess to attract tourists to a destination through the website. This includes user friendly (*Ismail, 2002; Al-Mashari and Al-Sanad, 2002*), page design (*Hanna and Miller, 1997; Liu and Arnett, 2000*), content, security, links to various resources (*Lu and Zhang, 2002*).

From the above discussion it is clear that the website evaluation is one of the important thing that every business should do to analyse their Return on investment (ROI). The websites of tourism organisations and agencies plays a very prominent role in attracting the tourists to the destination. Studies on online marketing of destination and comparative evaluation of tourism related website lacks attention in the literature (*K. Chavali and S. Sahu, 2008*). The evaluation of the website and the suggestions on how it can be improved could potentially reduce this gap. Theoretically AIDA model is widely accepted by researchers and academicians. However, there are limited studies on how it can be applied to tourism website evaluation.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the study:

- To analyse and compare the Kerala government tourism website with its competitors using traffic share from top countries, search traffic by engines, links through social networks and organic keyword search.
- To make a comparative analysis of the Kerala government tourism website with its competitors using AIDA model in digital marketing.

1.4 Research Methods

This research is quantitative and exploratory in nature as this includes web metrics variables. The websites of Kerala tourism and its competitors were compared using the analytical softwares – Alexa internet and SEMrush. With the results obtained, the researchers could understand the web traffic. The web traffic was analysed from November 2017 to February 2018. Usually, this period is peak season

in Kerala. So, analysing the data during this period would help the researchers to include the maximum number of tourist visiting the destination.

1.4.2 Measures

The analysis is done based on AIDA Model as discussed above. The data is acquired from authentic sources such as: Alexa – www.alexa.com and SEMrush – www.semrush.com

Alexa (www.alexa.com)- Alexa (officially Alexa Internet, Inc.) is a Californian based company focused in delivering commercial web traffic analytics and data. It was founded in 1996 and was acquired by Amazon Inc in 1999. The website is a great source of web traffic data, website rankings and other parameters with the data of 30 million websites.

SEMrush (www.semrush.com)- SEMrush is a 10-year old company that provides SEO competitive research service of the websites. It is an all-in-one marketing toolkit for digital marketing professionals. It is used by larger clients such as Ebay.com, Overstock.com, Seobook.com etc. SEMrush handles over 800 million keywords with 130 million domains in the world wide web.

For comparing the different websites, the researchers searched www.keralatourism.org (Kerala government tourism website) on SEMrush.com. The given below organic competitors were found:

www.irisholidays.com (Iris Holidays)

www.keralatravels.com (Kerala Travels)

www.paradise-kerala.com (Paradise Kerala)

www.keralabackwater.com (Kerala Backwater)

These websites were measured using AIDA model. The study has adopted the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for measuring AIDA model in digital marketing, which was developed by (Flores, 2014). The KPI used in the study for analysing AIDA model is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of key performance indicators in stages of the AIDA model

Key performance indicators (KPIs) of the Stage of the AIDA model for web analytics associated web analytics	
Attention	Number of visitors Unique visitors
Interest	Average duration of visit Bounce rate
Desire	Most visited pages Bounce rate
Action	Click-through rate

(Source: Flores 2014)

1.5 Data Analysis and Results

As discussed above, Alexa and SEMrush are used for analysing the data. The statistics obtained from SEMrush and Alexa between November 2017 and February 2018 (3 Months Data) using AIDA model in digital marketing are discussed below:

Table 2: Comparison of websites using AIDA model

Website	keralatourism.org	irisholidays.com	keralatravels.com	paradise-kerala.com	keralabackwater.com
Attention					
Number of Visitors	2.512 Million	447,696	257,084	411,983	118,705
Unique Visitors	1.44	1.24	1.55	1.67	2.45
Interest					
Average duration of visit	00:02:29	00:02:04	00:01:47	00:03:03	00:02:30
Bounce Rate	62.90	68.90%	66.60%	49.80%	60.80%
Desire					
Most Visited Pages (With respect to organic keywords)	2,418 ¹	2721²	1011 ³	1023 ⁴	77 ⁵
Action					
Clicks	2.141 Million	164,100	86,800	53,810	9,150

(Source: www.alexa.com)

According to the website analytics using AIDA's principle (with reference to Search Engine Optimisation items), Kerala Tourism (Government of Kerala) website tops in terms of Number of Visitors (**2.512 Million**) and Clicks (**2.141 Million**). However, the competitor Keralabackwater.com tops in the list of Unique Visitors. In terms of average duration of visit, paradise-kerala.com tops with the timing of **00:03:03**.

In terms of the bounce rates, the ideal percentile to attain for a good bounce rate is below 60%. Out of the five websites listed above, only one website (paradise-kerala.com) falls under good Search Engine

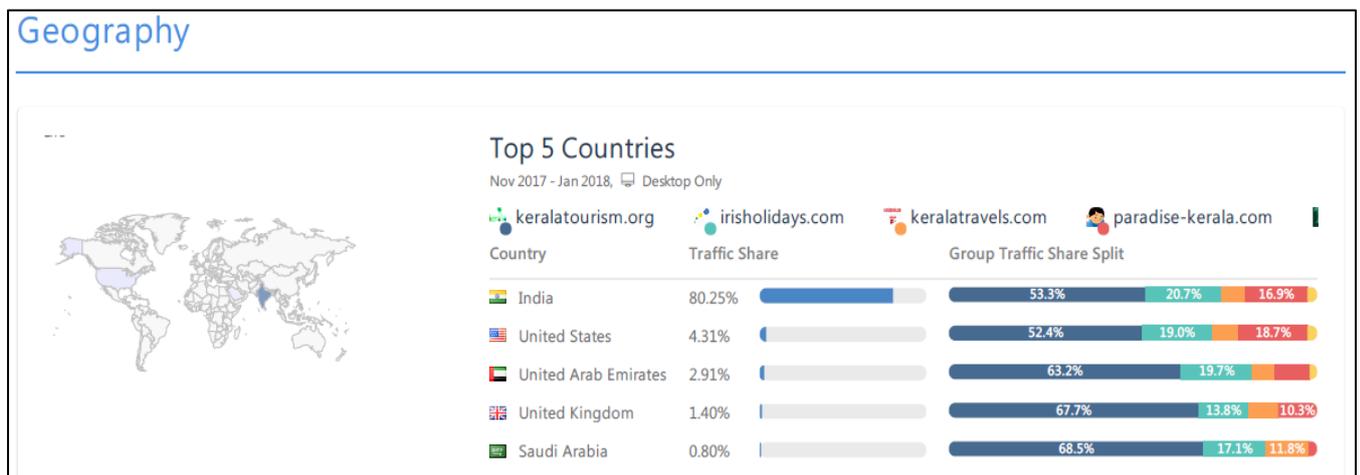
Optimisation (SEO). It doesn't imply that the others are bad, it simply means that they are somewhat slightly on a higher side and requires improvement.

The most visited pages are measures based on large amount of traffic generated from organic search results along with the number of keywords each page has in Google's top 50 search results. Irisholidays.com tops the chart with 2721 keywords for the link- <http://irisholidays.com/keralatourism/best-places-to-visit-in-kerala/>. The most visited pages of the five websites are:

- 1) <https://www.keralatourism.org/highresolutionimages/> (Kerala tourism)
- 2) <http://irisholidays.com/keralatourism/best-places-to-visit-in-kerala/> (Iris holidays)
- 3) <http://www.keralatravels.com/pages/train-timings> (Kerala travels)
- 4) <http://paradise-kerala.com/blog/top-tourist-places-in-kerala/> (Paradise- Kerala)
- 5) <https://www.keralabackwater.com/tours/backwaters.html> (Kerala backwaters)

Apart from the above results, the other findings include the following:

Table 3: Traffic share and 5 websites share



(Source: www.semrush.com)

From the above table, it shows the visitors from the top 5 countries. Among this the highest traffic is generated from India (80.25%) followed by US (4.31%), UAE (2.91%), UK (2.40%) and Saudi Arabia (0.80%). While comparing different websites traffic share in each country, keralatourism.org has the highest ranking (India- 53.3%, US- 52.4%, UAE- 63.2%, UK- 67.3% and Saudi Arabia- 68.5%), followed by irisholidays.org, keralatravels.com, paradise-kerala.com and keralabackwaters.com.

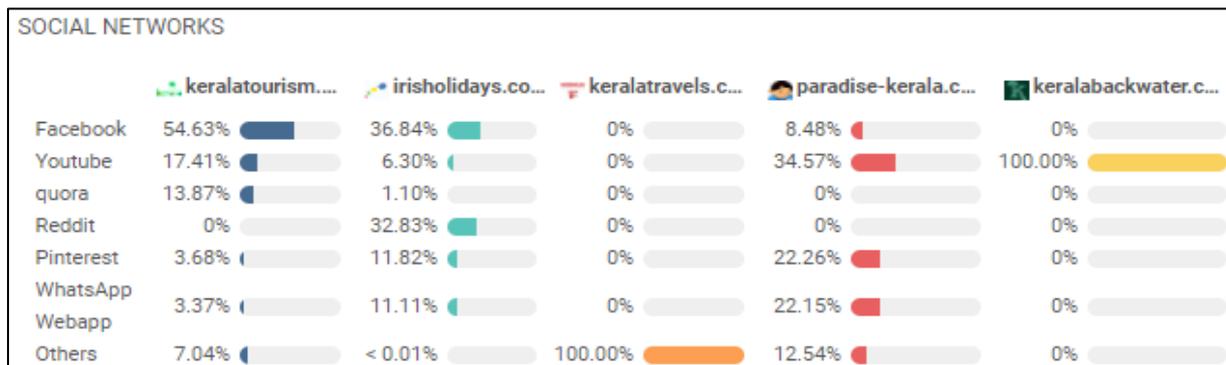
Table 4: Search Traffic by Engines

Domain	google	yahoo	syndicated	ask	bing	Others
keralatourism.org	95.91%	2.41%	0.95%	0.28%	0.25%	0.20%
irisholidays.com	98.77%	0.70%	0.43%	N/A	0.05%	0.06%
keralatravels.com	98.40%	0.51%	1.09%	N/A	N/A	< 0.01%
paradise-kerala.com	98.66%	0.95%	0.24%	0.15%	N/A	< 0.01%
keralabackwater.com	97.13%	2.87%	N/A	N/A	N/A	< 0.01%

(Source: www.semrush.com)

The above table projects the statistics of the search engines used by the visitors. From the statistics, the most widely used search engine is Google. In Google, the highest search was for the website irisholidays.com (98.77%) followed by paradise-kerala.com (98.6%), keralatravels.com (98.40%), keralabackwater.com (97.13%) and keralatourism.org (95.91%). The other search engines that was used includes Yahoo, Syndicated, Ask and Bing.

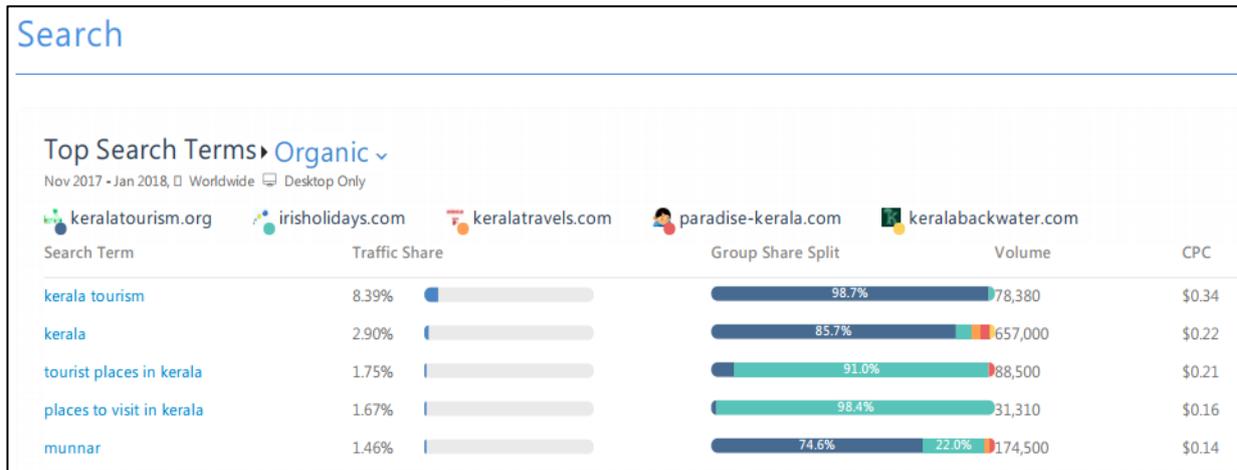
Table 5: Comparative analysis of the social networks used by visitors to link to their website



(Source: www.semrush.com)

Above table shows that to link to the keralatourism.org website the highest number of visitors have used Facebook (54.63%) followed by YouTube (17.41%), Quora (13.87%), Pinterest (3.68%) and WhatsApp (3.37%). For irisholidays.com, the highest link was generated from Facebook (36.84%), Reddit (32.83%), Pinterest (11.82%), WhatsApp (11.11%), YouTube (6.30%) and Quora (1.10%). Keralatravels.com doesn't receive any link for these prominent social networks. The highest link for paradise-kerala.com was received from YouTube (34.57%) followed by Pinterest (22.26%), WhatsApp (22.15%) and Facebook (8.48%). The keralabackwaters.com gets the link generated from YouTube (100%).

Table 6: Organic keywords search data



(Source: www.semrush.com)

Table 6 depicts that while giving the organic search (regular search by user) keyword as Kerala tourism the traffic share is highest for keralatourism.org (98.7%). It is same for the keywords Kerala (85.7%) and Munnar (74.6%). On the other hand, if the keyword is tourist places in Kerala and places to visit in Kerala the traffic share is highest for irisholidays.com (91%) and (98.4%) respectively.

1.6 Results and Discussion

From the above analysis it is found that the number of visitor and clicks are highest for the keralatourism.org. Unique visitors are highest for keralabackwater.com. Average duration of visit and bounce rate is good for paradise-kerala.com. The most visited pages are highest for irisholidays.com. Keralatravels.com doesn't lead in any of the key performance indicators. Attention can be generated towards a website and can be measured using number of visitors and unique visitors visiting the website. Kerala tourism and Kerala backwater are doing a lot of campaigns to gather the attention of the people who search online. The effectiveness of campaigns can be evaluated by systematically benchmarking and comparing statistics of web analytics (Flores, 2014). The other websites should do more and better campaigns to top the traffic share and thereby to create attention.

The effectiveness of website content generates interest and desire in the minds of the visitors (Charlesworth, 2014). The interest can be measured using KPI average duration of visit and bounce rate. Average duration of the visit shows the quality of the website. When the website content is more interesting visitors spends more time on the website. When the bounce rate is higher, it shows that the visitor leaves the website soon. Most visited pages also help to measure the desire of visitors towards the website (Flores, 2014). So, the websites lacking this should improve the content quality of the website and improve the engagements of visitors.

Action refers to the decision-making point. Click through rate shows the percentage of visitors who has clicked on stimulus (like advertisements, campaigns, sponsored post etc). This shows their intention to purchase or actual purchase. While designing campaigns or advertisements by the tourism website it is important that it should create attention and should finally convert it into action.

The traffic share is more in India, which means that the domestic tourists are aware about these websites but its reach to the international tourist needs improvement. More SEO optimisation should be done to increase the reach of the website. Google is the most widely used search engine. Kerala government tourism website when compared to other website lacks its reach in this search engine. They should adopt enough measures to improve this to reach to the international market. The study also gives a clear idea to each website on the backlinks created by different social networks. Tourists' decision making indicates that the use of social media is effective in integrating communication marketing of tourism service (*Sotiriadis and van Zyl, 2013*).

1.7 Conclusion

Development of digital marketing has led to many changes in the tourism industry (*Buhalis, 1998*). Building a website to market destination has become a necessity now. The government of Kerala is promoting tourism, focusing on its resources and has formulated different strategies to enhance the destination's visibility across the world. Since, the digital marketing has attained greater popularity among the people; the government has used this as an important strategy to promote Kerala as a tourist destination.

The present study was done to compare the tourism website of the government of Kerala with its competitors to analyse the website quality using AIDA model in digital marketing. The study utilizes web metrics for comparison and empirically supports the significance of the website in promoting tourism destinations. The study implies that the marketers can comprehend their online performance and suggest the steps that they must follow in order to enhance more visitors. Likewise, it is important to understand the experience of visitors and criteria that increases the value of the websites. It is also important to understand whether the visitors use these websites for decision making. Further research can be done using the AIDA model to find out the Return on Investment (ROI) through digital marketing. The limitation of this study is that a few parameters like repeated visit and conversion rate cannot be measured. This can only be achieved using Google Analytics software. Since, the researchers don't have access to the website console/codes, Google Analytics software is not used.

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