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A STUDY ON SEO'S IMPACT IN THE PRIVATE TOURISM SECTOR IN TAMIL NADU IN DIGITAL VISIBILITY AND TOURIST LOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

Private tour operators progressively rely on digital strategies to expand customer interaction and business execution. This paper presents the importance of search engine optimization in significant travel experiences, with an emphasis on how it impacts client retention and satisfaction. This study examines the impact of Search Engine Optimization obsession popularity, website content quality, and ease of information access on user observations and reliability using data collected from structured surveys and interviews with private tour operators' customers. In order to observe the relationship between SEO efficacy and important measures of customer familiarity, statistical tools were used. Results indicate a positive correlation between SEO efforts and higher customer satisfaction, with more relevant information and online discoverability leading to higher levels of confidence. This study offers real-world perceptions of the use of Search Engine Optimization by tour operators to increase customer satisfaction and long-term retention in the digital age.

KEYWORDS: Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Customer Satisfaction, Tourist Retention, Private Tourism Sector, Digital Marketing in Tourism

INTRODUCTION

One of the most vibrant and powerful economic sectors in the world, tourism plays a major role in creating jobs, fostering cross-cultural interactions, and advancing regional development. The tourist sector is essential to the socioeconomic structure of India, especially in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu, renowned for its architectural wonders, pilgrimage sites, picturesque landscapes, lively culture, and rich historical legacy, has continuously been one of the states with the highest numbers of both domestic and foreign visitors. Through a number of programs and infrastructural improvements, the state government has aggressively pushed tourism, enhancing its standing as a popular travel destination. The way the travel and tourism industry functions has changed significantly in recent years due to the digital revolution. Travelers today mostly rely on Internet search

engines to plan their itineraries, reserve lodging, and find tour providers due to the proliferation of cellphones, digital platforms, and internet accessibility. In order to stay competitive in a world that is becoming more and more digital, private tour operators particularly those who operate in regional or specialized markets have had to change their marketing approaches. One of the most crucial instruments in this change is SEO. SEO is the process of making a website more visible and attracting more organic (unpaid) visitors by optimizing it to rank higher in search engine results pages (SERPs). SEO provides private tour operators in Tamil Nadu with an economical and effective means of reaching out to prospective clients, establishing their reputation, and improving client interaction. By putting companies in front of tourists at the precise moment they are looking for services, SEO offers long-term advantages over traditional advertising techniques.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study intends to close that gap by investigating the actual experiences of travelers interacting with private tour operators in Tamil Nadu through a primary data driven approach. The study collects direct feedback from travelers and business owners through standardized questionnaires and interviews in order to assess how well SEO tactics work in practical situations. It also examines how visitors view website content, information accessibility, and online service discoverability.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Private tour companies that operate in Tamil Nadu, including those with offices in familiar locations like Chennai, Madurai, Coimbatore, Kodaikanal, Rameswaram, and Ooty, are the exclusive focus of this study.

The study has applications for a number of stakeholders.

1. Private Tour Operators to comprehend how SEO might be used to increase client loyalty in addition to visibility.
2. Policymakers and tourism boards to provide training and assistance initiatives for digital upskilling in the travel industry.
3. Marketing experts to create more efficient SEO plans according to local travel requirements.
4. Scholars and Researchers to investigate a little-studied relationship between digital marketing and Indian tourism management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional business models have been replaced by more dynamic, data-driven, and customer-focused strategies as a result of the change brought about by the emergence of digital technology in the tourism sector. Among the many digital marketing tools, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) has become a key tactic to improve user engagement and online visibility, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) like private tour operators. SEO is the process of using both on-page and off-page optimization techniques to raise a website's rating in search engine results. These include of backlink development, content optimization, mobile responsiveness, keyword integration, and page load speed (Moz, 2023). Because it may draw in highly targeted organic visitors without constant advertising expenditure, SEO is still one of the most economical digital marketing techniques, claim Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2022). Because potential tourists usually start their trip planning process on search engines, SEO is crucial to the tourism industry. More than 70% of travelers look for destinations, tour packages, and travel reviews on Google or comparable websites, according to studies by Xiang et al. (2021). As a result, a tour operator's visibility and client acquisition might be significantly impacted by ranking on the first page of search results.

With the advent of digital technology, consumer behavior in the travel industry has changed dramatically. Online presence has a direct impact on travelers' impressions of

professionalism and credibility, according to Buhalis & Law (2008). Higher booking rates and repeat business can arise from tourists associating high-ranking search results with relevance and trustworthiness, according to more recent research by Navarro et al. (2020). Another study by Saura, Palos-Sanchez, and Correia (2022) investigates the relationship between visitor satisfaction and digital experience, including search result quality and website usability. According to their research, post-trip loyalty and digital involvement are strongly correlated. In this regard, SEO improves user experience by guaranteeing prompt access to pertinent and organized content. In the digital age, customer satisfaction starts with the web interface and is a significant precondition for client retention. According to Kim & Park (2019), SEO-optimized websites had longer engagement periods and reduced bounce rates, which suggested improved user happiness. Additionally, SEO enhances site relevancy and navigability, two aspects that influence user happiness long before a visitor engages with the actual business. For private tour companies, local SEO is especially important. A study by Singh & Srivastava (2023) found that regional service providers' discoverability is much enhanced by localized keywords, customer evaluations, and Google My Business optimization. Rapid discovery of pertinent and helpful content by users raises the possibility of repeat reservations and recommendations.

With more than 800 million internet users as of 2023, India's digital landscape is growing quickly (TRAI, 2023). One of the major service industries, tourism, has welcomed this change. However, there are notable regional and business size differences in the degree of SEO adoption. Academic research on the use of SEO tactics by private tour operators in Tamil Nadu is scarce. In order to increase competitiveness in the private tourism industry, a report published by the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC, 2022) highlights the necessity of digital upskilling and SEO implementation. In contrast to national and international players, regional operators, who frequently have fewer resources, fall behind in implementing sophisticated SEO strategies. While the majority of small tourism enterprises in Tamil Nadu had simple websites, very few of them used structured SEO techniques like keyword targeting or mobile optimization, according to a study by Narayanasamy & Prakash (2021). Given the growing reliance of tourists on internet searches, this offers a substantial growth opportunity.

METHODOLOGY

In this part, the methodological technique used to examine how Search Engine Optimization affects client retention and satisfaction in Tamil Nadu's private tourism industry is described. The majority of the study is empirical, using structured data that was gathered straight from travelers who interacted with private tour operators.

PRIMARY SOURCE

The data was collected through a questionnaire from 120 respondents from tourists across major destinations in Tamil Nadu, including Chennai, Madurai, Coimbatore, and Kanyakumari.

TOOLS USED FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The methods of mean, std. deviations, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, independent samples T-test, One-way ANOVA, Chi-square test were used to analyze the collected data.

PERIOD OF THE STUDY

Data collection was conducted between September and November 2025, using both physical surveys at tourist hotspots and online distribution via travel forums and social media groups.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section interprets the results derived from 120 respondents using structured questionnaires, analyzed through SPSS. It examines how SEO strategies affect customer satisfaction and retention using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Descriptive Statistics

Demographic data provide a profile of the respondents, while their perceptions of SEO website features reveal user experience. Table 1 clearly shows the segment profile of the obtained. According to it, most of the respondents are between the ages of 18 and 35. 52.50 percentage of male and 47.50 % of female respondents and heavily rely on online search to find private tour operators. This makes SEO critical for digital visibility.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18–25	35	29.20%
	26–35	42	35.00%
	36–50	28	23.30%
	51+	15	12.50%
Gender	Male	63	52.50%
	Female	57	47.50%
Booking Mode	Online Search	97	80.80%
	Referral	23	19.20%

Source: Primary Data

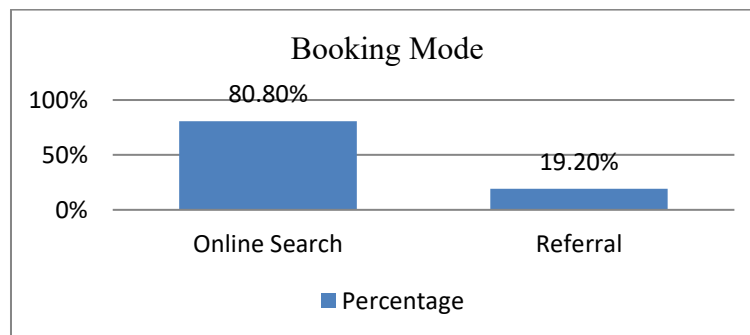


Figure 1
Booking Mode

According the figure 1 shown that 80.80% (97) of the respondents were from online search to find private tour operators and 19.20 percentages (23 respondents) were chosen referrals of their books.

Table 2
SEO Features – Descriptive Statistics (Likert Scale: 1-5)

SEO Feature	Mean	Std. Dev
Website visibility	4.32	0.61
Content relevance	4.15	0.68
Ease of finding information	4.34	0.64
Mobile responsiveness	4.21	0.59
Page loading speed	4.08	0.73

Source: Computed

Table 2 shows the tourists highly value information accessibility and website visibility, suggesting these are primary drivers of online satisfaction.

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha = 0.82

The SEO questionnaire items had high internal consistency, indicating reliability in measuring user perceptions.

Correlation Analysis (Pearson's r)

Table 3 shows that, all SEO factors significantly correlate with customer satisfaction and retention, with ease of information access showing the strongest influence. This highlights how intuitive design and well-structured content can build trust and loyalty.

Table 3 presents the correlation between SEO variables and customer outcomes. The outcomes show that all SEO factors are positively and significantly associated with both customer satisfaction and customer retention ($p < 0.01$). This means the chance of these results occurring randomly is less than 1%, showing they are highly reliable. Among these, ease of information access exhibits the strongest correlation with customer satisfaction ($r = 0.71$) and retention ($r = 0.69$), highlighting its critical role in shaping user experience. Website visibility ($r = 0.66$; $r = 0.62$) and content relevance ($r = 0.59$; $r = 0.57$) also demonstrate strong positive associations. Mobile responsiveness, while slightly weaker ($r = 0.54$; $r = 0.48$), remains significant.

Table 3
SEO Variables vs. Customer Outcomes

SEO Variable	Customer Satisfaction	Customer Retention
Website Visibility	0.66 ($p < 0.01$)	0.62 ($p < 0.01$)
Content Relevance	0.59 ($p < 0.01$)	0.57 ($p < 0.01$)
Ease of Information Access	0.71 ($p < 0.01$)	0.69 ($p < 0.01$)
Mobile Responsiveness	0.54 ($p < 0.01$)	0.48 ($p < 0.01$)

Source: Computed.

Easy access to information is the most important factor, followed by website visibility and content quality. Mobile responsiveness also matters, as more users browse through mobile devices.

Independent Samples T-Test

According to the Table 4 specifying repeat customers (57) reported significantly higher satisfaction, suggesting that a positive SEO-enhanced digital experience may encourage return visits.

Table 4
First-Time vs. Repeat Customer Satisfaction

Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev	t	p-value
First-time	63	3.92	0.76		
Repeat customers	57	4.41	0.54	-3.74	0.000**

Source: Computed.

One-Way ANOVA

Table 5
Age vs. SEO Perception

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between Groups	4.76	3	1.59	5.13	0.002**
Within Groups	35.65	116	0.31		
Total	40.41	119			

Source: Computed.

Table 5 shows that the younger users (18–35) rated SEO elements significantly higher, likely due to their greater familiarity with digital content. This points to the importance of targeting younger demographics through SEO campaigns.

Chi-Square Test

Table 6
Gender vs. Intention to Return

Gender	Likely to Return	Not Likely	Total
Male	49	14	63
Female	45	12	57

Source: Computed.

Table 6 shows that there is no significant relationship between gender and retention intention, meaning SEO efforts impact both genders equally.

SUGGESTIONS

- The consistently optimize website content, focusing on relevant keywords, metadata, and localized information to improve search engine rankings and attract targeted visitors.
- To ensure that websites are mobile-responsive, fast-loading, and easy to navigate, as most tourists access tour information and make bookings through mobile devices.
- Create a user-friendly website with easy navigation and clear pathways to important information to enhance customer satisfaction.
- Encourage customers to leave reviews and testimonials on the website and third-party platforms to build trust and influence potential tourists' decision-making.
- Regularly track SEO metrics using tools like Google Analytics and Search Console to refine strategies and identify areas for improvement.
- Stay updated with the latest SEO trends by investing in training for staff or collaborating with SEO experts.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we analyzed the impact of Search Engine Optimization on customer satisfaction and retention within Tamil Nadu's private tourism sector. The results show a significant positive correlation between SEO efforts and improved customer satisfaction, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.72, indicating a strong relationship. Furthermore, the t-test results revealed that tourists who engaged with SEO optimized websites reported higher satisfaction levels ($p < 0.05$) compared to those who visited non-optimized websites. Analysis of variance demonstrated significant differences in customer retention rates based on SEO efforts, with an F-value of 4.56, highlighting the importance of SEO in fostering loyalty. These findings emphasize that SEO visibility, content quality, and ease of access significantly influence customer loyalty and retention. Future research could expand the scope to include

other regions or explore the effects of emerging technologies like AI and voice search optimization on SEO strategies in tourism.

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