

A Study in Digital Space Creating Sustainable Tourism Awareness

J. H. Akash, Research Scholar (Media Sciences)

Dr. I. Arul Aram

Abstract

As natural environment is the base of the tourism industry, the major focus of the industry in the recent decade is about the sustainability of the tourism and how the right platform can be created. Since we are living in digital era, it is better to use the internet as a tool of communication. Internet, because of its virtual charm it is considered as a medium for social refrain. The present study is an attempt to find out the role of digital media in creating sustainable tourism awareness among tourists in Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu, India. The study combines a general review of media's role on ecotourism and then aims to find out which media are catering to the tourists. The Western Ghats provide Kanyakumari district with rich natural resources of flora and fauna. In the present scenario of climate change, environmentalists suggest ecotourism as a means for conservation of environment and socio-economic development. Today's society spends much time with the media. Media has greatly affected the way youth spend their leisure time. In this modern era, human ecosystem is significantly mediated by the media. So, it is the time to initiate development policies and strategies for encouraging tourism based on the media messages. The media in general are persuasive in nature, and the media primarily have the potential to control to some extent the minds of users. The role of mass media is important to promote the brand-image of the destination. The importance of digital media is growing in tourism industry. Today people are interested to use digital space to communicate than the physical space. Most governments see tourism as a means of economic development and hence investment in the industry is usually encouraged. In the rapidly-changing global economic scenario, tourism is considered as one of the largest sustainable industry. Kanyakumari district has been chosen for the study, as it has a good potential for tourism destination for both national and international tourists. The pleasing weather of Kanyakumari district throughout the year provides best sites for the tourism industry. A questionnaire was administered to collect data from 100 respondents. The survey for the study was conducted among the tourists in Kanyakumari district during the time period December 2017 to January 2018. Respondents to the questionnaire were selected through stratified random sampling technique.

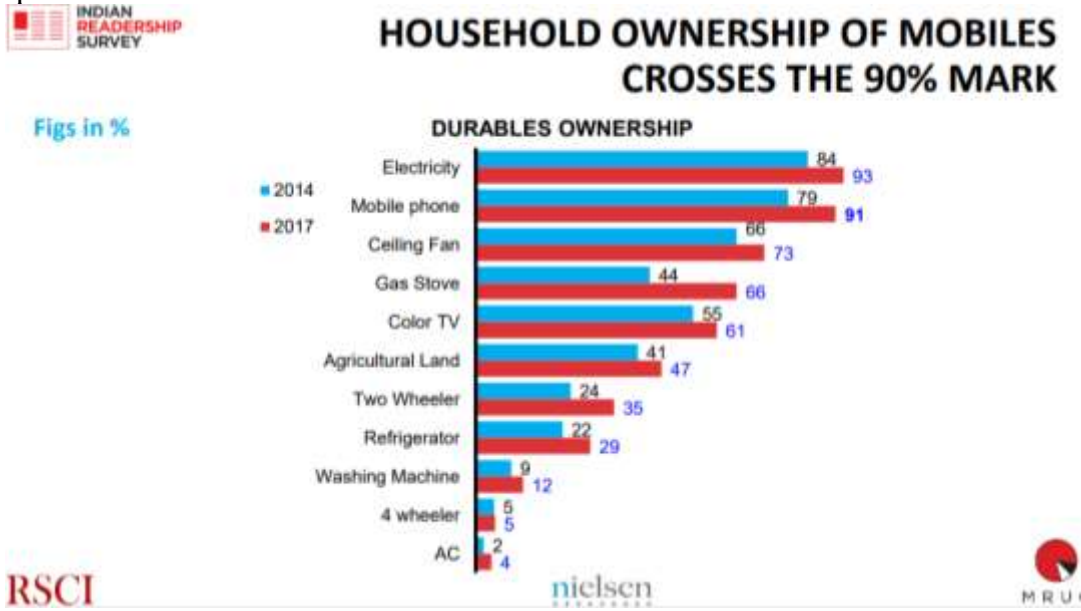
Keywords: Sustainable tourism, digital space, Western Ghats, ecosystem, livelihood.

Introduction

Kanyakumari, located at the southern extremity of Indian peninsula where the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal meet, is referred as 'Thriveni Sangamam' (confluence point of three seas). So, the district occupies a unique place in the world tourism map for this location. Kanyakumari has always been considered as the prime cultural hub of India. The beach with multi-colour sand has a uniqueness, where one can enjoy the sun sets and the moonrise simultaneously in full moon days. The district has a good potentiality in attracting national and foreign tourists. According to India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF – Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India) , Tamil Nadu attracted 20.1% of total foreign tourists visiting India in 2015 and in Tamil Nadu, Kanyakumari has a great role in attracting the foreign tourists. The Western Ghats keep the district with rich natural resources of flora and fauna. The district is also known as ‘district of ponds’. The district is blessed with a moderate climate and seasonal rains twice a year. This supports a wide variety of banana agriculture than most other places. The district is made up of different topography where the western seashore supports coconut groves, the Western Ghats that have flourishing rubber (latex) plantation, pepper, cashew, the plain region has vegetables, tapioca and horticultural crops like mango, pineapple and jackfruits. This natural scenario of greenery attracts the tourists the worldwide. But in the present scenario of climate change, Kanyakumari district is losing some of its charm. This negative trend can be checked by the proper interlocking of conservation through education and awareness.

The economic status of the district should also be developed along with it. Tourism, in this context, can be considered to cope with this situation on acting as a catalyst for the economic and social development of the district. As per IBEF report (2017), many developing nations are considering tourism as a multispectral industry to stimulate the economy from different sectors. Since it's a major sector in today's world, many countries are competing to attract tourists through all means of communication. So the mode of communication is considered for informing and influencing tourists in the selection of destination. At the same time, tourism without proper management leads to heavy damaging impacts on the environment such as increased water use, increased pollution loadings through waste and emissions, and direct and indirect disturbance to wildlife and vegetation (Fennell, 2003). This may destroy the beauty of natural destination and the tourists may reject the destinations which are polluted. As tourism opens door for rapid economic growth that attracts a number of foreign and non-local investors, this may neglect the prosperity of local people. So tourism also has its own seeds of destruction and, therefore, tourism can kill tourism; destroying the environmental attractions for which visitors come to this location (Glasson et al., 1995). Many environmentalists suggested ecotourism as a promoting tool for environmental conservation as well as socio-economic developments. To make ecotourism more practical, travellers should follow the definition of TIES. As per TIES, ecotourism should be “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people and involves interpretation and education”. While practising ecotourism, tourists are supposed not to destroy the natural inhabitants of the spot they visit. Ecotourism may play a vital role in this regard. Tourism activity in the district could be taken as a vibrant tool in enriching the social status of the society. Therefore, tourism calls for awareness for the conservation of nature and environment which can be done by the media.

With the advent of modern media technologies, there is an immense possibility to reach the unreached tourism spots and enlighten significance of ecotourism. Many countries have succeeded the usage of internet for their destination promotion. Tourism promotional activities through internet are encouraged by governments to reach globally. The district has a good potentiality in attracting national and foreign tourists. Based on Indian Readership Survey (IRS, 2017) released by the Readership Studies Council of India (RSCI), the household ownership of mobile phones had crosses 90 %.



(Source: IRS January 2017, <http://mruc.net/topline-findings> Media Research Users Council)

In the ancient times, man had the urge to explore new places and their travels were less sophisticated than current generation. Today, the situation is different. Human ecosystem is significantly mediated by technology. Mostly digital media are based on translating analog data into digital data. Any digitized content (*text, audio, video, and graphics*) that transmitted over the internet is digital media. This include that news from a TV, newspaper, magazine, etc. that is presented on a Web site or blog as a form of ‘convergence-media’ can fall into this category. Because of the rapid speed, today people are more likely to use digital media to communicate than all other medium. The development in the field of transportation as well as communication makes travelling more sophisticated and a modern traveller demands safety and comfort for his enjoyment. Modern tourists treat the tourism as not just packing the bags and exploring a new destination. It is about stepping to another comfort zone. People always love novelty, especially travellers like to explore new experiences and are curious to find new destinations, so tourism industry has always been on the lookout for new attractions to keep their tourists coming. The tourism department of Kanyakumari district should take the advantage of curiosity that people towards tourist attractions. The diversified culture and natural ecology has to be uncovered with the help of media. So it is the time to initiate development policies and strategies for encouraging tourism based on needs of modern travellers. In this sophisticated age, the efficiency of a department can be measured by the usage of technical competence for the promotional activities.

People use digital technologies for their day-to-day life considering digital technology is smarter than anything else in this world. So it is quite natural that in the field of tourism that travellers are interested in using digital communication technology to get information.

Significance of the Study

Our world is facing competition in every field, and the general trend is adapting the fastest initiative for rapid economic progression, without any concern about future generation. The tourism industry is also used for the economic growth without any concern for the next generation. However, this adversely affects the environment. Tourism can be said as people from different countries assemble at a place to relish the natural beauty of a place. Thus, tourism is one of the most popular forms of economic recreation. Tourism is directly associated with natural environment and culture, and the preservation of natural environment and tradition for economic progression. Tourism studies develop a sense of ethical responsibility to protect the nature to achieve sustainable development. This resulted in the need for sustainable tourism. Most of the countries recognized tourism to open job opportunities, foreign exchange earnings and maintain friendly relationship with foreign countries. Tourism contributes to ecological and economic conservation that leads to other major infrastructural developments in the fields of transportation, accommodation, hospital facilities, hygiene, proper sanitation measures etc., and these measures supports the country to reach top rank in the Environmental Sustainable Index (ESI) and Human Development Index (HDI). As Kanyakumari district is endowed with natural rich resources, it widely attracts tourists from all over the world. Delving deeper in to these places for tourism promotion and environmental education can protect biodiversity while creating jobs and sustaining the region through revenues from sustainable tourism. Introducing ecotourism to the district can protect and conserve the ecosystem by involving local people. Media is an integral part of communication today. The policy makers, social agents join with media in constructing environmental awareness for widely dispersed people. Thus, media is a key source of destination information and environmental awareness.

Objectives

1. To explore the role of various media in creating ecotourism awareness among tourists in Kanyakumari district.
2. To understand the role of digital media in environmental conservation.
3. To examine the gender difference and environmental concerns among the tourists.
4. To find out the source of information about natural places in Kanyakumari district.

Research Questions

1. Which are the types of media that create more ecotourism awareness in Kanyakumari district?
2. How do the media influence the tourists of Kanyakumari district?

3. How do media create awareness on environmental conservation among the tourists of Kanyakumari district?
4. How does age difference affect the environmental concerns and practices among tourists?
5. How does gender difference affect the environmental concerns and practices among tourists?
6. How does environmental tourism and ecotourism support environmental conservation?

Methodology

This study analyses the role of various media in creating environmental awareness among the tourists in Kanyakumari district. The researchers have conducted a survey in the district. A questionnaire composed of demographic questions in the first part and it was followed by the questions related to the media and environmental awareness. For the study, the questionnaire concentrated on two aspects, namely *information completeness* and *persuasiveness* of the media. The questionnaire collected information on the various types of media and its influence on tourism. Respondents were asked about the source of information for natural places in Kanyakumari district. Respondents are selected through a stratified random sampling technique. The survey was administered to 100 respondents to understand the information sources of Kanyakumari ecotourism awareness. The selected respondents belonged to the 21-60 age group which are categorized into four sub-groups. Among the N100 samples, male respondents are N69 and female respondents N31.

Findings and Analysis

The survey was conducted among the tourists from the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, as most tourists visit Kanyakumari district from these two states. Among the total samples collected, 61% are from Tamil Nadu and 39% are from Kerala.

The demographical details of the sample population are as given below:

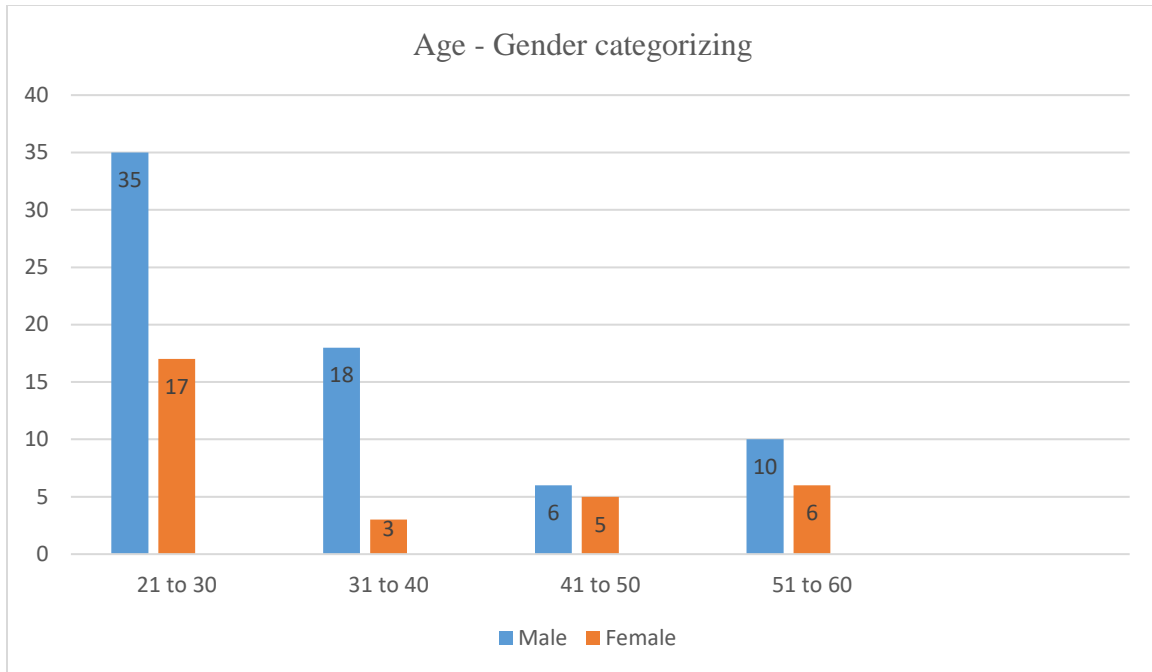


Figure 1: Age-gender categorization

Figure 1 shows that the majority of tourists are in the 21-30 age group and most of them are unmarried. They are free from job pressure and with less responsibility which give them more time for tourism. The study also finds out that the same age group are more users of social media. Social network sites help youngsters to becoming more social and bond with other people (Arpita, 2017).

Among the 41-50 age group, least tourists are found. It indicates that they spend less time for tourism activity. This is due to the age most people work hard for their children's education. The 21-30 age group (52%) travels more than other age groups. As much as 21 percentage of them are in the 31-40 age group, 11 percentage of them belongs to the 41-50 age group, and 16 percentage of the respondents belongs to the 51-60 age group.

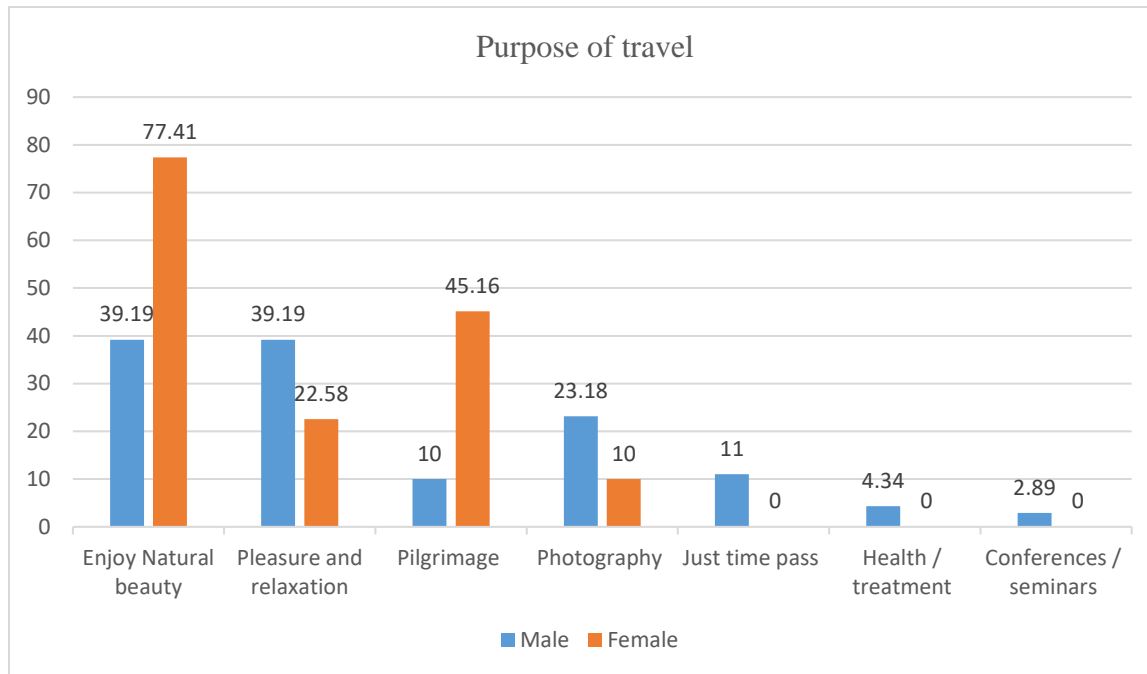


Figure 2: Purpose of travel

Tourism is the temporary, short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work and their activities. It includes movements for all purposes (The Tourism Society of England, 1976). So, the researchers designed the questionnaire to find out the purpose of travel also. They found that among the total sample the most tourists (N51) prefer to travel Kanyakumari district to *enjoy the natural beauty*. This indicates that the Kanyakumari district has more environmental tourism potentiality. Figure 2 shows that among the total male respondents (N27), 39.19 % are interested in *enjoying the natural beauty*, whereas 77.41% of female are interested in *enjoying the natural beauty* of the district. This indicates that female travellers (77.41 %) show more interest for *travel to enjoy the natural beauty* than male travellers (39.19 %).

Except for *enjoying the natural beauty* and *pilgrimage*, all other variables show that male are more interested. For pilgrimage purpose, among the total 69 male respondents only 7 show interest (10%). From the total 31 female respondents 14 show interest in pilgrimage (45.16%). The study found that majority of respondents travel with a specific objective, and only 8% of respondents prefer to *travel for just time pass*. Tourism involves travelling with the specific object of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery.

Researchers found out that 19% of respondents *travel for photography*. *Travel for photography* freezes the beauty of nature.

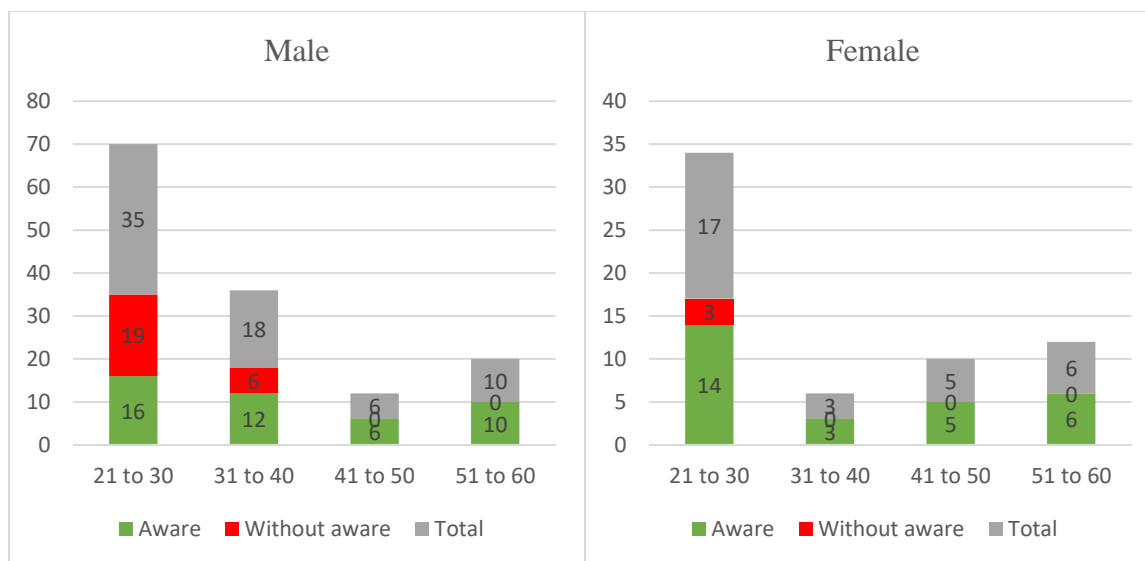


Figure 3a

Figure 3b

Figures 3a and 3b show that the female respondents are more *aware about the need of environmental conservation*. Among the total N69 male respondents, N44 are *aware about the need of need of environmental conservation* (63.76%). and of the total N31 female respondents 90.32% (N28) are *aware about the need of need of environmental conservation*. Women show at every age more concern for the environment than men (Bekkers, 2005).

Women, being attached with domestic and household management, interact more intensively with the nature than men. Women's direct contact with environment has not only produced them deep knowledge, but also protective and caring. Women had launched number of movement in demanding of better protection and environment conservation. Chipko movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan are the best examples for the environmental movements led by women (Aditya, 2016).

Figure 3a and 3b also explain that age is a factor in environmental concern, as higher the age group, they are more aware about the need of environmental conservation. Higher age exerts a positive effect on environmental morale. Focusing on social norms we observe that higher age is consider for higher social positions. It is stated that higher age persons have acquired greater social stakes.

The study also examines the connection between *natural tour and natural environmet conservation thoughts*. Majority of respondents (More than 76 %) responded that there is a great bond between travels and the environmental conservation thoughts.

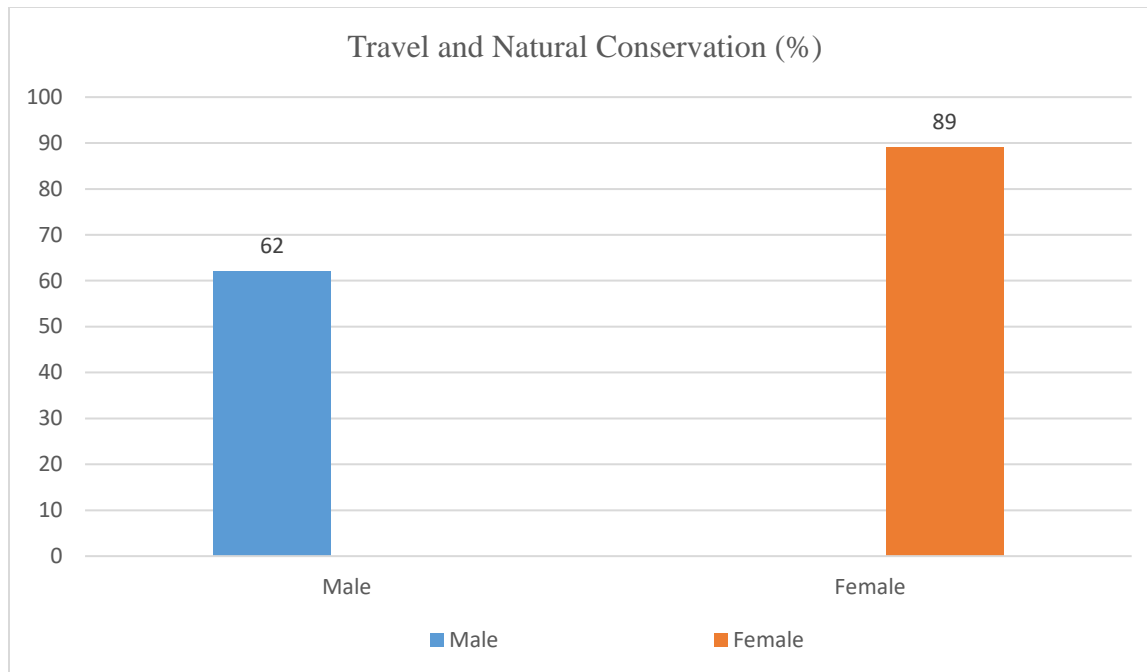


Figure 4: Kanyakumari ecotourism awareness through various media

The above (Figure 4) representing the relationship between the travel and natural conservation thoughts. The researchers find out majority of respondents are considering that travel to natural regions create a thought in their mind about the need for natural conservation. 62 % of male and 89 % of female answered traveling to the natural environmental locations provide environmental knowledge and make them to think about the need of conserve the environment. Commonly its known to all that, ‘Travels are great book of information’. When travelling, the traveller can experience and learn a lot of knowledge that cannot be learned from books . These experiences will lead the traveller to be richer in knowledge. From the real experience, they can touch all part of environment and that create a though in themselves about the need of natural conservation – as the traveller directly comprehend the environment for sustainable development.

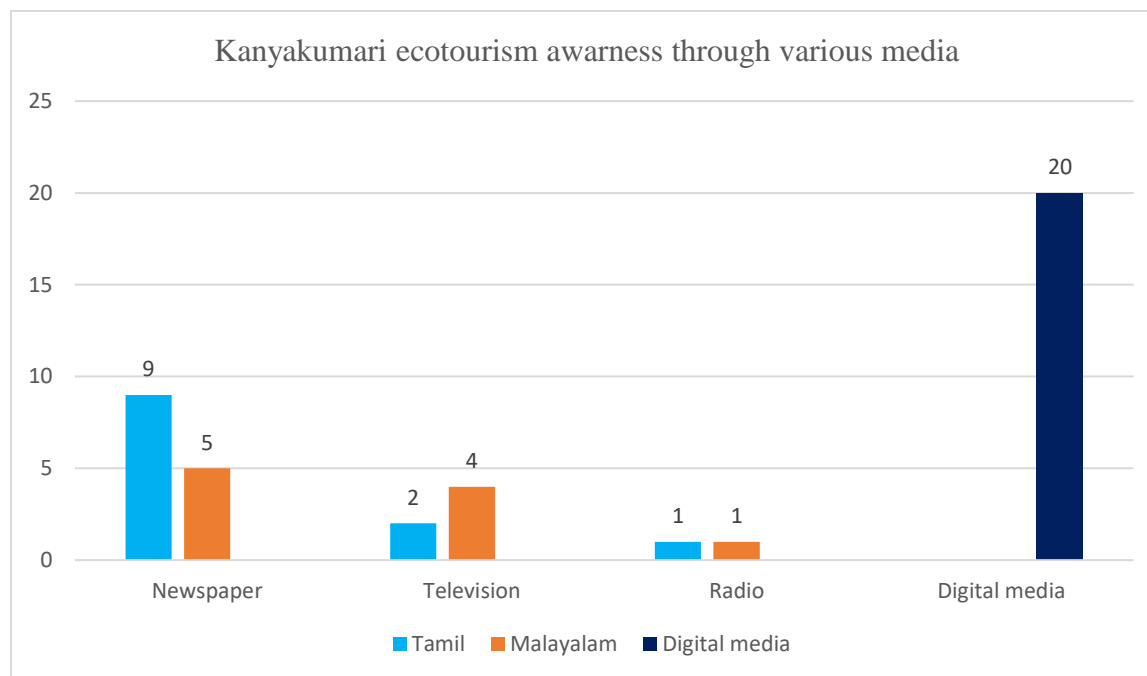


Figure 5: Kanyakumari ecotourism awareness through various media

Figure 5 describes the details of various media in ecotourism awareness in Kanyakumari district. The study found that only 41% of respondents were aware of ecotourism through media. Among the N41 respondents, 20 were informed through digital media which is 48.78%, Tamil newspapers 21.95%, Malayalam newspapers 12.19%, Tamil television channels 4.87%, and Malayalam television channels 9.75%. A very less percentage of 2.43 got awareness through radio. The study shows that more number of people are aware about ecotourism of Kanyakumari district through social media/digital media.

'Information completeness' and *'Persuasiveness'* are the aspects used by the researchers to analyse the role of various media. Most of the respondents stated that digital media can persuade, while newspapers can provide access for more credible and complete information that satisfies the *'information completeness'*.

Digital / Social media can be considered as a canvas of users' interests. In digital-social media, the users will share their travel experience. It is easy to access by the peer group and friends in the list. But at the same time, some users are not considering that digital media as a responsible and credible medium. Once people get some information about nearby places, they search about the related contents in the internet or other printed medium. Though ecotourism supports the well-being of local people, it is very important to create a positive attitude among the local people about the benefits of ecotourism which includes ecological and economic conservation. For uplifting tourism, there must be frequent communication campaigns of local people with tourists so that social barriers and orthodox systems could be abolished (Batra, 1990). Internet as a medium of mass communication, making its efforts to educate, inform and persuade the masses all over the

world. It offers the best platform for social interaction (Arpita, 2017). As a result of rapid technological growth, globalisation arrives and blurred the national boundaries.

Conclusion

Based on the survey, respondents ranked the digital media as top one institution contributing to public environmental awareness. Today, society pays more for information and awareness that can be gained through various communication channels. As digital media is more persuasive, most of the organizations use digital media as a broadcasting platform to magnify messages from traditional media sources such as radio, television, and print media. Digital media can be entirely a new way of approach on reaching the target audience and fast feedback for the content. It has a pivotal role for effective communication of informing and creating awareness. Digital media allows the users to access in any platform (including desktop, laptop, tablets, and mobile phones – in a convergence form). It is a fascinating medium. The content that previously used to be available only on the mainstream media outlets such as print media, radio and television. This in turn has resulted in a growing trend in the online community.

Moreover, digital/social media can serve as a canvas of users' mind. So, the Tourism Department uses this medium for the sustainable tourism.

Researchers found out that digital media can influence with its attractive platform and user-friendliness, but the traditional newspapers can provide information completeness.

=====

References

1. Aditya, S. K. (2016). Role of Women in Environmental Conservation. *International Journal of Political Science and Development*, 4(4): 140-145.
2. Arpita, S. (2017). Impact of new information media on teenagers. In *Communication Today*, (52-57). Jaipur, Rajasthan.
3. Batra, K. L. (1990). *Problems and Prospects of Tourism*. Jaipur: Printwell Publishers.
4. Bekkers, R. (2005). Participation in voluntary associations: relations with resources, personality, and political values, *Political Psychology*. 26, 439-454.
5. Fennell, D. A. (2003). *Ecotourism: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge.
6. Glasson, K. G. J. (1995). *Towards Visitor Impact Management: Visitor Impacts, Carrying Capacity and Management Responses in Europe's Historic Towns and Cities*. Aldershot: Avebury.
7. IRS Indian Readership Survey, (2017). *IRS 2017 Topline findings*. Mumbai: MRUC Media Research Users Council. Retrieved from <http://mruc.net/topline-findings>

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:3 March 2018

Prof. S. Arunraj and Dr. P. Viduthalai, Editors: Portrayal of Social Issues in Literature and Media

J. H. Akash, Research Scholar (Media Sciences) and Dr. I. Arul Aram

A Study in Digital Space Creating Sustainable Tourism Awareness

8. Kanyakumari District Administration, (2017). Retrieved from places of tourist interest: <http://kanyakumari.nic.in/tourist.html>
 9. Tamil Nadu Government, (2017). District Details. Retrieved from http://www.tn.gov.in/district_details/573
 10. Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (2017). India tourism statistics at a glance 2015. Retrieved from Tourism Department: <https://www.ibef.org/download/Tourism-and-Hospitality-June-2017.pdf>
 11. TIES, (2015). The International Ecotourism Society. Retrieved from Ecotourism: <http://www.ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism>
-

J. H. Akash
Research Scholar (Media Sciences)
Department of Chemistry
Anna University, Chennai-600025

Dr. I. Arul Aram
Associate Professor
Department of Chemistry
Anna University, Chennai-600025