Technology talk

TECH THE WAY FORWARD

India has built a solid reputation for producing talent in the IT segment but when it boils down to the stage of advancement of technology, the scenario is quite the opposite. The Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF) placed India at a dismal 91st position in the 2016 Networked Readiness Index (NRI) as the part of WEF's Global Information Technology Report, which measures countries' success in creating the necessary conditions for a transition to a digitised economy and society. The ranking has declined for the fourth year in a row while other countries have raced ahead.

The lax in infrastructure, for one, has certainly been a dampener but what's more significant is that scepticism has always been associated with any kind of change. That being said, the government's Digital India programme aims to change this outlook but if it really wants to set higher standards, it needs to try harder. While the recent Union Budget has prioritised the digital aspect and launched a few schemes to fast-track the movement, there are more than a handful of things that needs to change for the campaign to be a success.

The country needs policies to propel digitalisation – a policy for online security is yet to be formulated, and is only one of the few instances. Secondly, India will be truly digital when everyone can afford smartphones, laptops and the Internet. Thirdly, the skillset needs to be enhanced by a huge margin – digital literacy is the need of the hour. While these matters are just the tip of the iceberg, the country needs to work on retaining its talent through added benefits and better schemes.

AHANA GURUNG

NEWS IN BRIEF

PLAN HOLIDAYS WITH NEW SKYSCANNER TOOL

Global travel search engine, Skyscanner has launched a new travel planning tool to aid wanderlust-bitten Indians make the most of conveniently placed public holidays in 2017. Skyscanner's Holiday Planner highlights where public holidays fall and tells users how many annual leave days are required for their trip. The dynamic tool uses Skyscanner's technology to search thousands of airlines and travel agent partners to find travellers the destinations they can explore during their chosen dates and the cost of getting there. As with all of Skyscanner's travel search products, the tool is available to users free of charge. **Reshmi Roy,** Skyscanner's Growth Manager, India said: "One New Year's Resolution we hear time and time again is: 'to travel more.' The Holiday Planner will undoubtedly help Indians go further this year and truly make the most of annual leave and the abundance of long weekends."

ixigo acquires Reach

Online travel search portal ixigo has announced that it has acquired the mobile content-sharing application Reach. "As part of the deal, the Reach team will join ixigo to help enhance ixigo's already existing products by providing travellers not just utility, but consumable content," said the company in a statement.

Booking.com's Booster for start-ups

Booking.com Booster is designed to identify, mentor and fund enterprising start-ups from around the world that are seeking to have a positive impact on the global tourism industry, the 3-week programme taking place in June 2017 in Amsterdam will culminate in a chance to pitch for grants of up to €500,000 from Booking.com.

TUI 2022
1 million customers
1 billion turnover

TUI 2022 explores new markets in Asia and South America

At the Annual General Meeting in Hanover, TUI CEO **Fritz Joussen** has presented the 'TUI 2022' future programme, focused on digitalisation and growth in new markets. Its target is to generate additional turnover worth €1 billion and reach out to one million new customers within the next five years. "TUI is becoming even more international," said Joussen. "Markets such as Asia and South America are regions with rapidly growing middle classes, We are aiming to push expansion of our brand ahead in these markets."

Lufthansa allows sale of tickets through API

Lufthansa is opening the Open API for direct ticket sales. From now on, developers will be able to use the interface to integrate direct booking links for offers from Lufthansa, Eurowings and Austrian Airlines into their web- and app-based offers. They will be able to increase the appeal of their services by incorporating Lufthansa products and will also receive compensation for the prominent display of Lufthansa products on their websites whenever the API integration generates bookings on lufthansa.com. With the access to ticket sales, the programming interface developer. lufthansa.com will now also become commercially relevant. The developers of the previously mentioned online ticketing platform will be able to use the Open API to link their event calendars with the booking information of the Lufthansa Group.

RezLive completes a decade of service

RezLive, a travel service provider that includes hotels, sightseeing and transfer services worldwide, has completed a decade of service in the Indian travel industry. "As we celebrate 10 years in the online market, I'd like to thank all our travel partners for their loyalty and support. I would also like to make a note that our relationship with them will remain the foundation for such achievements and we look forward to their continued support in the future," he assures. The company has further cemented its position in the African region with the appointment of African Origin Travels & Sports Tourism and Continental Travel Group as its exclusive GSA for Ghana and Kenya respectively.

TravelTriangle raises $10 million in funds

TravelTriangle has recently raised $10 million in series B funding from RB Investments. TravelTriangle's successful funding round saw participation from existing investors SAIF Partners and Silicon Valley venture fund Bessemer Venture Partners. Commenting on the company's future growth, **Sankalp Agarwal**, Co-founder and CEO, TravelTriangle, said, "We have grown faster than OTAs in the leisure segment and now fast approaching their scale. With the association with RB Investments in this round we will achieve our vision faster."

AMADEUS

Rajiv Rajian appointed Global Head of Business Travel, Amadeus India

Amadeus has appointed **Rajiv Rajian** as Global Head of Business Travel, effective immediately. With global business travel spend set to reach $1.6 trillion in 2020, Rajian will be tasked with driving continued growth worldwide across three key pillars of Amadeus' business travel division: Global Travel Management Companies (TMCs), the Specialty and Networks customers, and corporations. "I'm excited to lead our team as we look to not only transform the corporate traveller journey but also grow Amadeus' entire business travel portfolio; across Global TMCs, Specialty and Networks, and corporations," said Rajian.

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> The cash crunch brought e-wallets like Paytm to the fore with the mobile payment and commerce platform recording at least 8.5 million transactions.

VIJAY SHEKHAR SHARMA
CEO
Paytm

Mobile Wallet

Credit Card

1234 5678 9012 3456
1234

09/18

ACCOUNT SUMMARY

Card Balance: $1 364,20

Last transaction: $ - 207,00

back   cancel

The company registered a rise of 12 per cent in its payments volume to ₹5 bn (₹5,000 crore) during January compared with December and a fivefold increase in its users.

Changing the landscape of
PAYMENTS

The past few months have seen huge acceptance for e-wallets and UPI-based tools that are slowly paving the way for a cashless economy.

AHANA GURUNG

The country embraced digital payments in a big way in 2016 and set the pace for a digital future. In a majorly cash-driven market, demonetisation left people with no choice but to shift over to alternate modes of payment in the face of cash shortage and strict bank withdrawal limits.

The aftermath of the currency ban saw digital payments soar up to 300 per cent last December, where transactions through e-wallets shot up from 1.7 mil (17 lakh) in early November to 6.3 mil (63 lakh) a month later, as per data from the Ministry of Electronics and IT. Consumers used the Unified Payments Interface, or UPI, the mobile payments platform released in August 2016, for 300,000 transactions amounting to ₹900 mil (₹90 crore) in November 2016, according to data from the Reserve Bank of India.

IN DEMAND

The cash crunch brought e-wallets like Paytm to the fore with the mobile payment and commerce platform recording at least 8.5 million transactions on a daily basis this year, said CEO **Vijay Shekhar Sharma** at a summit in New Delhi. The company registered a rise of 12 per cent in its payments volume to ₹5 bil (₹5,000 crore) during January compared with December with a fivefold increase in users during December-January and January-February. Buoyant by the success, Paytm is currently targeting a $10 billion annual transaction volume this year and has pumped over ₹300 crore on its travel vertical. The platform saw over 10 million tickets across bus, train and air travel and had reported bookings of over one million tickets in September 2016. The Alibaba-backed company recently received

Technologytalk

Chillr will be launching 'Settle' in the App, which is a Split wise feature. It will be a seamless experience for splitting bills and settling payments within the App.

"We have a total download base of 3.2 million users' post-demonetisation.

SONY JOY
CEO
Chillr

approval for banking operations that would further allow cement its position in the market.

However, with the normalisation of currency, digital payments was 10.2 per cent lower in January 2017 against December 2016 where the number of transactions fell from 1,027.7 million to 922.9 million in January. Debit and credit transactions at point-of-sale terminals saw an 18 per cent decline in January as did mobile banking transactions (7.6%) while the demand for e-wallets was stable and did not see much of a change.

On the bright side, the recently launched UPI gained traction in December where the number of transactions rose to 2 million and in January, it was 4.2 million. Additionally, the government launched the Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) app as part of Digital India which is also UPI-based and can be synced to any UPI-enabled bank accounts.

CATCHING UP

Another UPI-based payment tool Chillr has seen transaction volume, amount and number of active users more than double on a daily basis. Chillr CEO **Sony Joy** says, "We have a total download base of 3.2 million users' post-demonetisation. It's a simple tool to transfer money between bank accounts and you don't need to load money into any wallet to pay. Also, it's the first multi-bank payments app in India."

Since Chillr is integrated directly with the banks, one can transfer money from one bank account to another bank account, pay bills, recharge, pay your friends or pay at stores, all from your bank account. Their short-term revenue stream is commission from merchants and in-app utility payments and relies on a long-term business model that looks into the data showing transaction patterns of users and building relevant banking and financial products. "Our intention is to co-create new services for our users with the help of banks and help banks market their digital services using our data."

Chillr had partnered with a few banks, but with the launch of UPI, they are now open to a lot more banks with their focus on customer acquisition. Joy says, "Apart from that, we are launching 'Settle' in the app, which is a Split wise feature. It will be a seamless experience for splitting bills and settling payments within the App. We are working on a few other pilots like Chillr Credit on the credit side (which is already available for certain users) and 'Piggy Bank' feature on the savings side."

Reinventing
TARGETED MARKETING

Facebook helps travel marketers improve key metrics such as customer acquisition and accelerating mobile adoption, informs **Saurav Chakraborty**, Industry Manager-Travel, Hyperlocal and Classifieds, Facebook India.

Facebook has, for long, ventured beyond connecting people and has continuously been exploring other avenues like travel. India alone boasts over 150 million users and the organisation is utilising its widespread reach and massive database for travel marketing.

SAURAV CHAKRABORTY

HOW IT WORKS
Facebook believes it provides targeted marketing on a large scale which Chakraborty explains, "Traditional online marketing relies on cookies and on a mobile platform, cookies become redundant when the path to purchase involve multiple devices. Being a real people platform, it is able to reach out to travellers across devices and communicate the brands message appropriately at every stage of travel."

Given the intersection of mobile usage and the personal nature of travel, Facebook's large ad format and creative canvas makes it the prime mobile platform for hotels, airlines, OTAs and other travel companies, he comments. "Be it increasing Olacabs' new customer acquisition rate by 3x within five weeks or using Custom Audiences (CRM Matching) to give Cleartrip a 2.5x return of their ad spend, we help travel marketers achieve their key business metrics, at every stage of the marketing funnel."

PREDOMINANT TRENDS
According to Chakraborty, travel advertisers are seeing a majority of their traffic and sales happen on mobile (mSite and App). He adds, "Although the travel industry is inherently social and mobile, the ecosystem is still refining their mobile strategy. We have seen that once they accelerate the use of Facebook and Instagram they are able to drive business more effectively on mobile."

A bulk of travel bookings in India are air travel, reveals Chakraborty, but the margins on air tickets is wafer thin. "Additionally, the percentage of Indians booking hotels/holidays online is still very small. This is mainly due to the traditional consumer habits of checking rooms at the location, fear of booking online, etc."

However, the introduction of Pay at Hotel feature by several OTAs has caused a surge in the number of people booking hotels online with mobile first offerings that help accelerate this even further.

TRAVELOGUE

- **Fondest travel memory** – Diving with Sharks in South Africa

- **One destination you never get tired of visiting** – Las Vegas. It's a 24/7 city that has the best of both – a vibrant city as well as off the beaten track close to nature

- **Three things that you carry while travelling** – mobile, passport and a sense of adventure!

The Great Digital Inrush

RICK SAGGAR

Rick Saggar has joined the Travelport family in the role of Commercial Director for India and Sri Lanka after a stint with Flynas. In a tête-à-tête, the seasoned airline and travel industry executive gives insights into the industry and shares what's next on the plate.

AHANA GURUNG

WHAT INSPIRED YOUR FORAY INTO THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY?

My passion for travel inspired me to work in the travel industry. I've been in the industry for over 25 years now, and a factor that impresses me is its rapid evolution, depending primarily on new technologies. Travel commerce has changed dramatically and online merchandising has transformed the way customers search and book their travel.

WITH THE COMMENCEMENT OF YOUR NEW ROLE, WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO THE MOST?

I spent an early part of my career at Travelport UK and I'm excited to come back. It's exciting to work for an industry trailblazer and leader; Travelport has strategically invested approximately $830 million since 2012 in products with a focus on redefining the Travel Commerce Platform to address the trends, inefficiencies and unmet needs of all components of the travel value chain: Air and Beyond Air, which include distribution and merchandising solutions for hotel, car rental, rail, cruise-line and tour operators, B2B travel payments, mobile solutions, advertising and an array of additional platform services.

I am also excited to part of the IndiGo global launch. The launch is happening in a phased approach as Travelport helps to connect IndiGo's travellers to a world of travel choice. For IndiGo, Travelport's unique airline merchandising capabilities provide real benefits that weren't previously available through the traditional GDS platform. These include the ability to display and differentiate IndiGo's brand attributes and offering in a similar way as they do on their own website, and being able to better explain their products and services to travel agencies as well as direct to the end traveller through OTAs. Travelport provides a significant opportunity for IndiGo to reach new travellers both in domestically and internationally markets. Our main goal is to support customers' familiarisation with IndiGo's brand proposition.

HOW IMPORTANT IS INDIA AS A MARKET?

India is the third biggest sales region for Travelport and we reported growth of nearly 10 per cent in 2016, versus the previous year. Travelport's business in India is managed by partner InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ) who delivers differentiated content, technology and service to the Indian travel industry. ITQ is a strategic business unit of InterGlobe Enterprises which is a leader in aviation, hospitality and travel-related services, contributing to the growth of the market through innovation and service leadership. What's most exciting is that last quarter, in a GDS-industry first, IndiGo announced that it had signed a strategic partnership to distribute its low fares and ancillaries to all connected Travelport travel agencies around the world – both online and offline. Travelport's leading merchandising capabilities are bringing IndiGo's brand proposition to life for travellers in India and are to agents globally, as IndiGo continues to expand its route network into destinations in the India Subcontinent, the Middle East and South East Asia.

WHERE DO YOU THINK THE INDIAN AVIATION IS HEADING IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

The Indian travel market is predicted to be above the top six business travel markets globally in the next couple of years, by embracing innovation in travel technology leaders. Tourism in India accounts for 7.5 per cent of the GDP and is the third largest foreign exchange earner for the country. The direct contribution of travel and tourism to the GDP is expected to grow at 7.2 per cent per annum, between 2015 and 2025, with contribution expected to reach $160.2 billion by 2026. According to IATA's passenger forecast, by 2026 India will replace the UK, which is currently the third largest aviation market.

WHAT HAS POTENTIAL TO BE THE NEXT BIG THING IN TRAVEL TECHNOLOGY?

Travel technology is becoming more and more mobile centric and technology trends of the region are focused on the customised travel experience; therefore, I believe personalisation is the future, and the technology that supports this trend, such as the Travel Commerce Platform, is connecting travellers to a world of travel choice. Travelport Digital (formerly MTT) is at the forefront of delivering innovative digital travel solutions for airlines, TMCs and travel agencies to meet the expectations of today's ultra-connected travellers. They are based in Dublin, Ireland and create superior, end-to-end travel experiences across multiple devices and channels with the latest in mobile technology for travel industry players all over the world. Their enables airlines and travel companies to leverage 'every moment in travel' with mobile and digital services that transform how they interact with their customers. I'm excited to see what 2017 brings!

Tech takes
FLIGHT

RAJA NATESAN

Technological advancements are predominantly being used in air travel and non-air travel creating more room for convenience for the end consumer. What is changing is the need for a different set of skills in human resource.

The use of technology in travel today is not about the advancement of technology itself but the ease of use and there are two distinct ways the technology is moving ahead. The first is in the area of air travel, which still makes for about 80 per cent of all corporate business and stays the bread and butter of travel. The second is in the area of non-air where some spectacular advancements are taking place and the next one or two years will show how India moves ahead on it. This is where we will see more and more changes happen in the years to come.

The distinction between the air and non-air technology is clear in the way the two technologies are progressing. For air travel, technology is about few and fewer human touch points. Right from searching to booking to quality control to cost savings and MIS, technology now can do it all, faster and better than humans. And this is understandable. Air travel is pretty much a commodity business today and human touch points are not really required. There are enough and more technology producers available and fairly affordable. But there is still a cost and the question is whether the cost will give back returns in a commodity business -- the classic chicken and egg situation.

Technology in the non-air side of travel though is a completely different ball game. It is more about using technology to get into newer experiences, buyer psychology, the lure of marketing especially digital media and the coming of age of social media in business.

Bots are now intelligent enough to conceive, implement, analyse and course correct your entire digital marketing plan. You can use social CRMs to quietly follow your best customer profiles. Virtual and Augmented Reality can now create new destinations, new experiences and open up a totally new segment of virtual travel (which hopefully the travel agents will cash in on). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn don't just create connections, they create leads, chase potential customers and give you a high degree of control in an area where there is still money to be made. There are of course the disrupters like AirBnB, Uber/Ola that reduce human touch points in non-air. But given the avalanche of information available and the rules and regulations on bookings, cancellations, there is still a fair bit of what I would call 'creativity through technology'.

But to use this creativity, we need HR with different skills. Gone are the days when staff were hired on the basis of their GDS skills or even the speed of booking. Today is about the ability to filter and analyse information in order to add value to the customer. In this area, India is still lagging. Some of the OTAs are beginning to see the benefits of using technology creatively. Let's see how quickly the rest of us catch up.

The author is Raja Natesan, Chief Executive Officer, UniGlobe Travel (South Asia).

Virtual and Augmented Reality can now create new destinations, new experiences and open up a totally new segment of virtual travel.

2017 marks a long journey for yatra

India's second largest OTA has its game face on and started the year by raising more than $92 million at NASDAQ.

DHRUV SHRINGI

I t's been over a month since Yatra made its debut on NASDAQ and **Dhruv Shringi**, Chief Executive Officer, Yatra, exudes a calm fervour. There are big plans in store for the OTA and being the second Indian internet company to list on the American stock market is just one of the things that is giving it a head start into the year.

The stock trading that occurred after a reverse merger with Terrapin has raised more than $92.5 million (₹619 crore) of primary capital from global investors and Yatra's significantly stronger balance sheet allows the organisation to do a lot more. "There is tremendous growth ahead in the Indian market. It is going through a very momentous time – it is seeing a huge amount of growth and a lot of new customers and suppliers are being added by the airlines. On the whole, the travel industry has reached a great inflection point and on the back of what we've done at NASDAQ, the incremental capital we've raised in the IPO will allow us to successfully capitalise on the market," says Shringi.

With renewed funds, Yatra plans to increase its focus on consumer branding as well as intensify its penetration into the Tier-II and Tier-III cities. The OTA has already got the momentum going with a partnership with Reliance Jio where the devices will carry the Yatra App preinstalled. "The partnership will begin to kick through now and by the second half,

> **Yatra Online reportedly registered gross bookings of $897 million in fiscal 2016.**

about 35 million phones will have the App on it and will give us a greater reach into the smaller cities," he comments.

Yatra Online's 2016 last quarter results show an increase of 23.7 per cent in the number of air passengers handled which totalled to 1.8 million during October to December. Air travel was up by 23.7 per cent while revenue collected grew by 27.2 per cent to $14 million (₹943.8 million). Yatra Online reportedly registered gross bookings of $897 million in fiscal 2016.

While room night volumes for hotels saw a growth of 21.3 per cent at 365,000, packages were at 36,000. However, revenues for these segments combined were down by 4.9 per cent to $19.9 million (₹1340.3 million). Shringi states that the emphasis on accommodation and packages will multiply to meet the disparity with more the addition of more in pipeline. Yatra's most recent launch includes homestays for MoUs with several state governments like Uttarakhand and Andhra Pradesh were initiated and so far sees a 'favourable response'. Corporate travel will also be a prime focus which has held a successful front and will see more expansion take place.

Technologytalk
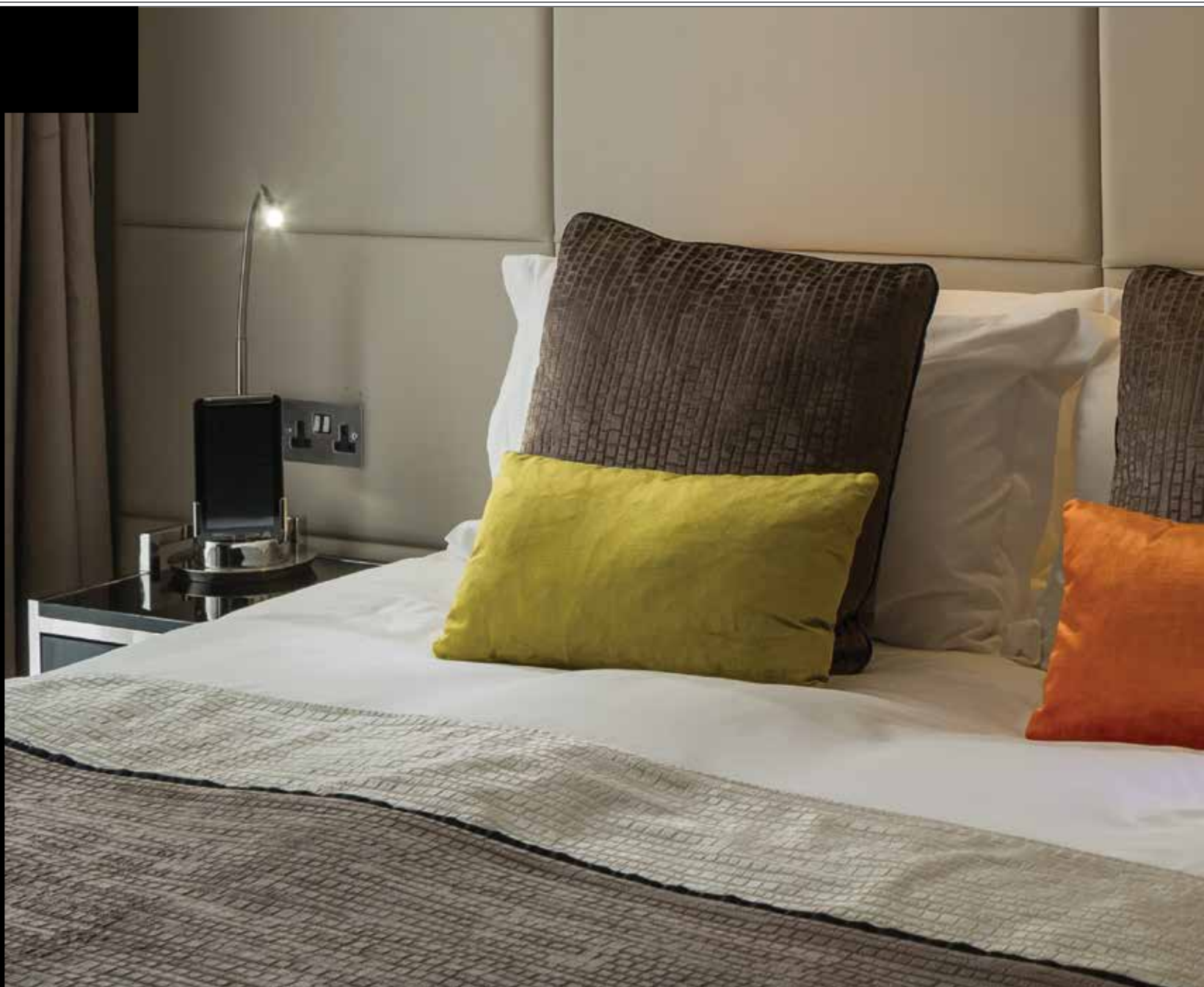
Hotels up the TECH QUOTIENT

Automation in execution and analysing guest profiles through multiple software and applications is aiding hospitality brands in offering personalised service to their guests.

NISHA VERMA
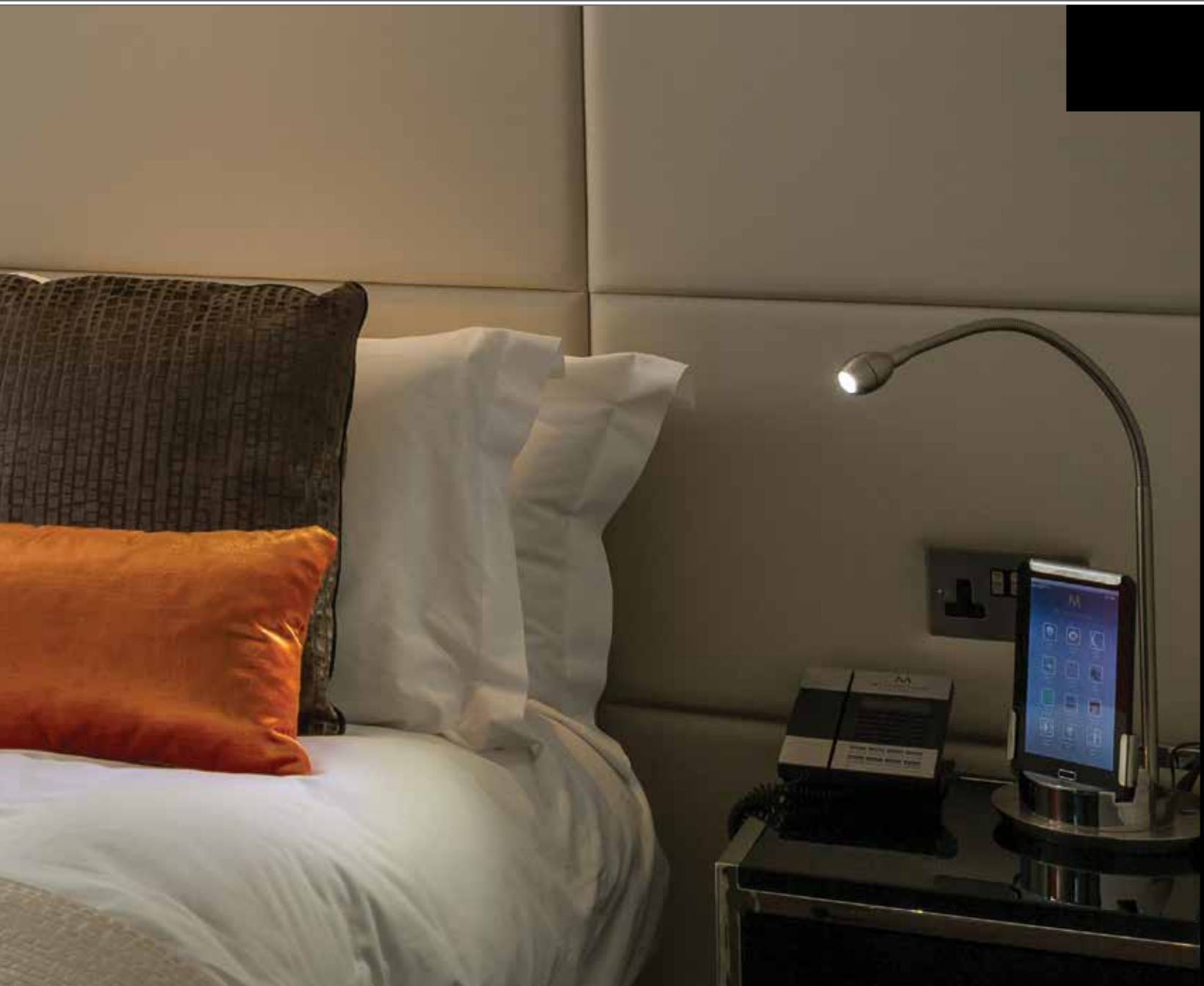
The experience of a hotel stay starts right from the time one books the room at a particular property. Hotels today understand that, and are adopting technological advancements to improve the guests' experience during their stay.

AIDING PERSONALISATION

While many would think that this computerised comfort might just underpin the personal touch that guests expect when they are staying at a five-star property, the hospitality industry thinks otherwise. **Satyajeet Krishnan**, General Manager, The Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, insists, "As customers expect hotel experiences to be completely personalised for them, we have to develop ways to link customer preference data with hotel management systems to develop a personalised, high quality service for guests."

Agrees **Nilesh Patel**, Director of IT, AccorHotels India, "We are leveraging technology at every step of the way, in not only easing the guest journey but also enabling seamless operations."

Aseem Kapoor, General Manager, Hyatt Regency Delhi, on the other hand, claims that technology plays a critical role in bringing the luxury quotient in a hotel. "Delivery of superior experience of a luxury brand at both the product and experiential levels is an important element which helps bring the luxury quotient in a hotel," he says.

SMART GUESTS

With today's guests being smartphone savvy, hotels are offering dedicated applications to ease the check-in process. Patel informs, "Last year capped off the 'Digital Transformation' plan for AccorHotels. We are investing €225 million over a five-year period and are leading the charge in the hospitality space. As part of the initiative, we launched a new version of our mobile application. The AccorHotels One App seamlessly unites various brand applications and features all the Group's hotels. The app offers an enriched experience at every stage of the customer journey, starting from the pre-stay right up to the post-stay stage."

TECH IT AND LOVE IT

"We have to develop ways to use customer preference data to develop a personalised, high quality service."

SATYAJEET KRISHNAN
General Manager
The Taj Mahal Hotel

"We are investing €225 million over a five-year period and are leading the charge in the hospitality space."

NILESH PATEL
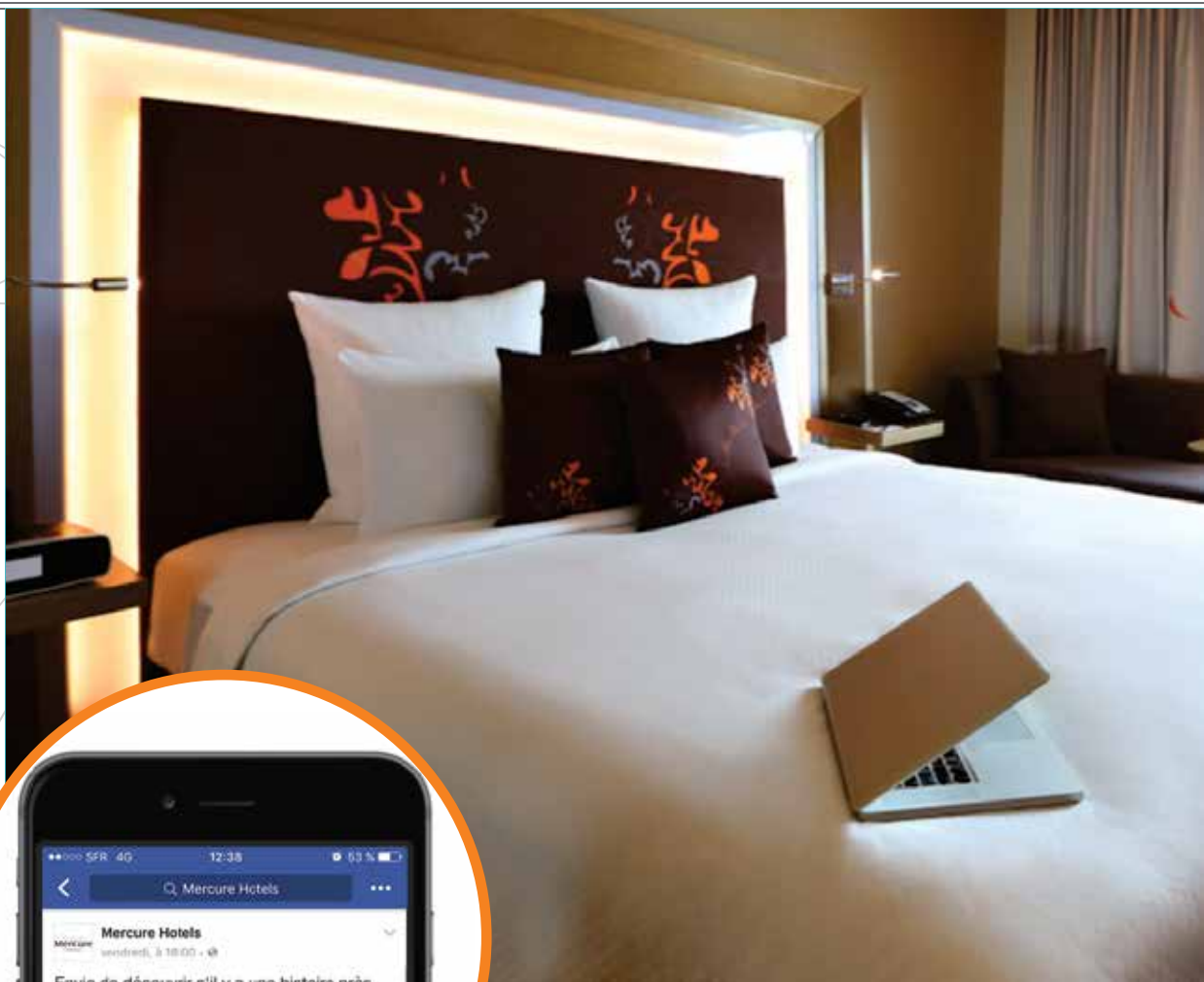*Director of IT*
AccorHotels India

"An e-concierge allows us to learn about guests' preferences and use this information to tailor their stay."

ASEEM KAPOOR
General Manager
Hyatt Regency Delhi

"In M by Montcalm, with a tablet in every room, guests can create their own environment at the tap of a screen."

RAMESH ARORA
MD/VP Marketing
The Montcalm Luxury Hotels

Another initiative up their sleeve is My Web Valet. Introduced last year, My Web Valet allows guests access to information from the hotel on their mobile devices and make all the requests they wish in one click, right from booking their spa, their table at the restaurant or their room service; checking all the hotel services; tracking flight and weather information; or even booking a taxi to move about according to their desires, while following their bill in real time. To date more than 2,660 hotels, including Pullman New Delhi Aerocity, have deployed the 'Lite' version. The 'Full' version of My Web Valet will see wider rollout this year, Patel revealed.

Kapoor says that having such a platform helps them service them better. "An e-concierge that is available 24x7, allows guests to browse at their leisure all the personalised and recommended activities, dining options, spa treatments or any other services and then book directly with the hotel via the platform. It allows us to learn about guests' preferences and use this information to tailor their stay."

Even London-based hospitality company Montcalm Luxury Hotels has installed touchscreens to control underfloor heating in bathroom and call room-service at the touch of a button. **Ramesh Arora**, MD/VP Marketing, The Montcalm Luxury Hotels, reveals, "In M by Montcalm, with a tablet in every room as standard, guests can create their own environment at the tap of a screen — dim the lights, close the curtains and order an indulgent in-room repast. Other amenities include HD LCD TVs with international cable and satellite channels, digital music library, voice mail, Direct-dial phone and electronic room keys."

INSTANT COMMUNICATION

Arora revealed that they also offer reservation on WhatsApp and hotel Apps for their tech-savvy and mobile-friendly customers. Even at Hyatt Regency, Delhi, social media is used in a big way. "We have also created a specialised and dedicated WhatsApp number to communicate with our in-house guests, which makes the process easier and hassle free," says Kapoor.

Patel says that they also use popular instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp, WeChat and Line for guest feedback at some of their Grand Mercure properties in Asia Pacific, including Grand Mercure Bangalore and Grand Mercure Mysuru. "As a VIP service to our privileged members of Le Club AccorHotels, we have made a provision for real-time service and feedback using instant messaging Apps. Upon reservation, we share QR codes and IDs of the messenger App with the members, which they can use to add the hotel on these apps. AccorHotels has partnered with Trust You (global leader in online reputation management) last year to create the Voice of the Guest (VOG) platform, which manages the online reputation and guest feedback of more than 3000 of their properties, to improve their daily operations," he informs.

INNOVATION IS KEY

Taking the smartphone experience forward, Montcalm London launched a complimentary smartphone service solution – Handy. "We are the first hotel group in the UK to introduce the Handy to our guests that allows them to make unlimited local and international calls to 10 international countries including India. Further facilities include free high-speed connectivity, pre-loaded apps, city guide, information on shopping, local attractions, bars and restaurants in London and host of other applications. The smartphones are available to guests upon checking in with all features accessible to them along with a personalised number. In addition, savvy guests can take 'Handy' outside the hotel along with them allowing them to explore the city of London as a travel destination with pre-loaded travel and other useful apps," explained Arora.

Patel, on the other hand, said that they have made a breakthrough in the digital payment space. "Last year, we introduced AccorHotels Personal Wallet, a seamless, quick and safe way to manage payments. Our guests can register the details of up to five credit cards on their AccorHotels account. They can do this, and modify or delete them, from any of their devices (mobile, tablet or desktop). With Personal Wallet now included in the One App, guests can book their rooms anywhere, any time," he informed. For guests on the move, they have another service called PressReader for AccorHotels. "This is an innovative service that lets guests read more than 4,000 international and local newspapers and magazines on their own devices," revealed Patel.

The Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, introduced RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) keys for guest rooms as replacements to the magnetic keys. Krishnan claims, "With RFID door locks, key cards are programmed and used by placing them in proximity of a digital device rather than swiping them through a reader, thus adding to guest convenience. This year we also started the use of iPads to facilitate smooth check-in services. Additionally, we also adopted the use of Under Valley Car Scanners for automatic scanning of all cars that enter the hotel premises. We use chemical free de-scaler for steam generators, upgradation of all analog CCTV cameras with digital cameras and DVR. We have also put technology in place to all uninterrupted power to passenger elevators. The property management system has been changed from Fidelio to Opera and we are resorting to NPS for measuring guest satisfaction scores. This year, we plan to invest in software that would help us track guest requests and complete these requests in real time. This system – called FCS – will help ensure maximum enhancement of guest experiences help us provide total service satisfaction. The hotel also installed an air-conditioning plant equipped with new technology. The Tri Rotor Screw Chiller has an efficiency of 0.45 KW/TR. Conventional lighting in the hotel was also replaced with LED lights and we also installed an organic waste converter to treat kitchen waste."

Krishnan sums it up saying that the use of technology towards creating a unified communication systems and prompt in-room technologies goes a long way in satisfying and fuelling the guests' expectations.

❯ By 2020, 100 million will shop in Augmented Reality

While 100 million represents a little less than 1 per cent of the worldwide population, the number of people shopping online is steadily increasing — from more than 1.5 billion in 2016 to 2 billion in 2019. Immersive technologies such as augmented reality increase user engagement with a product or service by enabling a consumer to fully explore features and conveying additional information that can aid in a buying decision.

What's shaping the
DIGITAL
FUTURE?

Here's a round-up of technology trends that will help you understand not only the radical disruptions, but also the outcomes that will reshape nature of future investments.
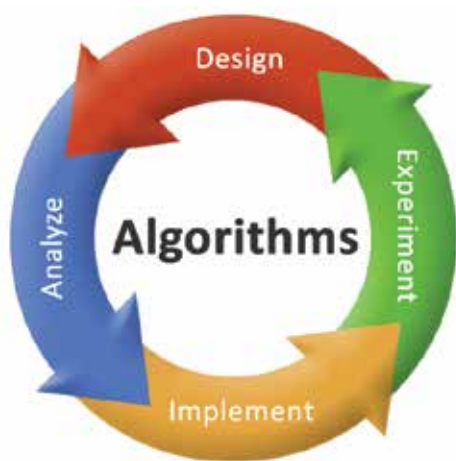
By 2020, algorithms will alter the behaviour of over 1 billion workers

Employees, as consumers, are already familiar with contextualisation algorithms to influence billions of decisions. An emerging set of "persuasive technologies" leverage Big Data from myriad sources, mobile, IoT devices and deep analysis to positively influence behaviour. Social sentiment algorithms are triggering and swaying human emotions of employees, consumers, citizens and voters via consumer Apps such as Facebook or WhatsApp.

By 2019, 20 per cent of brands will abandon their mobile Apps

Many brands are finding that their mobile Apps are not delivering the level of adoption and customer engagement that companies expected. The number of Apps available in the Apple/Android App stores is so high that discovery is a huge impediment to adoption. The cost of application support, not only in maintenance, upgrades and customer care, but also in marketing, throw into disarray the original ROI calculations.

Source: Google

By 2022, IoT will save consumers and businesses $1 trillion a year

Assets under maintenance globally exceed $240 trillion, with maintenance costs of $27 trillion. Moving to predictive maintenance can often save 10 per cent to 20 per cent over preventive maintenance. IoT, properly deployed, can unlock this $1 trillion savings opportunity. IoT holds enormous promise in reducing the cost of maintenance and consumables. Everything from restrooms to cruise liners have costs associated with inspection, pre-emptive replacement, wasteful consumption, unexpected downtime and customer disappointment. The challenge to deriving these savings is that of any IoT project: a secure, robust implementation that can deliver savings over one or two decades, without itself driving management costs that absorb any savings made.

Through 2020, IoT will increase data storage demand by less than 3%

There will be massive potential for data generation in 2020, with 21 billion IoT endpoints estimated to be in use; however, only a fraction of this data will actually be retained and stored. The cumulative IoT data stored in 2020 will come from consumer and business applications. Consumer IoT applications will account for only 3 per cent of this data and business IoT applications 97 per cent. Looking at total storage by industry vertical, healthcare providers, manufacturing and natural resources, transportation, and utilities have the greatest storage requirements due to a combination of the business value of the data and data retention requirements.

By 2022, a blockchain-based business will be worth $10 billion

Blockchain technology is established as the next revolution in transaction or event recording. A blockchain ledger provides an immutable, shared view of all transactions between engaging parties in a distributed, decentralised network. Parties can therefore immediately act on a committed blockchain record, secure in the knowledge that it cannot be changed. Any kind of value creation and exchange can happen in minutes, not days. Blockchain applications can free up cash, create new forms of value, reduce transaction costs and accelerate business processes. Its development is still immature, but the technology can start to deliver value, with the potential for extreme society, business and technological disruption. Blockchain is attracting product and capital investment.

Source: 'Top Strategic Predictions for 2017 and Beyond: Surviving the Storm Winds of Digital Disruption' by Gartner Inc.

SOCIAL MEDIA MEANS BUSINESS

As digital channels evolve, the travel industry has to keep up with tourism marketing strategies through social media.

ANKITA SAXENA
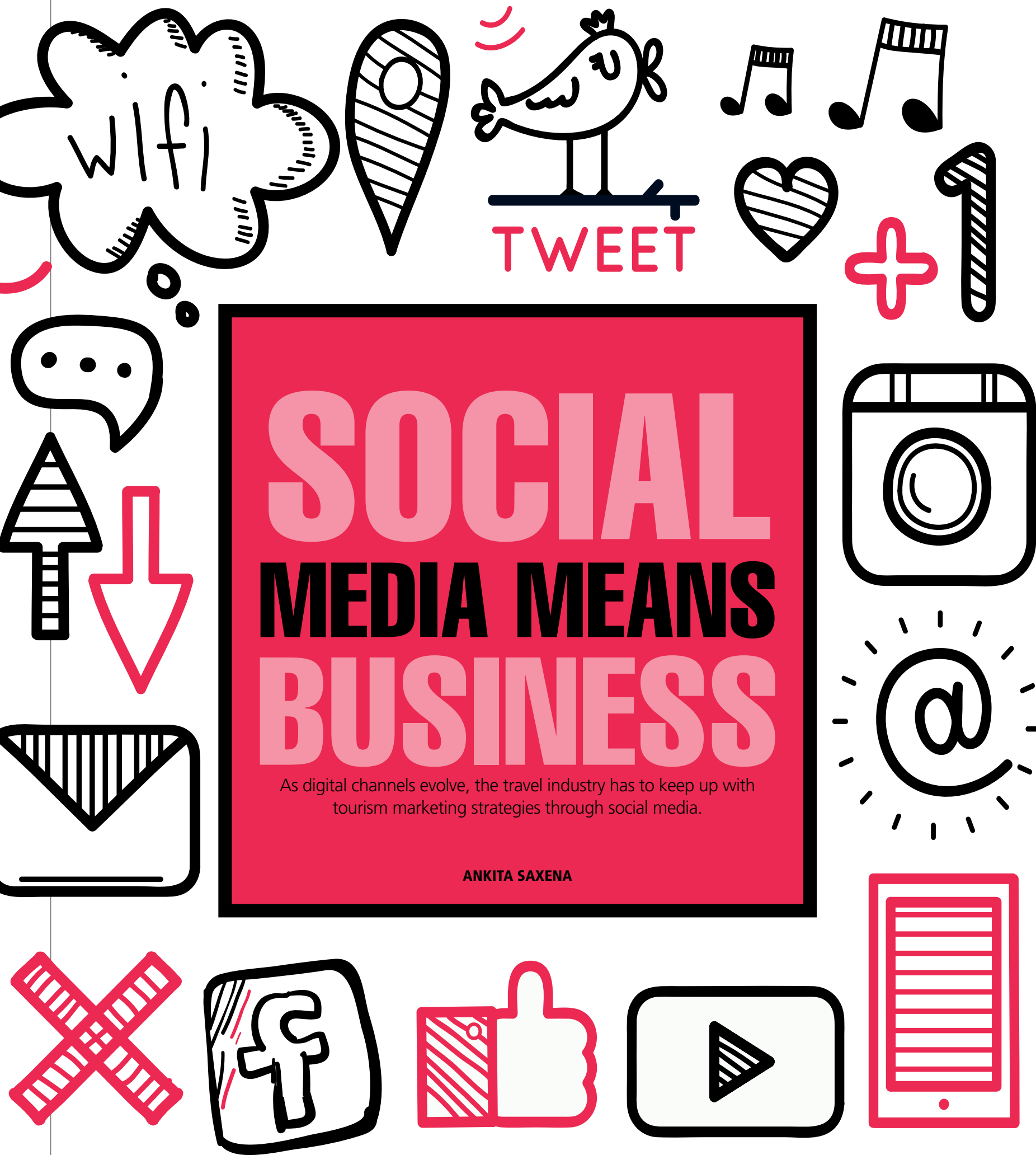
When it comes to social media, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram have become household names. The unique ability of digital channels to engage, measure, and create two-way dialogue are tools which can support marketing, operations, finance, or human resource activities for various industries, and the travel industry in particular.

DIGITAL INFLUENCE

Digital channels are ranked behind only friends and family and word of mouth as sources for travel ideas. However, when it's time to research and booking travel and accommodations, consumers turn to travel agents, online review sites, and specific brands' websites and Apps.

Social media influences travellers in different ways throughout the vacation process either during the planning stages, on-trip or after the completion of a holiday. At the planning stage, digital channels act as source of inspiration and as this inspiration takes shape, those channels become planning tools. Travellers have been observed to predominantly like sharing experiences on vacation through stories and images. While travellers occasionally post on business travel, particularly when it involves exotic or luxury accommodations, leisure travellers are featured often.

Nikhil Ganju, Country Manager, TripAdvisor, points out that an increased number of Indian travellers are using reviews to make discerning choices. With user-generated content working across all stages of the travel experience – from dreaming to planning and from purchasing to advocacy, it is crucial that Indian tourism and hospitality businesses remain agile and capitalise on the power of UGC in order to educate, influence and engage. TripAdvisor's redesigned destination pages called Premium Destination Partnerships allow DMOs to complement destination pages with customised content aimed to provide users with further insight on sightseeing, activities and products to engage in at the destination.

He says, "Travellers can view teasers of these collections, articles and events on these new destination pages and read more when they choose to click through dedicated pages. This new capability to include partner-supplied content complements the user-generated offering, as well as the booking tools already available on our destination pages." The platform has also integrated content distribution into Tourism Pages which has doubled, sometimes tripled, the exposure and interaction rate for DMO content.

CORPORATES GO SOCIAL

Most companies across the travel and hospitality industry have embraced online media to some extent, attempting to be as social as their consumers. However, for consumers these channels are social mediums, while for companies, they are business platforms. According to **Jaal Shah**, Founder, RezLive. com, social media platforms act as key information channels not only to target the B2C audiences but also to educate the B2B travel partners. Various channels not only help in creating a buzz about the product and services but also help in building and maintaining a brand image by interacting directly with the target audience. "Content marketing is king when future of tourism marketing is concerned wherein one provides its audience the content that is actually worth reading," says Shah.

According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India, 40 per cent of Indian travellers seek advice from friends in social media. **Huzan Fraser Motivala**, Representative India, Tourism Ireland, informs, "The size of social media audience in India provides a valuable platform for creating awareness, driving engagement and a great promotional opportunity for destinations to promote themselves to a worldwide audience as well as customise and tailor their messages for the Indian market specifically."

VARIETY TOOLBOX

Social media marketing is a varied toolbox, and each company will find different tools useful for different marketing needs. **Vishal Sinha**, Former CEO, TUI India, says, "All the platforms are growing at a steady pace with Internet penetration of 34.8 per cent and mobile Internet is supposed to grow by 55 per cent which gives us the magnitude of the population that can be reached. Facebook boasts of having 142 million monthly active users (MAU) in India, including 133 million accessing it on mobile, thus Facebook becomes our lead medium, whereas Twitter and Instagram work as the bombarding platforms."

Every platform has its own objective for its users, so LinkedIn works for B2B and talent requirement platform as well as brand awareness for TUI. Sinha further informs, "We spend substantial share of our monthly marketing budget on digital and more than 60 per cent of that on social media ads. This gives us approximately 70 per cent of our leads with a conversation rate of over 6 per cent. Interestingly, we have seen a surge in leads from Tier-II and Tier-III cities, which is a very encouraging trend and shows penetration of digital media and also travel growth."

TARGETING IS THE KEY

By targeting the precise consumer segments, companies can be more efficient with their spending and dedicate more resources to consumers who will actually generate revenue for the company. Motivala explains, "The scale of social audience, which crosses every demographic group, is so large that targeting it must be considered a key element of the marketing

IT PAYS TO BE SOCIAL

"Travellers can view teasers of new collections and events on the new destination pages."
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HUZAN FRASER MOTIVALA
Representative India
Tourism Ireland

"Social media enables us to be targeted; we can tailor activities per requirements."
STEVEN DIXON
Regional Manager–South and South East Asia, Tourism New Zealand

"With Facebook's new features, marketing campaigns have become impactful."
ROMIT THEOPHILUS
Director-Sales and Marketing
GNTO-India

MILLENNIALS' TIMELINE

- Syndicated reports* indicate Millennials are the demographic cohort following Generation X. This age group (18-34 years) uses social media to seek information, purchase and interact with the brand. Online adults aged between 18-34 are most likely follow a brand via social networking (95%) *(Source: Marketing Sherpa)*
- Visual content is more than 40 times more likely to get shared on social media than other types of content. *(Source: HubSpot).*

playbook." Elaborating on the same, **Steven Dixon**, Regional Manager–South and South East Asia, Tourism New Zealand, says, "Social media enables us to be very targeted: both in terms of who we are speaking to and the message we are communicating to them. For example, we can serve one message to someone who is currently planning their trip to New Zealand and a very different message to someone who is already in the country – we can tailor our activity to fit with their changing requirements."

CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

Romit Theophilus, Director-Sales and Marketing, German National Tourist Office-India, explains, "With social media being a more dynamic and personalised medium, marketing campaigns can be customised to suit certain type of audiences or interest making the campaigns more relevant and thereby effective. With Facebook introducing new features such as FB 360, Facebook Live, Slideshows, carousel ads etc., marketing campaigns have become vibrant and impactful."

INNOVATION

Digital media isn't new anymore, but its reach and potential continues to evolve rapidly. Some companies use these channels to engage consumers as a forum for feedback while some use this kind of outreach to provide more customised services. Other companies use digital channels for giveaways or contests.

Soraya Homchuen, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand in Mumbai, explains, "We run contests on social media where some winners are rewarded with tickets to visit iconic places in Thailand. In some cases we have received images from them at the places along with their comment on how they enjoy their trip." Homchuen feels 2016 has been the year of live videos through Facebook Live and Periscope on Twitter. The year 2017 however, is considered to be the year of chatbots. Chatbots will help travellers ask questions and receive answers instantly through Facebook Messenger in the form of a conversation thread. "We put out a variety of content in the form of videos, live telecast, blogger reviews, traveller reviews, GIFs, cinemagraphs, hyperxooms, animations, VFX etc. which share experiences instead of photo driven content," she says.

TRENDS

Karan Anand, Head-Relationships, Cox and Kings, feels that as users become more aware, they are also becoming choosier. "Gone are the days when pricing alone was a deciding factor. Service levels, quality, itineraries, customisations play an important role in line of travel. DIY is on the rise in tourism segment

Some companies use digital media to engage consumers as a forum for feedback while some use this kind of outreach to provide more customised services.

"We put out a variety of content, based on experiences and not photo driven."
SORAYA HOMCHUEN
Director
TAT in Mumbai

"Virtual reality, augmented reality, omni-channel marketing is exciting."
KARAN ANAND
Head-Relationships
Cox and Kings

"We receive 5-8 queries on an average a week from Facebook for Reunion Island."
VINEET GOPAL
Director-India, Tourism Board of Reunion Island

"Travstarz generates close to 20 per cent of the queries now through social media."
PANKAJ NAGPAL
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

"Social media is used aggressively to promote new products and services."
IGNACIO DUCASSE GUTIERREZ
Director
Tourism Office of Spain in India

"Users can purchase & review products and services directly from social media."
NEELU SINGH
CEO and Director
Ezeego1

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and an increased number of tourists are converting to 'travellers', looking for the next enriching experience. It's not just about sightseeing anymore, but the experience before and after the trip as well," he says. Anand also points out that while there are different strategies for different platforms as the audiences have varying levels of interests and knowledge, there is a massive scope in what more can be done. "Virtual reality, augmented reality, omni-channel marketing is exciting especially as they open up new avenues for an immersive experience for tourists," adds Anand.

Ignacio Ducasse Gutierrez, Tourism Counselor, Embassy of Spain in India and Director, Tourism Office of Spain in India, says, "Every day we are witnessing new tailor-made information and new tools that can filter the audience reach and focus on specific market segments. In the competitive Indian market, social media is used aggressively to promote new products and services especially via mobile applications."

BOOKINGS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA
Neelu Singh, CEO and Director, Ezeego1, points out that as far as bookings are concerned social media is used as a lead generation medium. While the numbers may vary, approximately 15-20 per cent of these leads are generated on social media channels for Ezeego1. "A key area is social commerce, where users can purchase and review products and services directly from social media. This is being seen as means to generate leads or sell to

users. However, for direct purchasing through social networks to become mainstream, social networks will need to develop robust payment models that can be integrated to the existing business payment models."

Vineet Gopal, Director-India, Tourism Board of Reunion Island, says, "Our focus is to generate interest and curiosity in Indian travellers towards Reunion Island as a unique luxurious holiday destination. We are focusing on generating queries which can result in bookings. At present we receive 5-8 queries on an average a week from Facebook for Reunion Island." He also feels that there is a shift happening from traditional to digital marketing, but it's not very prominent.

Internationally, social media is one of the strongest parts of any digital marketing plan, but in India it is yet to explore the opportunities. **Pankaj Nagpal**, Managing Director, Travstarz Global Group, also feels the same. "India is still at a very nascent stage as far as social media is concerned specially for marketing purposes but there is a definite shift happening to such platforms for marketing since they are most cost-effective and the audience is quite large specially for new upcoming destinations and hotels who can use it for branding purposes and the people who have visited these destinations and hotels can support the claims by their testimonials." Travstarz generates close to 20 per cent of the queries now through social media initiatives which is definite to grow up to 40 per cent very shortly.

Technology

Connected Cars

While still in the early phase, car rental companies are increasingly betting big on the Internet of Things (IoT) through mobile applications to bring a higher level of efficiency and enhance the quality of life.

RAJIV VIJ

The Internet today is no more limited to our desktops and laptop computers or smartphones, where we spend hours browsing or even sometimes procrastinating. It has gone beyond computers and is now touching gadgets or appliances we use at home, harnessing the power of Big Data among devices to make lives easier.

Catching up on these trends, India has witnessed a remarkable growth in IoT. It has not only demonstrated its fun side, but also substantiated its capabilities in real time applications. Owing to its burgeoning popularity earned in such a short span of time, its compound annual growth rate (CAGR) is expected to be 40.8 per cent from 2012 to 2018 reaching $300 billion by 2020 globally. The drivers of this growth will be and are a number of start-ups who with their innovative ideas are bound to make life more Internet friendly.

Adding to the insights, a report by Business Insider revealed that by the year 2020, around 34 billion devices will be connected to the Internet. Likewise, Vision Mobile added that there will about 10 million Internet of Things developers. With such prosperous numbers, the IoT space is touted to go a long way. Nevertheless, moving forward the question that still leaves masses speculating is that "What does it have in store in the future?"

IoT is being merged with mobile technology in the car rental sector to drive growth. While in its early days, enterprise mobility was majorly used for messaging and collaboration, with its evolving capabilities, there has been a surge in the demand for software that supports enterprise apps. Among many others, car rental companies today are banking on mobile apps for their growth and expansion and further adding value to their offerings, these companies are merging these Apps with IoT.

We might have seen it but never realised that the use of mobile technologies coupled with IoT is enhancing the quality of life we are leading. For instant, car rental companies can and have already started installing speed sensors in their cars that alerts drivers for over speeding renters considering their safety. It's not just about vehicles communicating other technologies over a network, it is about sieving out data from such communications to enhance efficiency within the sharing economy, that allows for a mindful, independent and connected vehicles to transform data into useful information.

Rapid urbanisation has created a need for sharing resources and shared economy, mostly because it puts a lot of pressure on the transportation segment and with IoT and mobile technology; consumers and organisations are sharing resources. Sharing vehicles connected through IoT and mobile applications can aid in soothing such pressures. Likewise, businesses can leverage connected vehicles as a new line of revenue.

The author is Rajiv Vij, CEO and MD of mobility solutions provider Carzonrent.

According to a report, by the year 2020, around 34 billion devices will be connected to the Internet. Likewise, there will be about 10 million IoT developers.

Bridging the
OFFLINE
GAP

TripBox, a customer engagement and management App, aims to empower brick-and-mortar B2C agencies by making itineraries and every kind of travel document available on the traveller's mobile even when offline.

With several Indian travel agencies yet to jump on board the digital bandwagon, several companies are cashing in on this area to enhance their services. Enter TripBox, an App that will sync all your travel details on the same platform to encourage ease-of-use for the end customer.

Co-founder **Harish Sharma** explains that the product primarily caters to the offline agents who may not be on an online platform but want to compete with them. "The platform allows them (offline agents) to upload their content manually or automatically where each of their customers can have access to this information on the mobile App. In this way, we are providing mobile solutions for travel agencies and tour operators. This is a first of its kind product in the travel space which caters to the offline travel fraternity and allows such customer engagement." Through the app, one can web check-in, save important documents such as passport details, tickets, visa, etc. and also has the option of making payments while using the app.

DRIVING BUSINESS TRAVEL

FOR ADMINISTRATOR:
- Update trip details manually/Import from list/html/email (flights, hotels, cars, rail, bus, vacations, transfers, visa)
- Send notifications to customers on the move
- Live chat with customers (agents can initiate from admin backend)
- Send branded itineraries in HTML/PDF
- Self-branded tickets and invoice copy
- Receive payments online for unpaid bookings

FOR CUSTOMER:
- Always handy trip itinerary
- Use booking details to check in at Airports/Hotels
- View All itineraries with details, on Offline mode as well
- Live Chat with agency staff
- Pay online for unpaid trips, instantly
- Request cancellations and support
- Associated info with trip e.g. weather, currency, things to do etc.

The biggest advantage is that during the course of an engagement with the service provider, a host of ancillary products can be generated and sold to the customers like forex, insurance policies, additional museum tickets, etc. This option is even available from the time a customer interacts to the time of completion of the trip, or even during the trip. "So, it is sort of a post-booking, during the trip engagement tool," he adds. One can also consult or clear queries through a live chat interface where documents and screenshots can also be forwarded.

TripBox has initially been rolled out with 10 travel agencies on trial to understand how well the product will be received and to test out ways to improve services. He says, "I've seen a lot of interest amongst fellow travel agents on using TripBox. See, everyone wants to go online but the question is about the price, ROI and whether they will be able to successfully implement technology or not. The future is that everyone is running with or behind technology and there is no way out of it."

Adopt & Benefit

Vikram Kohli, President, FCM Travel Solutions, strongly feels that technology and therefore automation is the future and is fast becoming a key differentiator in today's world.

HAZEL JAIN

HAS THE TECHNOLOGY LANDSCAPE IN INDIA CHANGED WHEN WE SPEAK OF TRAVEL COMPANIES?

Yes. Like travel, technology is also an evolving industry and we keep seeing changes and enhancements basis growing customer needs and 'ease of doing business.' From automating specific processes we are looking at end-to-end fulfillment including Expense Management Solutions.

We are also moving away from desktop to mobile solutions for the mobile customer. Organising and managing meetings and conferences is all heading the digital way.

HOW HAS THE PERCEPTION OF CORPORATE COMPANIES CHANGED TOWARDS AUTOMATING THEIR BUSINESS TRAVEL?

Today's customer is certainly more 'informed' and 'demanding' when it comes to automation. The recent 'digitalisation' push by the government is also adding up more towards automation and use of technology. Customers are looking for convenience, better control and reduced costs, which they can easily derive from automation.

Most of our customer engagements today revolve around our technological capabilities and it is becoming one of the key selection criteria for doing business.

WHAT ACCORDING TO YOU IS THE REASON BEHIND THIS GRADUAL EVOLUTION?

While the technology is transforming at a faster pace, its usage and adoption has been a gradual process. This is part of 'Change Management' process. Most technological solutions often involve multiple departments and getting them on board and making it a seamless process becomes a challenge. There is always the fear of the 'unknown' and the 'known' with certain sections of the business getting affected due to automation.

WHAT ARE THE MOST POPULAR TOOLS THAT INDIAN COMPANIES OPT FOR?

In the travel space, a lot of our customers are now opting for Self-Booking Tool (SBT), Expense Management Solution, Finance Integrations, HR Data Integrations for better policy compliance, Single Sign-On for comfort of end users, etc. Most importantly, these solutions are sought both for desktop and mobile platforms.

WHAT KIND OF CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE WHEN ENCOURAGING TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION OR SERVICING A CLIENT?

Most challenges are around bringing various departments like Human Resources, Finance, IT, Procurement, etc. on the same page. Also, as mentioned before it is a change management process.

Making customers understand the benefits they can derive out of automation without losing control will go a long way in defining the future of how travel is managed within the organisation. Also, organisations' internal systems need to support these changes.

Technology and therefore automation is the future and is fast becoming a key differentiator in today's world. The quicker companies recognise this fact, the sooner they will start reaping the benefits.

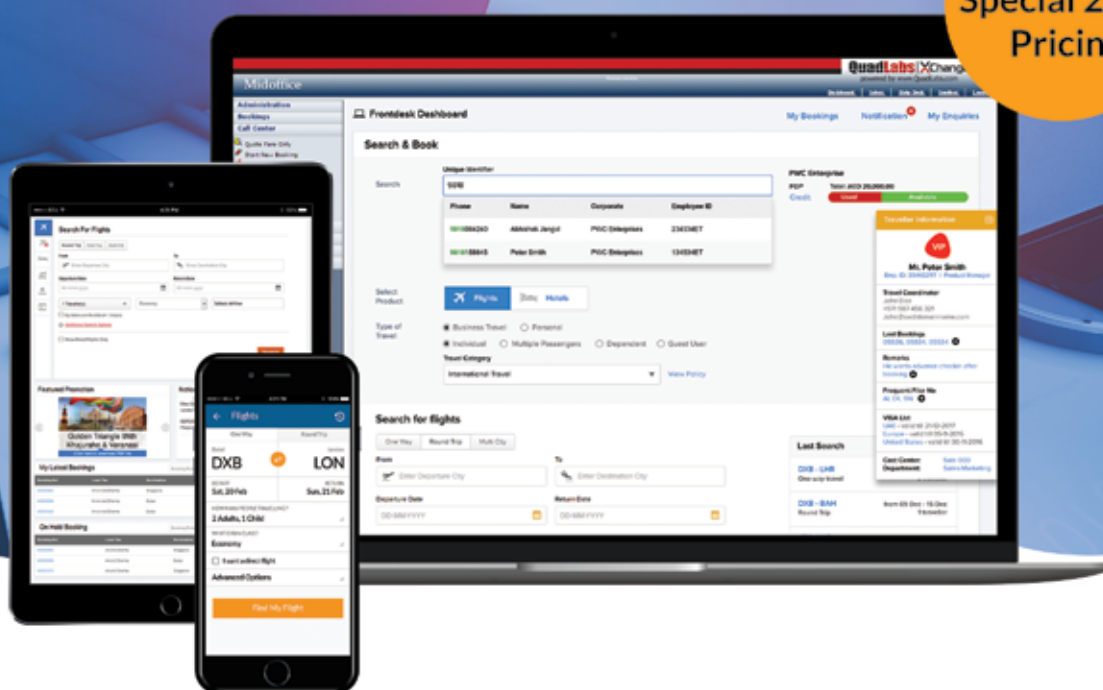Making customers understand the benefits of automation will go a long way in defining the future of travel.

Travelport Branded Fares

Delighting your customers with more personalized services while building greater relationships.

Sell more than just a seat, sell an experience!

Travelport Branded Fares can help you grow your revenues. Using this unique tool accessed through Travelport Smartpoint, you can access branded and ancillary services available from leading national and international airlines, and low-cost carriers alike. Plus, with its added images, you can explain the details of each airline fare and offer bookable ancillaries such as meals, bags, or seat selection for that extra leg room. Through Travelport Branded Fares, you can create more upsell opportunities, and create customized solutions. Sell your travelers an experience!