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## Digitalization of Ecotourism and Allied Services in Melghat Tiger Reserve of Vidarbha

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### ABSTRACT

*Ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism whose sole purpose is holiday activities and the core elements of this type of tourism is natural-based. The basic intention of this type of tourism is to raise awareness amongst travelers about the natural place they visit for and at the same time minimize any corrosive impact of human activity along with the upliftment of the localites of the particular area. In the digital era of technology, travel agendas rarely rely on trusted word-of-mouth recommendations and physical guidebooks; breakthroughs in digitalisation have given customers independence and choice in a really big way. Let's not forget that travel is essentially about connecting – places, people, experiences and memories. One thing that technology does well, is connect things. Before going on a trip, most people research the place they're about to visit. Once they arrive at the destination, the search for the best places to visit continues. Thankfully, the power of Wi-Fi allows travelers to use their devices anywhere from the hotel room to coffee shops and touristic attractions. As a result, planning any trip becomes as easy as visiting a review website and choosing the next destination point. A Descriptive approach was adapted to conduct the study on digitalization of ecotourism and other related services in the Melghat Tiger Region, the researcher could that digital services has in a way created varied sources of revenue generation and employment opportunities for the local people called as 'korku'. It is due to the vision of making India digital Melghat is crowned with Harisal- India's first digital village.*

**Keywords:** Digitalisation, Ecotourism, Employment, Services, Tiger Reserves.

### What is Ecotourism?

Ecotourism (also called sustainable tourism) can be defined by a variety of travel practices, but it all comes down to a general set of ideas. As an eco-tourist, you decide to travel in a way that shows respect to nature and does not contribute to its degradation.

Additionally, ecotourism is a part of environmental conservation, and understanding what the needs of the people are who are local to the area so that you can help to improve their quality of life. It also involves learning more about the history of other cities and preserving the historical landmarks.

As per The International Ecotourism Society,

*“Ecotourism is now defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education. Education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests.”*

Ecotourism is a responsible tourism which conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people. It...

- ) Builds environmental awareness
- ) Provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- ) Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- ) Respects local culture
- ) Supports human rights and democratic movements such as:

- ) conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection
- ) promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, by providing jobs to local populations
- ) sharing of all socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous peoples by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises
- ) tourism to unspoiled natural resources, with minimal impact on the environment being a primary concern.
- ) minimization of tourism's own environmental impact
- ) affordability and lack of waste in the form of luxury
- ) local culture, flora, and fauna being the main attractions
- ) local people, who benefit from this form of tourism economically, and often more than mass tourism

### Objectives of Ecotourism:

Eco tourism or sustainable tourism is designed to make travelers aware of the environment and carry out all tourism operations in an eco-friendly manner. We have listed down a few aims and objectives of ecological tourism. Have a look:

- Maintaining the Sanctity of the Environment
- Utilizing All Types of Resources Efficiently
- Preserving the Biological Diversity
- Ensuring the Economic Progress
- Increasing the Scope of Employment
- Strengthening the Cultural Bonding

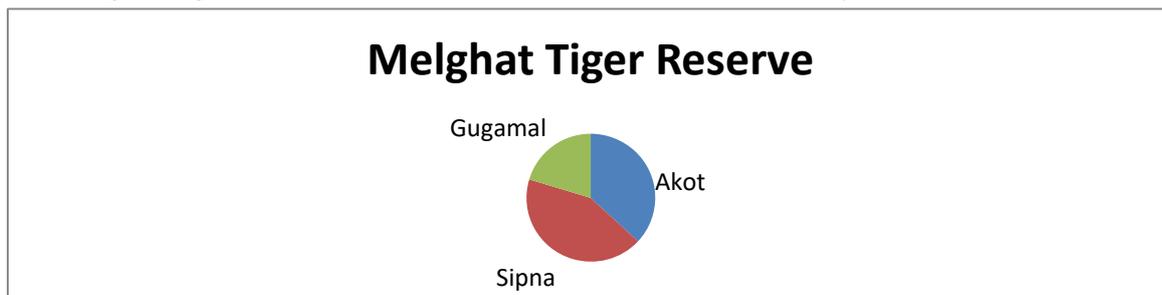
### Melghat Tiger Reserve:

Melghat means 'meeting of the ghats' which is just what the area is, a large tract of unending hills and ravines scarred by jagged cliffs and steep climbs. The exquisite hill forests, thick undergrowth and moss-covered trees underscore its virgin confines.

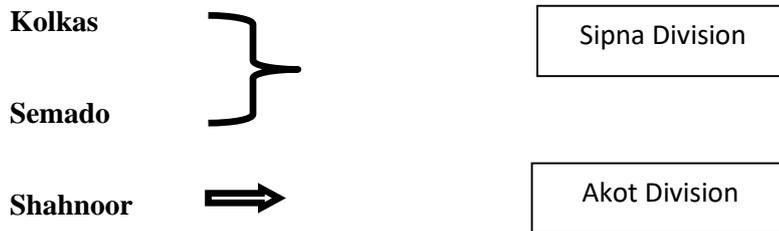
Melghat was declared a tiger reserve and was among the first nine tiger reserves notified in 1973-74 under the Project Tiger. It is located in Amravati District of Maharashtra State in India. The Tapi River and the Gawilgadh ridge of the Satpura Range form the boundaries of the reserve. In 1985 Melghat Wildlife Sanctuary was created. The Tapi river flows through the northern end of the Melghat Tiger Reserve, through a forest which lies within the catchment area of the river system. Many different kinds of wildlife, both flora and fauna, are found here.

### Melghat Tiger Reserve Division:

The Melghat Tiger Reserve is divided under three sub-divisions namely,



There are various rest houses at-



### **Korku tribes of Melghat:**

Korku have derived their name from the combination of the word ‘Koru’ meaning Man and ‘Ku’ which make it plural meaning tribal men.

Forming an important part of its identity, India remains home to a large number of aboriginals, untouched by the modern lifestyle of the city these people continue to live in the remotest of location with dense forest, raging rivers and varied wildlife. Living so close to nature, these people are filled with love, compassion and warmth.

### **Digitalization in Ecotourism:**

There’s no denying that technology plays a pivotal role within the travel and tourism sector.

Along with the exponential growth of extension and using the Internet and the World Wide Web, both at home and at work, have increased also the opportunities for travel providers to distribute information and to process bookings for potential buyers. The development processes within the information technology, communications and Internet, have revolutionized the entire tourism industry, creating new business models, changing the structure of distribution channels of the tourism and reprojecting all products of this industry and last but not least, influencing the touristic packages suppliers , destinations and stakeholders. (Organism or group of people with major interests in the conduct and results of the company). Some hotels have implemented a fully automated check-in process, stepping back from personal contact and relying on an electronic process to meet the customer’s needs. As long as the small tourism operators can be reached on the Internet, the trend will grow up in their direction, because the Internet is similar to a “playground” in which with a well done web site, the small businesses can advertise as professional as their larger competitors. In this context, we assist to a more and more emphasized development of the electronic commerce, hence of the electronic tourism (or e-tourism).

Our day-to-day lives are made easier through the use of the internet and technology – whether it be on our mobile devices, at home or in the work place using a desktop or laptop. Significant developments in technology have now made this achievable on a global scale.

It’s seen by many that technology – namely social media – has created a global village, connecting everybody to everyone, everywhere. Some argue that this has made us less sociable, inhibiting face to face and physical interaction. However, the concept that globalisation and technology allows us to overcome the limitations of physical distance through our finger tips, presents countless opportunities for the travel and tourism industry to flourish.

People always have and always will continue to travel around the world to experience new things... and advances in technology are there to influence and inspire this: not prohibit.

Websites, booking platforms, apps and using social media all provide the opportunity to engage and connect with customers on a variety of levels to allow an enhanced travel experience. Now that this information for customers is easily accessible (through various mediums), it inevitably means that it’s important for companies to get smarter and adapt to remain competitive.

The digitalization impact has spread its wings to the nearby villages and its people too. Harisal, about 270km from Nagpur, is going to be India's "first smart village". The state and central governments have big plans for the hamlet, located in a hilly area deep inside the Melghat Tiger Reserve and inhabited by 2,000 people, mostly Korku Adivasis. They plan to provide each of the 406 households with solar electricity and Internet connections.



So far, Harisal has been known mainly for its malnutrition deaths. Now the words "digital" and "smart" are on everybody's lips - right from unlettered villagers to the few who have been to school. The government wants to introduce the Internet and computers to the villagers, mostly farmers, to put the village on the digital map. On the agenda are cashless markets, WiFi zones, mobile connectivity, health cards and telemedicine facilities.

In summary, developments in technology have led to big changes in the way that customers use it to enhance their full travel experience. Consequently, travel companies must adapt to continue providing their customers with the best customer experience possible along with the upliftment of the localities in the region.

### **Research Methodology:**

Research in common parlance refers to a search for knowledge. One can also define research as a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic.

The process used to collect information and data for the purpose of coming to a conclusion giving suggestion and taking decision for which the methodology included books, publication research, interviews with officials at the Forest Office of Melghat Tiger Reserve and Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation Amravati.

### **Statement of Problem:**

The traditional method of providing information and services are limiting the growth of tourism industry. Digitalization of these services will save the time and cost of the tourist which will result into the higher satisfaction level and increase in their number.

Hence the researcher undertook the study "Digitalization of ecotourism and allied services in Melghat Tiger Reserve of Vidarbha".

### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To study the various segments of forest tourism.
2. To analyze the Traditional and Digital Methods of tourism.
3. To analyze the impact of digitalization on the related services and tourists.
4. To study the impact of digitalization on the growth of tourism in Melghat Tiger Reserve.
5. To study the impact of digitalization on providing employment opportunities to localities.

### **Tiger Reserve- An Introduction:**

India is home to 70% of tigers in the World. There are around 50 tiger reserves in India which are governed by Project Tiger administered by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

Initially 9 Tiger Reserves were created for Project Tiger in 1973-74

1. Manas Wildlife Sanctuary (Assam)
2. Palamu Tiger Reserve (Bihar)
3. Simlipal National Park (Orissa)

4. Corbett National Park (Uttar Pradesh now UttaraKhand)
5. Kanha National Park (Madhya Pradesh)
6. Melghat Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra)
7. Bandipur National Park (Karnataka)
8. Ranthambore (Rajasthan)
9. Sunderban Wildlife Sanctuary (West Bengal)

#### List of Tiger Reserves in Maharashtra

Tiger Reserve	Year declared	Core Area(km <sup>2</sup> )	Buffer Area(km <sup>2</sup> )	Total Area (km <sup>2</sup> )
<u>Melghat</u>	1974	1,500	1,268	2,769
<u>Tadoba</u>	1993	626	1,102	1,728
<u>Pench</u>	1977	257	484	741
<u>Sahyadri</u>	2007	600	565	1,166
<u>Nawegaon-Nagzira</u>	2013	654	1241	1895
<u>Bor</u>	2014	138	678	816
<b>Total</b>		<b>3775</b>	<b>5338</b>	<b>9113</b>

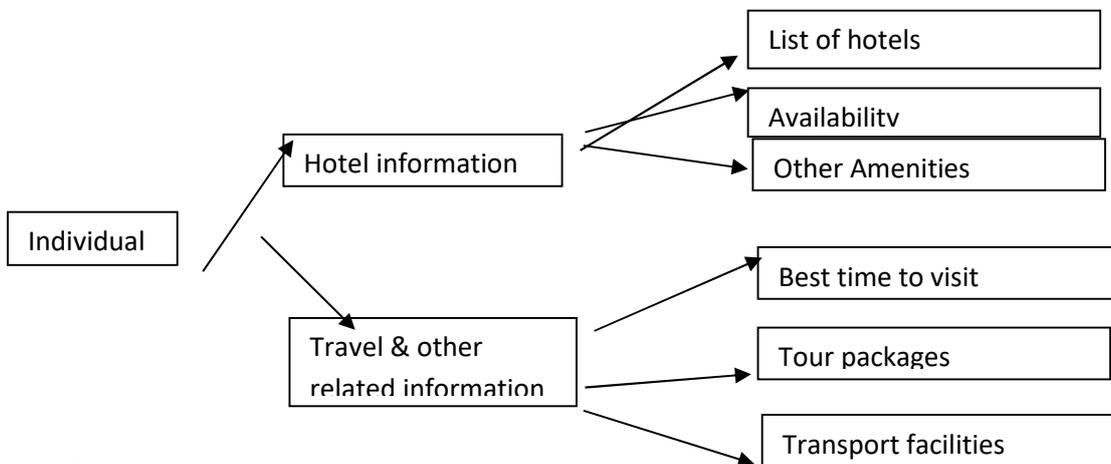
(Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger\\_reserves\\_of\\_Maharashtra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger_reserves_of_Maharashtra))

#### Findings:

It is found that the traditional method of tourism included various middlemen and lot of tedious structure of the booking and reservation process. Whereas, the world of technology have enhanced the reservation system by Douglas Foster- Do-it-yourself reservation system, wherein all the information and booking are available at just one click.

The digital initiative has, among other things, focused on providing Internet facilities to schools. Students and teachers will be given online training. Computer labs are being set up, along with a digital library with the help of Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University.

It is also found that the digital method have given a boost to the tourism sector in the region as compared to the traditional methods of tourism with help of Do-it-yourself model.



#### Conclusion:

From the above findings and survey done during the research process it can be concluded that-

- ) There are various avenues available in the region of Melghat Tiger Reserve, such as jungle safari, adventure sports at Shahnoor rest house.
- ) The digital methods of tourism have given a boost to the ecotourism in the last 3 years as a result a new gate for jungle safari has been opened from Chikhaldara from February 2017.
- ) The digital growth in the the region is been such that the local people are been given training and computer literacy so that they can sell their handmade bamboo items online globally.
- ) Melghat is one of the oldest tiger reserves in India and is now acknowledged world wide due to digitalization.
- ) There is almost a hike of 8-10% annually in the number of visitors in the region.
- ) It can also be concluded that the digitalization of ecotourism and their allied services have generated moderate employment opportunities for the localites- such as tour guides, catering, handicrafts, various sports activities tutors etc.

### Suggestions:

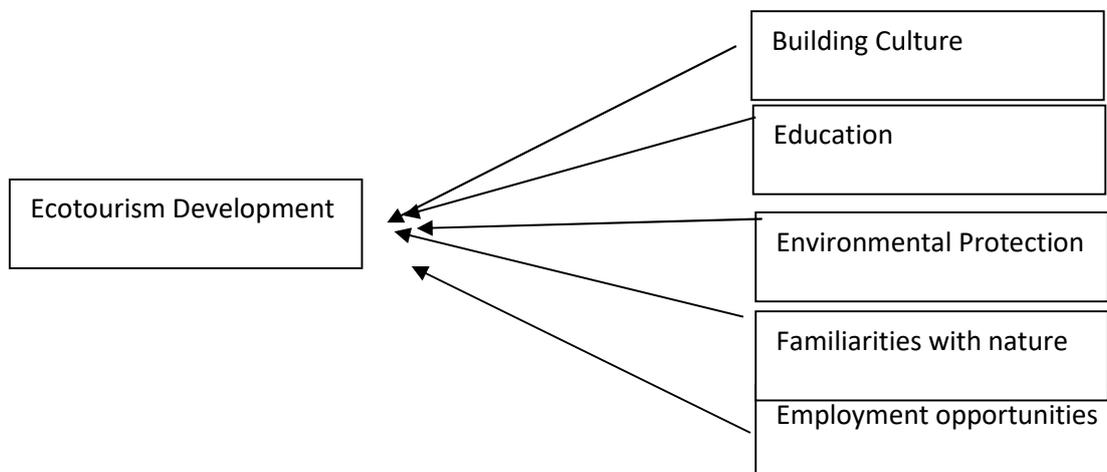
There is huge scope of growth in the tourism industry in the region of Melghat.

Adequate supply of electricity

More number of mobile and wifi towers.

Residential facilities in Korku huts for proper understanding of the local culture and environment.

The ecotourism can develop when the other related factors are in proper coordination with it.



Proper synchronization of the above factors will channelize the ecotourism in an effective manner for a better tomorrow for the people in the region of Melghat and the generation to ccome in the digital era.

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