



# Usability Evaluation of Tourism Icons in India

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## INTRODUCTION

In India, there are twenty nine states and seven union territories and most of them have their official tourism websites. These websites are designed to provide relevant tourism information and services to the Public and visiting Tourists, who are Indian Citizens, Non-Resident Indians (NRI) or Foreigners. There are unique tourism icons used by these Indian tourism websites, which represent a diversified culture of the respective state of India. There are three major types of icons viz. simple icons, indices and symbols. An icon is a visual sign that looks like what it means. An index indicates about a particular object or process through indirect means. A symbol is a sign which is used for representation of objects or process through convention or standard (Agrawal & Bhutkar, 2012, 2015; Bhutkar et al., 2011; Cumbria, 2015; “Horton”, 1994; Specht, 2014; Kalsi et al., 2009; Shah, 2007; Withrow et al., 2000). The examples of icon, index and symbol in e-Governance websites are depicted in Table 1. An icon showing a house represents housing. An index for education is represented using a graduation cap with rolled degree and red ribbon, which is an indirect representation of education. A symbol for differently-abled services is depicted by a person in sitting position on chair-like object. All the icons in Table 1 are referred from a section – ‘Topic’ on Indian e-Governance Portal (“India Web Portal”, 2016).




The tourism icons used in these websites are of the type – index and each of these icons indicates about state tourism through indirect mean representing regional or cultural aspect(s) of the respective state of India (Bhutkar et al., 2011; Kergosien, 1991). In this chapter, the tourism icons available with these state tourism websites are studied and evaluated to propose a comprehensive methodology of icon evaluation.

## Characteristics of Icons

The icons have about 40 characteristics representing several aspects incorporated in them (“Horton”, 1994; Specht, 2014). These icon characteristics include major characteristics such as –

- **Functional Analogy:** If you can’t show the object itself, you can show the object that performs an analogous function in more familiar area.
- **Animal Use:** Animals or birds are used as symbols.

*Table 1. Examples icon, index and symbol in e-governance websites*

Icon	Index	Symbol
		

- **Overlapping:** Allowing one object to block the view of another for conveying the proximity.
- **Size:** Size is a dimension or magnitude of any object.
- **Shape:** Shape is an outline of any object.
- **Clarity:** Clarity is defined as a clear, understandable, informative and easy association with the message.
- **Universal:** Globally used.
- **Labels Off:** Labels are not displayed or required (If symbol is not obvious or known to all readers then it must be labeled).
- **Functional Analogy:** If you can't show the object itself, you can show the object that performs an analogous function in more familiar area.
- **Color Indicator:** In color indication, each color denoted by background, border or text may have a different meaning.
- **Animal Use:** Animals or birds are used as symbols.
- **Overlapping:** Allowing one object to block the view of another for conveying the proximity.
- **Size:** Size is a dimension or magnitude of any object.
- **Shape:** Shape is an outline of any object.
- **Clarity:** Clarity is defined as a clear, understandable, informative and easy association with the message.

The icon characteristics are divided into two parts. A first part contains primary characteristics, which are required characteristics observed in most of the icons. The tourism icons have three required characteristics such as labels off, clarity and functional analogy. These characteristics are observed in most of the tourism icons. For example, a tourism icon for a state of 'Himachal Pradesh' is shown in Figure 1, which consists of Deodar Trees, Sun, Moon, Caves and Hills. This index does not have any label; which is a 'labels off' characteristics. This index is easily understandable and 'Clear'. It has a 'Functional

Figure 1. Tourism icon for the state of 'Himachal Pradesh'



analogy' in the form of natural entities such as Sun, Moon, Caves, Hills and Deodar trees representing a state of 'Himachal Pradesh' and natural life in Himalayan mountain ranges.

Ten tourism icons have been selected satisfying primary characteristics and are depicted in Table 2. The other part has secondary characteristics,

Table 2. Icons from state e-governance websites of India list of selected tourism

Icon	Icon Represented In State	Icon	Icon Represented In State
	Bihar		Nagaland
	Gujarat		Kerala
	Haryana		Rajasthan
	Himachal Pradesh		Jammu and Kashmir
	Sikkim		Tamil Nadu

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