

Chapter 21

E-Relationship for Web-Based Tourism Promotion: A Review of Literature

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ABSTRACT

Tourism has been featured as a rapidly growing industry with excellent opportunities for business development. There are several success factors which determine the growth of the tourism promotional endeavors of the hotels. This chapter evaluates four of the key success factors related to web based tourism promotion: trust, electronic service quality, usability and accessibility. The theoretical models available for measuring the aforementioned success factors are evaluated along with the survey on the development of research activities in these four fronts. The theoretical frameworks within each concept categories are compared and contrasted to infer the competitive advantage of each model in modeling web based tourism promotion activities. Finally, the conclusions are made on the basis of the analysis undertaken on the conceptual models in each of these categories.

INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented growth in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) has revolutionized the business world. Advances in relation to managerial functions have resulted in an epochal impact on the relevant businesses. For the survival and success of any industrial cluster, proper acquisition of technology and effective usage of its innovations have become vital elements. The tour-

ism industry is one particular area that has made a strategic utilization of ICT. In fact, ICTs have made significant changes to the global tourism industry, the growth in multimedia platforms, has resulted in changes within the industry (Buhalis, 2004). Although the Information Systems/Information Technology (IS/IT) has evolved as a strategic player and even the principle enabler in tourism promotion during the last few decades, most of the hoteliers in developing countries are still using it

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as a limited support tool for promotion. This lack of utilization will inevitably have some negative impact upon potential business, particularly given the huge growth in tourism within developing countries. Especially, the use of internet is critical in marketing of a cultural product like tourism due to that fact that the internet provides wider scope in marketing, which is paramount in marketing a cultural product to people coming from differing cultural and geographic backgrounds. There are also other essential factors that contributing towards the success of web based tourism which needs to be considered when marketing cultural product. The purpose of this chapter is to shed some insight into these success factors and understand how they could potentially contribute towards the success of web based tourism promotion in developing countries.

The global leading position of the tourism industry has opened up a strategic window for many developing countries to boost their economy, by positioning themselves to a record global market share in tourism. In fact, the WTO predicted that in 2010, America would lose its favorable position behind Europe, to Asia and the Pacific in receiving international tourists and that by 2020, Asia and the Pacific could expect around 397 million arrivals (Harris & Vogel, 2007). The growth of tourism in developing countries is expanding at a faster rate than their developed counterparts. One of the primary success indicators for this is the promotion of their tourism attractions to developed countries. 30% of the American adult population used the internet to browse for travel information in 2003, while European online travels sales for the same period increased by 44% (Werthner & Ricci, 2004, pp. 101 - 105). The above study clearly shows the increasing trend of internet based tourism reservation from year 2003. Furthermore, the evolution of web platform technologies from traditional web 1.0 to interactive Web 2.0 has resulted in a paradigm shift in online promotion. Web 3.0 platforms could enable even greater potential.

However, one could argue as to whether it is prudent for hotels located in the developing countries, to invest a huge amount in web 3.0 technologies in the era of global financial instability? Also, being at the cutting edge of a technological shift, is it advisable for hotels to invest in technologies which could become quickly obsolete? However, an interactive platform is an essential component for most of these hotels, to facilitate excellence in tourism promotion. Consequently, web 2.0 with high level interactivity could be the most viable platform technology for the hotel websites.

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It is commonplace for IS/IT to be used as a strategic player, even as the principle enabler, in business success. There is also a counter argument by researchers which asks whether investments on technology are sustainable. Bocij et al. (2003, p. 514) discussed this argument and concluded that there is no significant correlation between spending on IT and profitability. However it could also be argued that the underutilization of IS/IT may create a strategic vulnerability to the organization. The European e-business market watch reports, that the overall ICT utilization remains important for competitive advantage within the tourism sector (E-Business Watch, 2005, p 7). In contrast the success greatly depends on the approach being adopted, not only on the technology itself (Gretzel et al., 2000, p. 146). Therefore developing new strategies is more productive than solely investing on emerging technologies. Apart from the above discussion, another study suggest alignment of business and IS/IT strategies as a better means to improve organizational performance (Shin, 2001, p. 227). However, a thorough analysis of business needs and the existing IS/IT mix is essential to make a case for each IS/IT investment in the current climate of a global recession.

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