EVIDENCE ON THE ADOPTION OF E-TOURISM TECHNOLOGIES IN NAIROBI

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ABSTRACT

The advent of the internet in the early 1990s revolutionized commerce by facilitating efficient communication and operations in numerous industries. The concept of e-tourism is revolutionizing the tourism industry operations across the globe, including Kenya, albeit a slow adoption owing to various challenges. The aim of this paper is to analyze the merits and demerits of embracing the internet in Kenya's tourism industry by exposing some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats presented by the adoption of e-tourism. Data was collected from executives in the travel and tourism industry in Kenya's capital city, Nairobi, including both domestic and international tourists. Although there were several merits including flexibility and interactivity, adoption of e-tourism is confronted by various challenges including connectivity issues and redundancy of intermediaries. These changes have the potential to edge out many tourism businesses, which could increase unemployment in Kenya. It is therefore imperative for the government to support the country's tourism industry particularly the small and medium enterprises in implementing e-tourism technologies.

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KEYWORDS: Tourism organizations; E-Tourism; SWOT Analysis; Enterprises; Internet

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has evolved and grown over time and has changed in terms of travel motivators, destinations and number of participants. Today, it is a major economic activity worldwide and a major contributor to the global economy. For instance, tourism in Kenya accounts for 10 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), making it the third largest contributor to Kenya's GDP after agriculture and manufacturing, and Kenya's third largest foreign exchange earner after tea and horticulture (KNBS, 2007). Tourism has also been identified as one of the key drivers in achieving the goals of the Vision 2030 (GOK, 2009).

The internet has become a significant sales and marketing distribution channel in hospitality and tourism (Lee and Morrison, 2010). The introduction of the computer brought with it technological innovations that have caused major shifts in the way operations are managed. Businesses have gained efficiency and effectiveness as a result of technological advancements. These advancements seem to have a never-ending life cycle, as various technologies continuously improve and develop upon their previous forms and functions.

Communications have become easier, faster and convenient globally since early 1990s. Indeed, the true potential of the internet in the tourism industry has recently been uncovered. Computers and computerized devices have slowly revolutionized the tourism industry and contributed to its growth and development.

E-tourism refers to any tourism activities carried out via the internet. The various functions of the internet have been diversified and as a result, the internet provides an un-matched potential for growth and

development of the industry through increased efficiency and effectiveness in areas such as marketing, promotion, market research, finance, travel, purchasing and feedback systems. With the continued laying of fibre optic cables around the country following the arrival of the undersea cable in Mombasa, internet connectivity will be boosted in Kenya.

E-tourism has great potential to influence the growth and development of the tourism industry. However, unlike North America, Europe and other countries like South Korea (Computer Industry Almanac, 2009), E-tourism is a fairly new concept in Africa. Adoption rate in Kenya has been slow. Thus, the study aimed at establishing reasons for this state. In effect, the paper identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats presented by e-tourism adoption in Kenya.

The rest of this paper begins with a review of related literature, and then explains the methodology for the study. An analysis and discussion of the results and concluding comments would then follow.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chen et al, (2000) notes two major categories of E-commerce as the business-to-business model (B2B) and the business-to-consumer model (B2C). B2C e-commerce includes Internet marketing, advertising, purchasing and electronic payment systems. Online travel service is a typical case for B2C e-commerce.

Tourism and Internet

Sheldon (1997) suggests that 'information is the life-blood of the travel industry', and therefore effective use of ITs is pivotal for its competitiveness and prosperity. ITs and particularly the internet empower the emerging globalization of tourism demand and supply experienced worldwide. At the same time, they propel it by providing effective tools to consumers for identifying and purchasing suitable products and to suppliers for developing, managing and distributing their offerings on a global scale. ITs therefore become an imperative partner as they increasingly determine the interface between consumers and suppliers (O'connor, 1999). In the late 1990s, the proliferation of the internet revolutionized communications as it enabled organizations to demonstrate their offerings globally using multimedia interfaces (Buhalis and Licata, 2002). Consumers are empowered through the new tools to search for information and to undertake online reservations. The availability of information on everything conceivable enables consumers to package their own bundles of tourism products and to purchase only the most suitable products for their own individual needs. Suppliers on the other hand have an unprecedented opportunity to communicate with their target markets globally, to develop their global presence and to establish direct relationships with consumers. It is estimated that 150 million people globally currently use the internet (Taylor, 1999). Most internet users are well-educated professionals who travel frequently and therefore should have a higher disposable income, as well as a higher propensity to spend on tourism products (Buhalis and Licata, 2002). These markets are targeted by most destinations and tourism organizations and hence the industry has to reflect on the needs and abilities in order to take advantage of the emerging tools. The rapid growth rate and the expeditious increase of on-line revenue experienced in most industries such as tourism, illustrates that electronic commerce will be dominant.

Tourism and Electronic Commerce

In the past few years there has been an explosion of online commercial activity enabled by the internet and this is generally referred to as electronic commerce. The shift towards electronic commerce is revolutionary because it offers several powerful marketing opportunities. Researchers have found that marketing in electronic commerce is more flexible than the traditional media; marketers can immediately add new items and update information based on the direct feedback received from customers (Kiani,

1998). Updating information in electronic commerce costs much less than creating new traditional brochures or catalogues. Accessibility is another powerful characteristic of the internet. Through the internet anyone on earth can access the information 24 hours a day. Companies can increase their business hours and consumers can reach needed information or even purchase a product at any time. Each time users connect to World Wide Web (WWW) site, the site provider has a record of the user's electronic address (Alrawi, 2007). Thus, companies can build a list of customers who participated in online commercial activity. Although the database marketing is not new, low-cost and high-speed electronic management of communication is revolutionizing marketing (Blattberg and Deighton, 1991). Compared to traditional media, marketing in electronic commerce is faster, less expensive, highly immediate communication (Ellsworth and Ellsworth, 1997). Communication shits from 'one-way' to 'two-way'; information flows between marketers and consumers (Blattberg *et al.*, 1994), and from 'one-to-many' to 'many-to-many' where consumers and marketers can individually interact within the medium (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Many-to-many communication brings many changes in marketing environment. Importantly it changes the orientation of information from 'supply side' to 'demand side'. Electronic commerce users want control over information search where they initiate their own contacts, control information flow and experience online. It also encourages them to desire messages from other online customers for their own individual needs. Thus, communication is becoming more and more consumer-oriented (Rayport and Sviokla, 1995).

Internet as a Source of Information

The internet is revolutionizing tourism marketing whereby it has evolved into a dynamic source of information as well as an effective marketing tool that is able to reach tourists efficiently (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Due to the increased use of personal computers and the decrease in prices of internet services, the internet has become a source for gathering timely information and converting information into profitable results at a faster rate for tourists. Online purchases have become the fastest growing activity on the internet, and even users who are not online buyers search the World Wide Web for information (Goldsmith and Flynn, 2004).

Socio-demographic changes such as active ageing population and childless couples have also led to substantial changes in travel and tourism demand (Hall and Weiler, 1992). An important consequence of these social changes is a greater variety in pleasure travel. Increasingly, new, experienced, sophisticated and demanding travelers are actively seeking information about more exotic destinations and authentic experiences in order to satisfy their specific needs and wishes. Tourists are increasingly seeking information which enables them to 'experience' the destination instead of simply obtaining facts about 'how the destination is'. These trends for tourism suggest that travel has become a means for finding personal fulfillment, identity enhancement and self-expression. And, perhaps even more important, travelers have become especially concerned not with just being 'there' but with participating, learning and 'experiencing the there' they visit (Stebbins, 1982).

Factors Affecting Internet Penetration

There are various factors that affect penetration of E-tourism in organizations. These factors include cost of purchasing hardware, software and communication package, training cost of users, design and construction of internet presence, cost of hosting the site on a reliable server, ongoing maintenance and regular updating, marketing the internet service and registration of domain, development of procedures for dealing with internet presence, commissions for online purchases by intermediaries, advertising fees for representation in search engines and other sites and interconnectivity with travel intermediaries (Buhalis, 1999). The author also notes that most costs are management and marketing- based rather than IT based. Hence, it is evident that competent and innovative entrepreneurs will find the internet more beneficial than their counterparts who lack management or marketing skills, ability and knowledge. Costs

can therefore be reduced by intensive management, marketing and IT training for enterprises which will enable them to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy and use IT as a strategic tool for their long-term development.

SWOT Analysis Approach

A SWOT analysis approach was used in this study. It is a procedure generally carried out before the development of a business plan which involves a detailed examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the business organisation, and the opportunities and threats in the environment within which it operates. The 'business' to be examined in this analysis is the adoption of e-tourism by enterprises in Nairobi to improve their operations.

From the literature review, strengths of e-tourism such as convenience and flexibility, and opportunities in the form of efficient marketing and establishment of customer contact were identified. The study aimed to expose the positive aspects of the use of the internet for tourism activities so as to better understand the possible opportunities that it presents to the tourism industry in Kenya. The identification of weaknesses such as connectivity problems and internet speed creates an understanding of the areas that require improvement and gives room for suggestions towards this improvement. The internet also brings with it the threat of redundancy of intermediaries, which creates the need for industry players to be more open to change and develop ways of mitigating the threats so that intermediaries remain relevant in the industry. By understanding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the use of the internet in tourism, industry players would be better equipped to enhance the positive and control the negative characteristics of e-tourism so as to ensure that the adoption of e-tourism will indeed lead to positive improvements and development of the tourism industry in Kenya. Many scholars have applied SWOT analysis including Kelly (2006) and TOUREG (2009). Kelly (2006) looks at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats influencing the potential of tourism to contribute to a more harmonious and therefore more peaceful world, while TOUREG (2009) performed a SWOT analysis for the European tourism industry.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Primary data was obtained directly from the field through administration of questionnaires and interviews. The target population included travel and tourism executives as well as international and domestic tourists. The sampling techniques used included both probability and non-probability sampling. Tourists were randomly selected, while hotel operators were selected using both purposive and convenient sampling techniques. The sample size included a sub-set of hotel operators (30 respondents) and 40 domestic and international tourists. On the other hand, secondary data was obtained from various published and un-published works such as text books, newspaper articles, internet articles and precious research reports.

Qualitative data was analyzed by induction method using content analysis which exposed common themes in the data, and presented in form of texts, verbatim and paraphrase. Descriptive analysis in the form of percentages, graphs and charts was also used.

ANOVA was used to test differences between mean rankings of three sub-groups; age, gender and country of origin. Chi square was also used to test how well sets of observations fit theoretical set of observation, including whether frequencies observed for rating internet in Kenya (poor, average or good) fit the expected frequency. These analyses were performed using SPSS.

RESULTS

This section analyzes and discusses the findings from the study. It explains how various factors influence adoption of e-tourism in Kenya's tourism industry.

Characteristics of Respondents

The study revealed that 8.3 percent of males were educated to secondary level, while 91.6% were educated to tertiary level. 100% of the female respondents were educated to tertiary levels. Out of the 40 respondents interviewed, 35% were between 18 and 25 years, and the same percentage between 26 and 35 years, while 20% were aged between 36 and 45 years. Only 10% of the respondents were above 45 years old. As for the country of origin, majority of the tourist respondents were international tourists from a combination of Europe, USA and Asia (75%) as shown on Table 1.

Table 1: Country of Origin of Respondents

Country of origin	frequency	Percentage
Kenya	7	17.5
Rest of Africa	3	7.5
Europe, America and Asia	30	75
Total	40	100

This table shows the observed frequency of forty respondents. The first row represents the country/region of origin, while the second and third rows show the count and percentage, respectively.

Reasons for Using the Internet

Tourist respondents were asked to rank certain aspects of internet use on a likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- undecided 4- agree and finally 5- strongly agree. The reasons were assigned weights, and the weighted averages calculated as illustrated in table 2. As shown in the table, the three highly ranked rationales for internet use include informative, convenience and currency. Lowest ranked was trustworthy. Perhaps the respondents did not place much importance to this constructs because of many uncertainties and suspicion about internet. Many people would be hesitant to trust the contents and security of some transactions through the internet – save for specific functions like bookings. Respondents gave equal ranking for efficient, trustworthy and easy to use.

Table 2: Reasons for Using the Internet

Extent of agreement	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	undecided (3)	disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Σ(w×f)	R=Σ(w×f)/ N	Rank
Affordable	16	22	2	0	0	174	4.35	4
Convenient	18	21	1	0	0	177	4.425	2
Efficient	13	20	7	0	0	166	4.15	5
Fast	14	16	1	8	1	154	3.85	8
Trustworthy	2	14	22	2	0	136	3.4	9
Effective	9	27	4	0	0	165	4.125	7
Up-to- date	16	24	0	0	0	176	4.4	3
Easy to use	12	22	6	0	0	166	4.15	5
Informative	18	22	0	0	0	178	4.45	1

Table 2 computes the ranks of each aspects of internet utilizing the different weights. First, the total rank: Σ(w×f) is computed by multiplying the weights with its respective frequency, then computing the total. The mean rank R can be computed by dividing each sum by the respective N, in this case, 40, which gives us the order from highest to lowest.

Rating of the Internet in Kenya

The respondents were also asked to rate the internet in Kenya on a 3-point scale ranging from poor to good. A substantial 52.5% of respondents rated internet in Kenya as average, while 40% said it was good.

The remaining 7.5% indicated that it was poor (χ^2 = 12.95, df = 2, p = 0.002). The average rating could be attributed to the 75% of respondents coming from outside Africa. Obviously, the infrastructure in other continents is more advanced than what currently exists in Kenya.

Ranking by Age, Gender and Country of Origin

One way ANOVA demonstrated that ranking of various aspects of the internet related significantly to age and country/region of origin as shown on table 3. For instance, the youthful respondents of 18-25 years and 26-35years both had higher means of 4.36, as opposed to the other groups such as 45years and above (M=3.25) when rating internet as 'easy to use'.

There was a variation in ranking within three domains between country of origin. Rankings by European and American respondents for affordability of internet was higher (M=4.47) than those from Kenya (M=3.86). Perhaps these rankings differ because the cost of internet in Kenya is still higher than those in developed countries, and therefore respondents from Europe and USA were basing on the cost at home. The same reasons could explain higher rankings for speed among the Europeans and American respondents (M=4.47). As for effectiveness of internet, respondents from the rest of Africa appear to attach more importance than other respondents (M=4.27).

Table 3: Relationship between Rankings and Age, Gender and Country of Origin (F Values)

	Age	Gender	Country of Origin
Affordable	1.502	0.602	3.551*
Convenient	0.174	0.013	1.261
Efficient	0.596	0.411	1.735
Fast	0.556	0.492	94.881*
Trustworthy	1.997	0.446	0.664
Effective	0.393	0.323	6.436*
Up-to- date	1.581	0.066	1.476
Easy to use	5.024*	1.382	2.183
Informative	0.943	0.258	0.654

* p ≤ .05 *Table 3 above shows the F values of the three sets of relationships: i.e. rankings and age, gender and country of origin. The statistics that are significant at 95% level of confidence are also marked with asterisks.*

Internet Presence and Use by Tourism Organizations

Out of the 30 tourism enterprises interviewed, only nine (30%), notably bigger companies had established information management system or websites while 70% did not. Nevertheless, all the companies that neither had information system nor websites used the internet in their operations and correspondence in form of electronic mails.

The study also sought to find out the extent of transactions with customers through the internet. All respondents were found to transact with their clients via the internet in one way or the other. Of the total client-supplier transactions of each company, over 70% involved the use of the internet. Those with websites mentioned that their consumers were able to carry out activities such as booking and reservations, comparison of offers, searching for travel destinations and obtaining information. The majority of online clients were notably from Europe and North America (50%) while the other half constituted a mix of clients from Africa and other regions such as Asia.

Problems and Benefits Associated with Internet Use for Organizations and Customers

The tourism organizations and tourists (customers) were asked to give problems as well as benefits/advantages they associate with using the internet. The organizations cited problems such as expenses of acquiring machines and software, cost of hiring skilled personnel, constant updating of information and competition from larger, more established companies; and benefits including wider reach of market, increased profit due to reduced distribution cost, effective marketing tools among other benefits including direct contact with clients. On the other hand, customers cited advantages such as savings due to absence of intermediaries and problems such as untrustworthy information.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This study aimed at finding out the factors influencing adoption of information technologies in Kenya's tourism industry. It sought to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats presented by adoption of e-tourism in Kenya. A field survey on travel and tourism executives and both international and domestic tourists in Nairobi aided in achieving these objectives.

Strengths are those positive qualities that are inherent in the features and functions of the internet, and that positively influence tourism activities. These strengths include convenience, speedy transactions, efficiency and effectiveness, informative and up to date. The top three aspects of the internet (informative, convenience and up-to-date) ranked by tourist respondents were part of these qualities, which confirms that the internet is obviously an important convenient source of up-to-date information. But within this positive qualities are weaknesses such as enormous confusing information in the web. Threats to the industry players such as fraud and redundancy also exist. In spite of these threats and weaknesses, IT brings many opportunities including new marketing practices, mitigation of perishability and ultimate enhanced profit margins.

Kenya is primarily dependent on Europe and USA for international tourists as found from the current study. Countries from these regions have advanced information technologies, and are more likely to use this new infrastructure in most of their day to day activities including search for information about possible destination as well as executing certain transactions such as making bookings. Many hotels and travel agencies in Kenya are still lagging behind in technological adoption. It is therefore apt that the majority of tourists from these generating countries are better informed than the travel agents considered as professional advisers. Speedy adoption of e-tourism by the tourism industry in Kenya is therefore basic in order to remain competitive. South Africa that is generally endowed with attractions similar to Kenya's is a major recipient (60%) of international tourists in Africa (UNWTO, 2009) probably because she has been keen to move with the rest of the world in terms of IT.

It is ironic that higher ratings by tourists from European, USA and Asia for speed and affordability were recorded when there is actually low connectivity speeds with higher costs of internet in Kenya. This could mean that tourists do not spend most of their time online in Kenya – save for communicating with friends and relatives back at home. It also means that most of the trip arrangements are usually complete before they start traveling to Kenya. Thus, the tourism industry in Kenya should strive to use IT to be felt at all stages of the traveler's purchase behaviour particularly at the pre-travel stage, which comprises of the information search, evaluation among alternatives and actual payment and travel.

Market research and adopting new marketing tools are obvious opportunities that e-tourism opens. It is worrisome though that only nine out the 30 companies surveyed had actually embraced some form of e-tourism technologies. The other 70% mainly drawn from the small and medium businesses had not adopted e-tourism due to various reasons including the costs involved. Nonetheless, tourism companies in Kenya must eventually change the way in which they conduct their businesses. The overwhelming shift to

computerized operations will exert pressure to these companies. Those who will invest in the new technology are expected to maintain their competitiveness and therefore survive. Competition is a constantly changing landscape in which new products, new ways of marketing, new production processes and new markets emerge. Today's dynamic competitive environment is characterized by change and innovation.

Ultimately the internet and the emerging technologies provide unprecedented tools for communication and interaction, bridging the gap between tourism suppliers and consumers on a global basis. As with any industrial revolution there will be several winners as new opportunities emerge and several losers due to the strength and perhaps weaknesses. Therefore non-competitive players will suffer the consequences of this evolution in the tourism industry. However, the likely losers in this equation are the traditional travel agents and tour operators whose survival is threatened by the widespread use of the internet which could edge them out.

The Kenyan government should not turn a blind eye on this emerging trend. If small and medium businesses in Kenya cannot compete globally, it would translate to losses not only in employment opportunities but also may result in a decline in tourist arrivals. Thus, the Kenyan government should give more support to the tourism industry. This includes facilitating IT training to the players and lowering the high taxes charged on computers and accessories. This way, the small and medium companies will be able to adopt e-tourism.

It is critical to note that the internet is here to stay and it is up to the traditional intermediaries in Kenya to evolve with the times, just as the suppliers at the generating countries are doing. They may form partnerships with these suppliers, or establish their own websites. This will give them access to the global marketplace and enable them to reposition themselves in the distribution channel so that they are not completely phased out of the channel. As earlier mentioned, tourism businesses in Nairobi and Kenya in general should embrace e-tourism since it presents affordable tools and efficient mechanisms to serve their customers without having to rely on intermediaries. This will enable them to realign the power structure in the distribution channel and if they are competitive enough, to develop and distribute innovative offerings. This will empower and enable them to strengthen their competitiveness and succeed in the global marketplace.

Limitations and Areas of Further Research

This study surveyed a total of forty international and domestic tourists, and thirty hotel operators in Nairobi. The sample size for tourists is quite small; therefore this investigation is exploratory in nature. However, future research should employ a bigger sample size, be spread to other major towns in Kenya and should further study challenges confronting the small and medium tourism companies in adopting IT.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for Tourists

SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Gender : male ☐ female ☐

2. Please indicate your age as appropriate
    18- 25 yrs ☐   26- 35 yrs ☐   36- 45 yrs ☐   45yrs and above ☐

3. Country of origin _____

4. Occupation :
    Self-employed ☐

    Civil servant ☐

    Private co. / NGO ☐

    Student ☐

    Unemployed ☐

5. Education level: Primary ☐   Secondary ☐   College/ university ☐

SECTION B: INTERNET USE

6. Do you have access to internet?   _____

7. If yes, do you use the internet for any tourism- related activity?
                          Yes ☐   No ☐

8.   Which of the following activities do you use the internet for?

    a.   Booking and reservations ☐
    b.   Searching for attractions ☐
    c.   Travel networks ☐
    d.   Price comparisons ☐
    e.   Others
         (specify)...

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the internet?
    Please indicate with a number the most appropriate response to the question

    1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3=undecided 4=agree 5= strongly disagree

Reasons for using the internet	Insert the appropriate no. against the statements
1. It is affordable	
2. It is convenient	
3. It is efficient	
4. It is fast	
5. It is trustworthy	
6. It is effective	
7. It is up to date	
8. It is easy to use	
9. It is informative	

9. From your use of the internet in Kenya, how would you rate it (the internet)?
    Poor ☐   average ☐   good ☐

10. Which problems do you encounter while using the internet? ....

    Where do you get most of your tourism information?
    Television adverts ☐   Print media ☐   The internet ☐   Friends and family ☐

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule for Travel and Tour Operators

Administered for the purpose of establishing the extent to which e-tourism is in use in travel and tour operations as well as determining the positive and negative factors associated with its use.

    1. Does your organization have a website?
        Yes ☐   No ☐

    2. What activities are customers able to carry out in the website? (e.g. booking and reservation, purchasing, etc.)
        _____
        _____

3. Approximately what percentage of your clients do you transact with via the internet?
_____
_____

4. From which area in the world do these clients come from? (Europe, Asia, America, Africa. etc)
_____
_____

5. Which problems, if any, do you as an organization encounter in the use of the internet?
_____
_____

6. As per your experience, what are the advantages or benefits of using the internet for tourism related activities?
_____
_____

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