Chapter 66
E–Marketing Practices from Jordanian Tourism Agencies Perspectives:
A Qualitative Evidence

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ABSTRACT

The article aims at providing a deep understanding of electronic marketing practices and investigating the current status of e-marketing (benefits, tools, and barriers) in Jordanian tourism agencies. Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative design to achieve its objectives. In-depth interviews are employed to generate data. The purposive sample is used to choose the target interviewees. Eight executives from different tourism agencies have been selected to conduct the interviews. The qualitative data of each interview have been analyzed using the thematic and textual analysis. Based on a holistic view of the study, the interviews themes have been extracted. The article concludes that cost minimization and time saving are the most important advantages for e-marketing. Moreover, promotional offers information is the most important type of information provided by e-marketing system. Social media and e-mail marketing are the common tools for e-marketing in tourism agencies. However, privacy issues barrier is the major challenge which is encountered by e-marketing practices.

INTRODUCTION

E-business is a general term that includes all electronic activities which are conducted in several businesses to build relationships with customers and other parties (Al-weshah et al., 2011). More specifically, electronic marketing grows in a dramatic and dynamic environment. Small business enterprises (SMEs) play an important role in the global economic environment, and they are recognized as one of the critical factors in the economic development. Businesses can identify available opportunities to utilize the

Internet as a medium to provide needed and relevant information in order to achieve promotion and sales goals (Su, Chang, and Hsu, 2013).

According to Kotler (2000), marketing is a social and management process by which a business can establish, communicate, and provide values in order to meet and satisfy customers' needs and wants. Thus, this process is conducted by Internet, is referred as "Internet marketing". Internet marketing includes two traditional marketing values, namely, promotion and distribution, which are the most important activities of travel agency salespeople (Su, Chang, and Hsu, 2013). Internet marketing communication is an interactive tool to communicate with customers in the tourism and travelling activities that can be facilitated by internet and information-based products (Connolly, Olsen, and Moore, 1998).

In the travel and tourism industry, customer relationship is the most valuable issue to measure marketing performance. In addition, customers are cautious about providing personal information and their credit cards information online due to lack of trust and hackers risk, thus, travel agencies may consider alternative methods of payments (Su, Chang, and Hsu, 2013). Al-Weshah et al. (2013) stated that internet usage by travel agencies can build, enhance, and maintain relationship marketing by meeting traveler's needs.

Travel industry is a service-directed industry. It provides passengers with different services such as booking, transportation, lodging, dining, recreation, tours, entertainment, and travel planning (Cheung and Lam, 2009). The internet technologies have created new trend in most service industries. Tourism industry is not an exceptional in the new trend. Internet based information is one of the critical influencing factors on customer's purchasing decisions. in Middle East generally and Jordan particularly, there are limited studies that investigated the e-marketing practices and tools (Al-Weshah et al., 2013, El-Gohary 2012, Alkhaffaf and Altaher, 2012) Therefore, this study is designed to explore e-marketing practices and their challenges in Jordanian tourism agencies.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Al-Weshah et al. (2011) stated that e-business is a general term to describe all electronic issues that are used in different businesses to build relationships with customers and other parties. More specifically in small businesses, there is shortage in staff skills or time to implement online applications.

Electronic marketing is a new and not well-established concept, however, e- marketing applications are used by different industries. Recently, the new concept applications are adopted by firms to market their products and share new products ideas and information over internet networks. Internet adoption has been investigated the by researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and different types of users (Gohary, 2012). Moreover, e-marketing has emerged as a new marketing medium and businesses are increasingly adopting its applications to support their marketing efforts and activities. Majority of people can easily access internet using PCs, Laptops, 3G and 4G services on mobile devices, internet can be accessed by any person who is using smart mobiles. The massive growth of internet and information technologies provide signals towards the necessary need of internet usage as a marketing tool for different activities (Ali et al., 2015).

Tourism studies confirmed different contributions of the internet on travel and tourism generally and on passenger products and services particularly (Law et al. 2004). Information provides a necessary need to tourists and travelers. Tourists and passengers seek different types of information to set their plan before they start a trip or vacation (Su, Chang, and Hsu, 2013). Internet provides businesses and individuals with useful ways that support decision making. Using internet, consumers can obtain

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