

CHAPTER 10. E-TOURISM: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH FOR THE SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED TOURISM ENTERPRISES (SMTEs) IN KOREA

This text has been drafted by Chulwon Kim, Professor, College of Hotel & Tourism Management, Kyunghee University, Korea

Abstract

This paper deals with e-tourism, innovation and growth. The Internet is revolutionising the distribution of tourism information and sales. The Korean small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs) with well-developed and innovative Web sites can now have equal Internet access to international tourism markets. This paper examines problems and solutions related to electronic commerce in the tourism industry and suggest recommendations for successful e-commerce strategies in tourism to be applied by the industry and the government of Korea.

Introduction

Although the definition of tourism innovation (e.g. product, service and technological innovations) remains unclear new technologies can make an essential contribution to tourism development.

The Internet's potential for tourism businesses is to make information and booking facilities available to large numbers of tourists at relatively low cost. It can also serve as a tool of communication between tourism suppliers, intermediaries and end-users. The OECD (2000)⁷⁹ has shown that the advent of Internet-based electronic commerce offers many opportunities for firms to expand their customer base, enter new product markets and rationalise their business. According to the World Tourism Organisation (2001)⁸⁰ e-commerce allows SMTEs to do business in new and more cost-effective ways.

79. OECD (2000) Realizing the potential of electronic commerce for SMEs in the global economy.

80. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2001) *E-business for Tourism*.

The UNWTO has also demonstrated how the Internet is revolutionising the distribution of tourism information and sales. An increasing proportion of Internet users are buying online and tourism's share of the online market is set to grow ever larger. The Internet is clearly having a major impact as a source of tourism information. However SMTEs face a number of obstacles to the adoption of new information technology, in particular e-business. These include the scale and affordability of information technology and difficulties of implementation in organisations that are rapidly changing and growing. Moreover solutions that work for large, stable, internationally oriented firms are of no use to small, dynamic, locally based ones.

Even so, SMTEs can now have equal Internet access to international tourism markets with the help of innovative Web sites. This implies equal access to telecom infrastructure, as well as to marketing management and education. According to a UN report (2001)⁸¹, "it is not the cost of being there, on the online marketplace, which must be reckoned with, but the cost of not being there." It is certain that embracing digital communication and information technology is no longer an option, but a necessity. E-commerce is an opportunity for SMTEs to extend their capabilities and grow.

Recent research on e-commerce in tourism

The literature on e-commerce in the tourism industry was critically reviewed with a view to developing a framework suitable for this study. E-commerce is defined as the process of buying and selling or exchanging products, services and information via computer networks including the Internet⁸². However, the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is only part of the story. Network access costs, information on electronic commerce, training and skill development are all part of the challenge for smaller companies.

81. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (2001) *E-commerce and Development Report 2001*.

82. TURBAN E., LEE, J., KING D. and CHUNG, HM (2000). *Electronic commerce – A managerial perspective*.

SMTEs are also more vulnerable to problems in the areas of authentication/certification, data security and confidentiality, and the settling of commercial disputes⁸³.

An SME⁸⁴ e-commerce study carried out for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) found nonetheless that SMEs are “significant players in business-to-business electronic commerce, which accounts for more than 80 percent of all e-commerce activities.”

Most research suggested that government plays an important role in facilitating the use of electronic commerce in the tourism industry. Governments in partnership with the private sector should establish a more comprehensive and consistent policy approach to the use of e-commerce in tourism, and apply evaluation mechanisms to see what works and what does not⁸⁵.

Key factors for successful e-commerce

Research was performed to collect secondary data regarding e-commerce for the tourism industry at SME level. A questionnaire designed to obtain information on e-commerce activities, its benefits for tourism, the barriers and key success factors was developed on the basis of this data and provided an insight into the challenges the industry faces today. It essentially covered Korean SMTEs, defined as businesses that have 300 or fewer employees or sales ranging from USD 2 million to USD 20 million.

Benefits of e-commerce

The main benefits of e-commerce mentioned include ‘providing easy access to information on tourism services,’ ‘providing better information on tourism services,’ and ‘providing convenience for customers’. Respondents seemed less aware of other

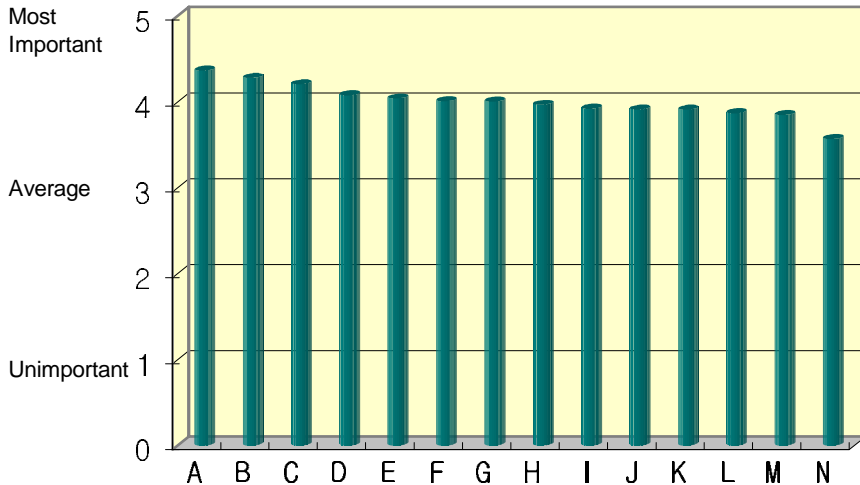
83. BUHALIS, D., SCHERTLER, W. (eds.) (1999), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 1999*.

84. SMEs - Small and Medium Size Enterprises.

85. United Nations *Conference on Trade and Development* (UNCTAD) (2001) *E-commerce and Development Report 2001*. OECD (2000) *Realizing the potential of electronic commerce for SMEs in the global economy*; Korea Information Society Development Institute (2000) *The Activation of E-commerce for SMEs in APEC Region*; Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (1999). *SME Electronic Commerce Study*.

benefits of e-commerce such as ‘creating new markets,’ ‘improving customer services,’ ‘establishing interactive relationships with customers,’ ‘reducing operating cost,’ ‘interacting with other business partners,’ and ‘founding new business partners’ (Figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1. Benefits of E-commerce

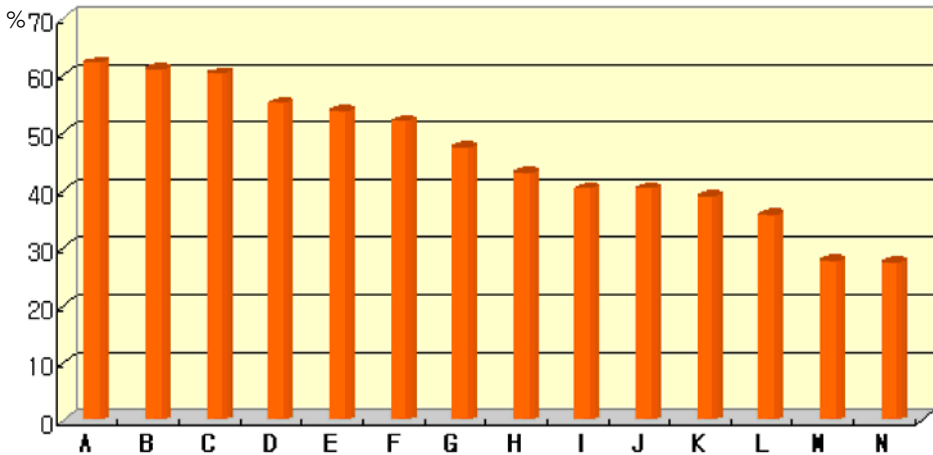


A: Providing easy access to information on tourism products and services; **B:** Providing better information on tourism products and services; **C:** Providing convenience for customers; **D:** Expanding choices by customers; **E:** Creating new markets; **F:** Establishing interactive relationship with customers; **G:** Improving customer services; **H:** Improving image and public recognition of the small & medium sized tourism enterprises; **I:** Saving time for providing tourism services; **J:** Providing customized & specialized tourism products & services; **K:** Reducing operating cost; **L:** Simplifying the process business; **M:** Interacting with business partners; **N:** Founding new business partners.

Source: Modified from APEC Tourism Working Group (2002).

E-commerce barriers

A number of barriers discourage SMTEs from adopting e-commerce in Korea. These include ‘limited knowledge of available technology,’ ‘lack of awareness,’ ‘cost of initial investment,’ ‘lack of confidence in the benefits of e-commerce,’ and ‘cost of system maintenance.’ Other factors are ‘shortage of skilled human resources,’ and ‘resistance to adoption of e-commerce.’ Also worth mentioning are ‘insufficient e-commerce infrastructure’ and ‘small e-commerce market size’ (Figure 10.2).

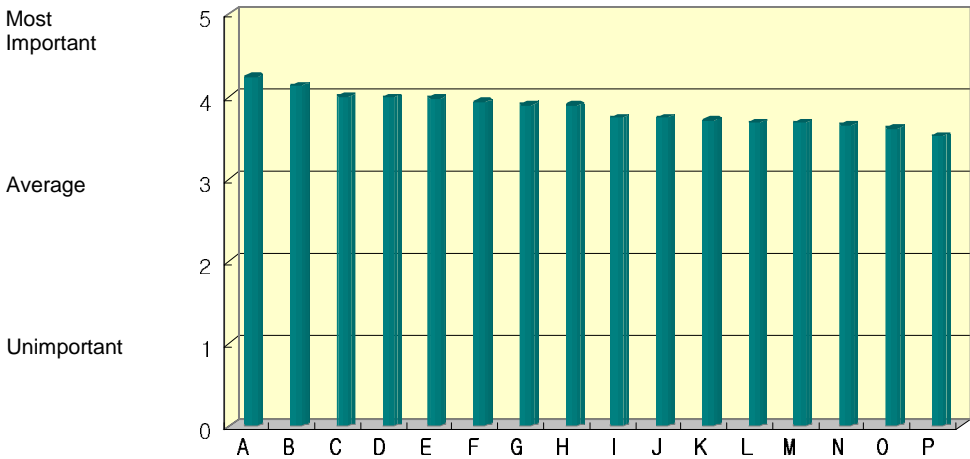
Figure 10.2. Barriers to adopting E-Commerce

A: Limited knowledge of available technology; **B:** Lack of awareness of e-commerce; **C:** Cost of initial investment; **D:** Lack of confidence in the benefits of e-commerce; **E:** Cost of system maintenance; **F:** Cost of securing skilled human resources for e-commerce; **G:** Shortage of skilled human resources; **H:** Difficulty with integrating e-commerce & existing system; **I:** Cost of training human resources for e-commerce; **J:** Insufficient e-commerce infrastructure; **K:** Lack of government support; **L:** Relatively small e-commerce market size; **M:** Fear of changes in corporate culture; **N:** Resistance to adoption of e-commerce.

Source: Modified from APEC Tourism Working Group (2002).

Successful e-commerce practices

The two main factors for conducting successful e-commerce are ‘security of the e-commerce system’ and ‘user-friendly Web interface’. Also considered as important are ‘Top management support,’ ‘IT infrastructure,’ and ‘Customer acceptance’. Few SMTEs recognise the importance of ‘sharing knowledge and information between SMTEs’ and ‘business partnerships’ (Figure 10.3) as strategies for success.

Figure 10.3. Important Factors for Successful E-commerce

A: Security of the e-commerce system; **B:** User-friendly Web interface; **C:** Top management support; **D:** Level of trust between customer and company; **E:** Information technology infrastructure; **F:** Customer acceptance; **G:** Cost of establishing and maintaining e-commerce system; **H:** Skilled human resources; **I:** Market situation; **J:** Integration with the existing corporate system; **K:** Specific tourism products or services for e-commerce; **L:** Corporate knowledge, culture & acceptance; **M:** Relationship with other business partners; **N:** Sharing knowledge and information between the small & medium-sized tourism enterprises; **O:** Internal communication; **P:** Government support.

Source: Modified from APEC Tourism Working Group (2002).

Importance and performance

The study used importance and performance (IP) analysis to examine e-commerce strategies. For ‘importance’ respondents indicated the importance of each of the 16 proposed factors for a successful implementation of e-commerce. For ‘performance,’ they indicated how well their member’s economy performs regarding e-commerce, related to their response to ‘Importance’ (Figure 10.4).

Four IP categories emerge from the analysis: ‘Keep up the good work’ (importance and performance both high); ‘Concentrated efforts’ (high importance, low performance); ‘Low priority’ (low importance, low performance); ‘Possible overkill’ (high performance, low importance).

Keep up the good work

Respondents considered the following factors as important: ‘Security of e-commerce,’ ‘User-friendly Web interface,’ ‘IT (Information Technology)

infrastructure,’ ‘Level of trust between customer and company,’ ‘Customer acceptance.’

Concentrated efforts

The factors in this category including ‘top management support’ and ‘skilled human resources’ are considered as very important but insufficiently performed. More efforts are needed.

Low priority

‘Government support,’ ‘Sharing knowledge and information between SMTEs,’ ‘Integration with the existing corporation,’ and ‘Relationship with other business partners.’ received low marks in importance and performance despite being critical for successful e-commerce. This implies that managers have limited knowledge and need more information on the importance of these factors.

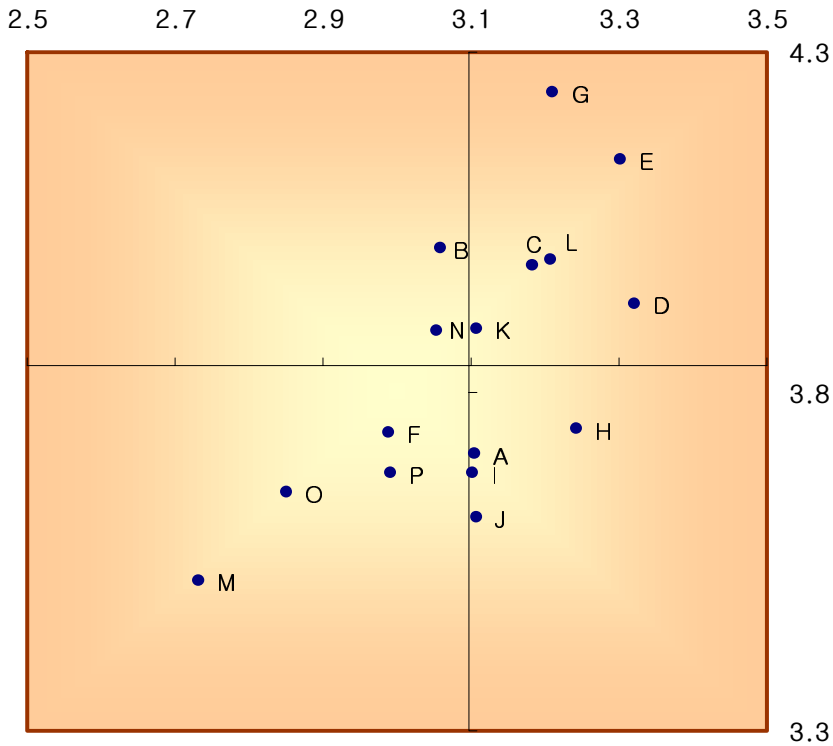
Possible overkill

‘Market situation’ falls in the ‘Possible overkill’ category. The results show that managers use the Internet for market analysis (possibly competitor analysis) but do not consider it important. This seems to contradict certain previous findings indicating that SMEs do not often use the Internet for market research.

Remainder

Three factors including ‘Specific tourism products or services for e-commerce,’ ‘Corporation knowledge, culture, and acceptance,’ and ‘Internal communication’ fall somewhere between ‘Low Priority’ and ‘Possible overkill.’ One factor, ‘Cost of establishing and maintaining e-commerce system’ is between the ‘Concentrated efforts’ and ‘Keep up the good work’ categories. The assessment of these factors was fairly similar to that for ‘low importance’ and ‘middle performance.’

Figure 10.4. Importance-Performance (I-P) Analysis



A: Specific tourism products or services for e-commerce ; **B:** Top management support ; **C:** Information technology infrastructure ; **D:** Customer acceptance ; **E:** User-friendly Web interface ; **F:** Integration with the existing corporate system; **G:** Security of the e-commerce system ; **H:** Market situation ; **I:** Corporate knowledge, culture and acceptance ; **J:** Internal communication ; **K:** Cost of establishing and maintaining e-commerce system; **L:** Level of trust between customer and company ; **M:** Government support; **N:** Skilled human resources ; **O:** Sharing knowledge and information between the small & medium sized tourism enterprises internal communication ; **P:** Relationship with other business partners

Source: Modified from APEC Tourism Working Group (2002).

E-commerce strategies as a tool of innovation

For Rayport and Jaworski ⁸⁶, the implementation of e-commerce strategy requires four critical forces: technology, capital, media, and public policy

86. RAYPORT, Jeffrey, JAWORSKI, Bernard (2002), *Introduction to E-Commerce*.

infrastructures. An infrastructure is defined as the foundation of a system. E-commerce strategies relate to four infrastructures:

- *Technology*: Internet, computer hardware, servers, routers, cables, network technologies, software, and communications technology. Understanding the technology, what it can and cannot do, is essential for the formulation of a viable vision and strategy.
- *Capital*: how to secure funding for an e-business and subsequently value that business.
- *Media*: managers who run online enterprises must learn to manage the staff responsible for design interface, stylistic choices, editorial policies, appropriate content choices. An e-commerce manager is a publisher of digital content on the Web and should be able to make choices about the types of media employed (print, audio, video) and editorial policy (style, content, and look, feel).
- *Public policy*: e-commerce managers should understand current laws and how they may affect their businesses.

The best SMTE strategies depend on the company's e-commerce infrastructure and stage of development:

- External service providers have great potential for start-ups on the Internet. Marketing should be selective. Although it is possible to develop a strategy for international markets, earning a good reputation in the local market should be the top priority.
- Established SMTEs should focus on two key strategies: 1) expanding the range of services and products and 2) upgrading their quality. They should redesign their Web sites to focus more on 'customer retention' than 'customer acquisition', concentrating on the quality of service. The Internet is a useful tool to reach international markets. E-partnerships between SMTEs or with large firms are important (build an e-community).

Strategy should reflect the environment. Linkage to a site of destination management organization (DMO) is critical to success. Development of an online booking system is the most important technological aspect. Measures should be taken to overcome consumers' lack of trust and confidence including 'about us,'

‘frequently asked questions (FAQs),’ and ‘call centre’ services. Established SMTEs should consider target market segments as well as building trust and confidence.

Implications for tourism policy

The role of government is very important, in particular active support to foster an entrepreneurial culture. Key policy should include; 1) improving the legal and regulatory framework, 2) moving government procurement online, and 3) facilitating transformation to e-commerce.

Important issues for consideration are: consumer protection, legal mechanisms for disputes (e.g. e-commerce mediation committee), intellectual property protection, validity and enforcement of contracts, taxation of Internet transactions (problem of tax avoidance), identification and residence of users. OECD and APEC guidelines can help. A programme of e-trust certification is one way to build consumer confidence. Medium-to-long-term strategy should include online government procurement, and government support for transformation to e-commerce. This support can take the form of tax reductions, financial support, the promotion of knowledge and information sharing between industries and research organisations.

A current Korean pilot project aims to create a business-to-business (B2B) network in all key industries. The government’s ‘System to Certify Venture Tourism Business,’ indirectly supports industry. In 2001, 11 companies were selected as venture tourism businesses enabling them to obtain support. Applications are evaluated twice a year. Most domestic software companies in Korea do not have distribution channels of their own and pay a commission of almost 40% to the distributors. To solve this problem the government established software “cybermall”, opened in 1998 and which provides product demonstrations. Products can be purchased electronically.

Other ways the government can help the growth of e-commerce include building capacity in information technology infrastructure, manpower training and planning as well as promotional and incentive measures. The government should be a facilitator, promoter and educator and should itself be ready to test new applications. OECD member countries are expected to facilitate international strategic alliances at government-to-government (G2G) and industry-to-industry (I2I) levels. Governments can also help remove regulatory obstacles to the growth of markets and businesses, and to create markets in emerging areas. Its ultimate

objective is the promotion of private sector initiatives for e-commerce development⁸⁷.

Conclusions: recommendations for e-tourism innovations

This paper makes certain recommendations to the Korean e-tourism market, which may also be of use to the tourism industries of other countries.

The government should have a national vision, a strategic plan and policy guidelines for the e-commerce activities of SMTEs. The strategies should include all tourism stakeholders. Policymakers are also responsible for establishing the appropriate laws, regulations and service standards needed to build consumer confidence.

SMTE entrepreneurs need to adopt business models tailor-made to their own objectives and the environment, possibly combining various e-business models. External service providers have great potential for assisting SMTEs.

The integration of SMTEs into tourism associations might be one way to discourage competition at the destination level, replacing it with the development of networks that can benefit all concerned. Partnerships with other small or large firms could also help, especially in such management areas as branding, customer relations, and human resources.

Marketing via an e-shopping mall is a way to share start-up advertising and technical costs. Key words include: interactivity, mass customisation, real time and customer databases.

Established SMTEs may need to focus their websites more on 'customer retention' than 'customer acquisition'. They should also try to develop and manage their own digital brands: in the virtual world consumers are more dependent on recognised brands.

Finally policymakers and entrepreneurs need to work together to raise awareness of e-commerce, notably with the help of training and education programmes.

87. Khan, H. (2002), *Best Practices on E-Commerce Strategies for SMTEs in Singapore*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I. TOWARDS AN INNOVATION-ORIENTED TOURISM POLICY 9

CHAPTER 1. CAN THE STATE PROMOTE INNOVATION IN TOURISM? SHOULD IT? 11

 Growth problems in the industrialised countries 11

 Innovation as the motor of growth 12

 Tourism’s productivity dilemma 13

 Inventions and patents do not in themselves produce growth 13

 A lack of process innovation in tourism 15

 Can the State promote innovation? Should it? 15

CHAPTER 2. INNOVATION AND TOURISM POLICY 17

 The magic role of innovation 17

 Competition and structural change in the developed tourism countries 18

 Innovation as a growth machine in market economies 22

 Essential characteristics of the innovation process 24

 Peculiarities of tourism that affect innovation 27

 Agenda-setting for an innovation-oriented tourism policy 33

 Reasons for the promotion of innovation 37

 Bibliography 40

PART II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INNOVATION PROCESS IN TOURISM 41

CHAPTER 3. INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 43

 Technological innovation, a major force for economic growth 43

 Dealing with uncertainties 44

 A few examples of innovation 47

 The impact of a technological innovation 49

 Innovation in tourism 50

 Bibliography 52

CHAPTER 4. PRODUCT IMPROVEMENT OR INNOVATION: WHAT IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN TOURISM?	53
Relevance and importance of innovation and product development in tourism.....	53
Definition of the term “innovation”	55
Potential areas for innovation in tourism.....	57
On the economics of innovation and product development in tourism	58
Types of innovation.....	60
Empirical evidence gathered so far	62
Implications and prospects for tourism policy.....	65
Bibliography.....	67
PART III. ROUTINISATION OF THE INNOVATION PROCESS IN TOURISM	71
CHAPTER 5. HAS INNOVATION BECOME A ROUTINE PRACTICE THAT ENABLES COMPANIES TO STAY AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION IN THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY?	73
Innovation and Economic Growth.....	73
Background	76
Motivations for consolidation and vertical integration.....	78
The results of consolidation and vertical integration.....	79
The contribution of innovation to survival and success	80
Bibliography.....	83
CHAPTER 6. A DYNAMIC CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO INNOVATION IN TOURISM	85
Methodology	85
Defining innovation.....	86
Innovation in tourism and innovation in other service sectors	87
The dynamics of innovation in tourism: which models?.....	90
Structural approach: the framework for innovation in tourism	96
Cognitive approach: innovation in tourism and the dynamics of knowledge.....	98
Conclusions	103
Bibliography.....	105

PART IV. INITIATIVES ENHANCING INNOVATION IN TOURISM	107
CHAPTER 7. THE FRENCH INITIATIVE FOR INNOVATION IN TOURISM: HOW TO REJUVENATE SUPPLY AND INCREASE THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE TOURISM SECTOR?	109
What does innovation look like in tourism? Some noteworthy examples.....	109
French initiatives and programmes.....	111
Instruments for shaping national tourism supply.....	116
Bibliography.....	120
CHAPTER 8. INNOVATION IN THE FIELD OF MARKET COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING: THE AUSTRALIAN INITIATIVE	121
Marketing Australia.....	121
Challenges	122
Australia's innovative approach	125
Conclusions	129
CHAPTER 9. MALTA: A PERMANENT PROCESS OF INNOVATION IN TOURISM	131
Malta: A unique value proposition	131
Promoting Malta as an experience	132
Active cooperation with all Maltese tourism actors	132
Revisiting the distribution model	132
A permanent process of innovation.....	133
CHAPTER 10. E-TOURISM: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH FOR THE SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED TOURISM ENTERPRISES (SMTES) IN KOREA	135
Introduction	135
Key factors for successful e-commerce.....	137
Importance and performance	140
E-commerce strategies as a tool of innovation	142
Implications for tourism policy	144
Conclusions: recommendations for e-tourism innovations	145
Bibliography.....	146

Tables

Table 6.1. Interpretation of Figure 6.4.....	94
Table 8.1. The Ageing Consumer.....	123
Table 8.2. Focusing the efforts.....	127

Figures

Figure 2.1. Productivity and growth problems of SMEs in highly developed tourism countries.....	19
Figure 2.2. Shrinking market share of tourism in highly developed countries ...	20
Figure 2.3. Innovation cycles of destinations: end of cycle and lack of opportunities for repositioning in the markets	21
Figure 2.4. Oligopolistic competition as a driver of innovation.....	23
Figure 2.5. Basic innovations in transport: major impact on tourism development.....	25
Figure 2.6. Creative risk-taking and standardized processes.....	27
Figure 2.7. Tourism a new 4th sector between "high tech" and "high touch"	28
Figure 2.8. Creative imitation and innovation by way of outsourcing	30
Figure 2.9. Importance of destination goods	31
Figure 2.10. The State as a co-producer	32
Figure 2.11. Model for an innovation-oriented tourism policy	34
Figure 2.12. Determinants of labour productivity in the field of tourism: the importance of innovation creation mechanisms.....	35
Figure 2.13. Competitive market structures	36
Figure 2.14. R&D Division for tourism clusters	38
Figure 2.15. Impact on prosperity of marginal social utility	39
Figure 3.1. Innovation types, adopted from Abernathy and Clark	61
Figure 3.2. Product versus Process Innovation in Tourism	63
Figure 4.1. Platform strategy: Y-Model	79
Figure 6.1. Application of the Barcet model	90
Figure 6.2. Linear models.....	90
Figure 6.3. Chain-linked models	91
Figure 6.4. BCG Growth-Share Matrix	95
Figure 6.5. Channels of knowledge transfer in tourism.....	103
Figure 8.2. ATC Strategic Direction	126
Figure 10.1. Benefits of E-commerce.....	138
Figure 10.2. Barriers to adopting E-Commerce.....	139
Figure 10.3. Important Factors for Successful E-commerce	140
Figure 10.4. Importance-Performance (I-P) Analysis	142



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