

RESEARCH ARTICLE

E-tourism in developing and underdeveloped countries: Case of Cameroon

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Abstract: Tourism is a fragmented yet most popular sector worldwide. The involvement of ICT and social media in a tourism sector is now very popular in developed countries, meanwhile developing countries are still struggling on the implementation of the e-tourism in their respectively countries. The aim of this study is to provide an understanding of the related concepts and research foundation on E-tourism, and make an overview of E-tourism in several developing countries, then compare Cameroon's E-tourism industry performances with China's industry follow by the investigation of the major determinants of E-tourism adoption in Cameroon and recommendations for better E-tourism development in developing and underdeveloped countries like Cameroon. Differences between China and Cameroon are: cultural difference and environment differences. Opportunities between China and Cameroon are: creation of job opportunities and development of infrastructures that would benefit the tourism industry under the belt and road initiative. It is found that China's presence in Africa is very important ,also China has shown a growing interest in open up new markets and investments opportunities and accessing the energy resources of Africa in return it has offers credits opportunities, development assistance as well as strategic partnerships with African governments and they are equally interested in collaborating with Cameroon as they look for new businesses opportunities and ways to boost regime stability specially by developing the tourism industry.

Keywords: tourism, E-tourism, developing countries, Cameroon, business

1 Introduction

Tourism is one of the growing fragmented industries and the source of foreign income^[1] with most business volume. There are many factors influencing this industry, such as natural and man-made scenes facilities, economic, political, social situations, ecological issues, business dynamics, *etc.*^[2] Much information and communication technology (ICT) has been used in tourism industries in recent years. Many researchers used the term 'E-tourism' to use ICT for the tourism industry. It primarily involves applications for e-commerce to handle tourism business using information systems. The development of e-tourism, as the tourism sector, varies from country to country and region to region^[3].

There, more and more people are becoming aware of the benefits of new technologies for planning leisure activities as a growing number of companies and organizations provide easily accessible tourist information via web services. Organizations have to seek the motivation level of their employees prior to adopting any technology^[4]. Travelers, however, generally have limited knowledge of the city to visit and are unaware of local artistic, social or entertainment venues. A user may find a lot of information about the city, but he can spend a long time selecting the activities he prefers and organizing them to spend a day in a profitable way. Innovation is redefining rising sectors, the international tourism industry among them. The Cameroon's vision development strategy aims to turn the country from a low-income agriculture-based economy to a service-oriented society. Despite some obstacles that have sometimes slowed its growth, Cameroonian tourism seems to have found its secret weapon. The internet has brought a real breath of oxygen and an unprecedented alternative in the development of the tourism industry in Cameroon. The National Tourism Council has opted for the choice of the internet as an essential element of the new promotion strategy for Cameroon. From the Ministry of Tourism to private tourism companies, everyone is dancing to it. Direct impact: Internet users begin to dis-

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cover from their place of residence the true Cameroonian culture.

2 Literature review

2.1 The use of ICT in tourism

In many industries, such as finance, education, retail, *etc.*, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) has boomed over the past decade^[5]. E-tourism is the term used throughout the world to describe the use of ICT in tourism to encourage and facilitate e-tourism services^[6]. E-tourism is the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in tourism that can enable tourism to operate at least variable cost, less time and more efficiency in the workplace^[7]. Tourism is widely recognized as highly informative. The Internet offers the possibility of making information and booking facilities available at a relatively low cost to a large numbers of visitors. It also offers a communication tool between suppliers of tourism, intermediaries and end users^[8].

ICTs allow an organization to make the best possible use of all these sources. It will allow the organization to make timely decisions by taking advantage of the advantages available through technological advances. In terms of how information-intensive the industry is, the role of information and communication technology in the tourism and travel industry cannot be over-emphasized. In comparison to a physical product, tourism is intangible and cannot be pre-tested or checked before purchase; thus, access to accurate, reliable, timely and relevant information is important to help visitors and travelers make the right choices^[9].

One of the major challenges facing the tourism industry is to provide relevant, reliable and localized data and to maintain a good customer relationship alongside it. In line with this, it is seen that alongside information technology, tourism is revolutionizing itself. Euro monitor (2016) has reported continuous growth in online travel on a global scale, but as the market matures, the rise is less drastic than in previous years. However, the report stated that short-term rentals raise the online value for 2015 by 17%, but airline remains the leading online travel segment, and digital channels account for 18% of all online sales with online travel agents gaining more in 2015 with a value of USD 67 billion worth of mobile purchases. The Online travel booking is rapidly penetrating and providing the travel and tourism guide with new business opportunities globally.

Tourism-related institutions and Internet businesses are coming together to explore the potential e-commerce market. Beyond the benefits to tourism-related organizations of e-commerce, e-commerce is increasingly changing the

actions and desires of visitors. The internet has revolutionized the tourism industry as both a source of information for customers and a channel for the sale of tourism products.^[10] This has increased the promotion of tourist destinations and services. Other technology gadgets such as GPS, mobile phones, smartphones and handheld devices, apart from the internet, have improved tourism and tourist travel experiences. For improvement, the focus should be on accessibility to travel information, destinations, bookings, payments, hotels, attractions and the quality of maps. According to Forrester (2006), the current online travel expenditure is estimated at \$73 billion, representing 35 percent of total online expenditure, and more than 80 percent of web shoppers use the reviews of other consumers in their travel plans (Forrester, 2006b).

Similarly, Compete, Inc. (2006) found that nearly 50% of travel buyers visited the message board, website, or online community for their online travel purchase, and one out of three buyers reported that user feedback helped with their purchase decision. Hence the value of IT and social media enhancement by internet accessibility is high with volunteering sustainability as social responsibility. Online travel reservations are increasingly expanding, adding new business opportunities to the international travel and tourism industry. Information technology has introduced online travel reservations through the introduction of the Internet and the World Wide Web, which has affected travel and tourism behavior of both consumers and industry Consumers have more options in terms of travel and budget planning^[11]. Ninety-five percent of web users searched the Internet to collect information related to travel. Ninety-three percent visited destination websites, and almost half used email to collect travel-related information. The Internet is transforming the spread of tourism information and sales, according to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Increasing growing number of Internet users are buying online travel, and tourism is gaining a large share of the online trading market. The Internet offers the opportunity for tourism businesses to make information and booking facilities available at a low cost to a vast number of tourists. It also offers a communication tool between manufacturers of tourism, intermediaries and end-consumers. The accessibility of Internet resources, and the Internet itself, provides opportunities for the tourism industry to provide a pool of consumers with larger, broader and more personalized services than before, by creating effective partnerships at manageable costs and without significantly altering the value of the information provided. The current information society has made tourism a highly information-rich and intensively structured sector also the spreading of ICT has enormous potential impacts in the tourism business.

2.2 Tourism in Cameroon

CEMAC zone is considered the giant; the Cameroonian economy remains flourishing and promising despite the difficulties associated with the various crises it has been going through for a few years. The country contributed 29% of the GDP of the CEMAC zone. In terms of tourism, Cameroon is relatively stable compared to 2016 despite the crisis in English-speaking regions. The travel and hospitality sectors have been successful in boosting exports, providing foreign exchange and creating jobs for many Cameroonians. The sector employs 604,500 people or 2.8% of employment in the country. By the end of 2018, this rate is expected to increase by 5% and 3.3% annually by 2028 to reach 875,000 jobs (9.5% of the country's employment). Investments have also been at the heart of Cameroon's tourism activity in 2017. FCFA 107 billion is the total amount invested in this sector, *i.e.* 2.6% of the total investment in the country. It is expected to increase by 3.9 percent in 2018 and 3 percent per year over the next ten years to reach CFAF 142 billion (US \$ 245.7 million) in 2028, or 2.2 percent of investment.

The Cameroonian government is promoting the country as "miniature Africa," claiming that the country offers all of Africa's diversity within its borders in climate, culture, and geography. Sometimes other tourist phrases include "Africa's melting pot" and "Africa in the microcosm." The tourist destinations of Cameroon are in four general areas: the coast, the main towns, the western highlands and the north. The coast offers two major beach resort towns: Limbe, an English-speaking town with black, volcanic sand; and Kribi, a French-speaking town with white sand. Mount Cameroon on the coast is Central and West Africa's highest mountain, attracting hikers and climbers. Yaounde is home to most national monuments in Cameroon. It has a variety of museums as well. The western highlands offer picturesque mountain scenery, waterfalls and lakes, and a cooler climate is given by the elevation.

Bamenda is the main town in the western highlands and the capital of the province of the northwest. This area is known for its traditional crafts and culture. Cultural understanding becomes important not only for itself but also to understand the social responsibility^[12]. The town of Bafoussam is particularly famous for its culture and objects of wood carving. Indeed, in Cameroon, the area produces more crafts than any other. There are also traditional chiefdoms in the West, such as Foumban's sultanate. The north of Cameroon is the main tourist attraction of the country. There are several wildlife reserves in the region, including Waza National Park, the largest and best managed in West Africa. Such parks provide both hunting for animals and fishing for big games. There are cheetahs,

elephants, giraffes, hippopotami, and rhinoceros in this area. Maroua has a large market for crafts and museums. The provinces of Adamawa, North, and South offer a new front for tourism industry growth, but weak transport conditions in these regions hold the industry small. Southern forest reserves have little tourist-oriented facilities, but tourists can see primates, lions, gorillas, and other fauna in the rainforest. (see Figure 1)



Figure 1. Cameroon Map

2.3 ICT in Cameroon tourism

The internet has brought a real breath of oxygen and an unprecedented alternative in the development of the tourism industry in Cameroon. The National Tourism Council has opted for the choice of the internet as an essential element of the new promotion strategy for Cameroon. From the Ministry of Tourism to private tourism companies, everyone is dancing to it. Direct impact: Internet users begin to discover from their place of residence the true Cameroonian culture. Websites and other blogs dedicated to travel are born and become real platforms for promoting tourist sites, hotels, and restaurants. Regarding the Cameroonian web, we notice more and more that most of the big hotels have an online representation either a Facebook account or a website and sometimes both. Online booking sites for hotel rooms or furnished apartments have been created, allowing travelers to prepare their stay. Let's take a look at the JOUFIJU platform so we understand why digital is important because in a few clicks you can get essential information, announcements, services and more about life in Cameroon in order to facilitate and improve your stay. On this site in addition to finding accommodation, the traveler can be aware of events taking place in another city.

2.4 E-Tourism in China

In many developing countries, the tourism industry is a major economic driver. This industry's contributions are

more prominent in economies where tourism accounts for a significant share of GDP^[13] With the rising disposable income, more public holidays, and faster transportation, in recent years, China's domestic and outbound travel has grown unprecedented. With regard to Chinese tourism, China has recently become the first country on the global level in terms of spending^[14]. In fact, they spent \$102 billion in 2012, putting them before Germany and the United States. In 2012, the number of outbound tourists reached 83 million. China should be at the forefront of international tourism in terms of receiving and issuing visitors in a few years. At 546 million wired Chinese, China has the highest number of active Internet users. This is lower than the population of the EU (504 million). Also, 420 million

Chinese people use their mobile phone to connect to the Internet. Figures are also remarkable with regard to e-business: there are 242 million Chinese cyber buyers in 2012, June. It is one of the activities with the most significant growth, with+ 25 percent between 2011 and 2012. BCG's very serious office announces that in 2015, China will become the world's first e-business market. So we can see that in terms of e-business and tourism, China will be positioned in front of the other countries. Like all cyber consumers, Chinese people are increasingly planning their own online trips and rising their expenses. A recent e-marketer market research, a specialist office of statistical analysis, highlights the fact that China has been at the top of online sales among the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India and China) since 2010 and this until 2016. When we examine China's e-tourism sector, we find that the market is dominated by three main actors: Ctrip, Elong and Qunar. Recently, the China Internet Watch office has outlined the market shares of the various companies on the Chinese market. We can clearly see that Ctrip and Elong are the leaders. Qunar has a special status as it is not really an online travel agency but a comparator using Ctrip and Elong. (see [Figure 2](#))

3 Methodology

This section is concerned with the analysis and discussion of various factors influencing the adoption of e-tourism in Cameroon. We resort to descriptive analysis and ANOVA 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 Cameroon (poor, average or good) fit the expected frequency. These analyses were performed using SPSS. During the survey Tourist participants were asked to rank certain aspects

China Online Travel Agency Market Share, 2012

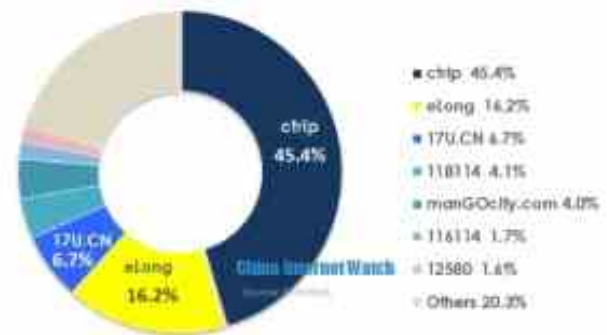


Figure 2. Data on Chinese online market

of internet use on a 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 the following table. As shown in the table, the three highly ranked factors justifying the use of internet include informative, convenience and currency. Lowest ranked was trustworthy. Perhaps the respondents did not place much importance to this construct 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.

Due to the 12,000 employees and the experience of Chinese preferences, we clearly see that Ctrip leads with nearly 50 percent of market shares. With regard to traffic, Qunar is at the top position. Yes, according to the Chinese marketing office of research, the website receives about 80 million unique visitors each month. One of the explanations of success is the current merger with the Chinese search engine Baidu. The fact that Chinese tourists are now avoiding travel agencies is also the product of these digital patterns. Such trends and figures again tell us that China is gradually establishing itself as a nation that will become a pioneer in the highly competitive tourism industry.

4 Results and findings

4.1 China's versus Cameroon's E-Tourism industry performances

China's presence in Africa is very important ,also China has shown a growing interest in open up new markets and investments opportunities and accessing the energy

Table 1. Inbound tourism (arrival by region)

Arrival by Region	CMR2013	CH2013	CMR2014	CH2014	CMR2015	CH2015	CMR2016	CH2016
Africa	215	401	211	497	192	488	219	502
America	23	3124	21	3107	27	3115	27	3379
EAP	24	117744	21	117276	22	123306	24	130357
Europe	182	6422	151	6209	167	5475	166	5988
Middle East	9	269	8	278	15	267	21	253
South Asia	0	1055	0	1125		1164		1296
Others	9	2	22	7	29	3	28	0
Total	462	129078	432	128498	452	133820	484	141774

resources of Africa in return it has offers credits opportunities, development assistance as well as strategic partnerships with African governments and they are equally interested in collaborating with Cameroon as they look for new businesses opportunities and ways to boost regime stability specially by developing the tourism industry. The comparison of the two countries tourism performances shows a huge gap; in fact, the inbound tourist flow in Cameroon over 2013-2016 time frame have been meaningless than the one observed in China during the same time period.

Precisely according to the United Nation World Tourism Organization report, Cameroon has observed a number of 783, 822, 897 and 994 thousand inbound tourists in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively while China has witnessed over 129,128,133 and 141 million of tourists during the same time period. This is clear on the Table 1&2, presenting the tourist inbound in the two countries, from the arrival by region as well as from the arrival by transport mode perspective. Figure 1,2&3 representing the tourists inbound from the two perspectives and the long trend on tourist inflows in the two countries is also in line with that idea.

Though these differences can be justified by the fact that China is a very large country compared to Cameroon, and obviously has more tourist places, and more infrastructures (roads, hotels, etc.), that make it be more attractive than Cameroon; the difference in using ICT to leverage tourist activities between the two countries might also be part. We do not have enough evidence to prove the difference in applying the ICT in order to get more competitive tourist industry; but we can still investigate the major's factors that determine the adoption of E-tourism in Cameroon.

4.2 Factors affecting the adoption ICT in tourism industry in Cameroon

Table 2 computes the ranks of each aspects of internet utilizing the different weights. First, the total rank:

$\Sigma(w \times f)$ 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, 200, which gives us the order from highest to lowest.

4.3 Internet rating in Cameroon

During the survey; the respondents were also asked to rate the internet in Cameroon on a 3-point scale ranging from poor to good. A substantial 41.5% of respondents rated internet in Cameroon as average, while 35% said it was good. The remaining 23.5% indicated that it was poor. 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 Cameroon.

4.4 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 participants had higher means of 4.36, as opposed to the other groups such when rating internet as 'easy to use'. There was a variation in ranking within three domains between countries of origin. Rankings by European and American respondents for affordability of internet was higher (M=4.47) than those from Cameroon (M=3.86). Perhaps these rankings differ because the cost of internet in Cameroon 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). (see Table 3, 4)

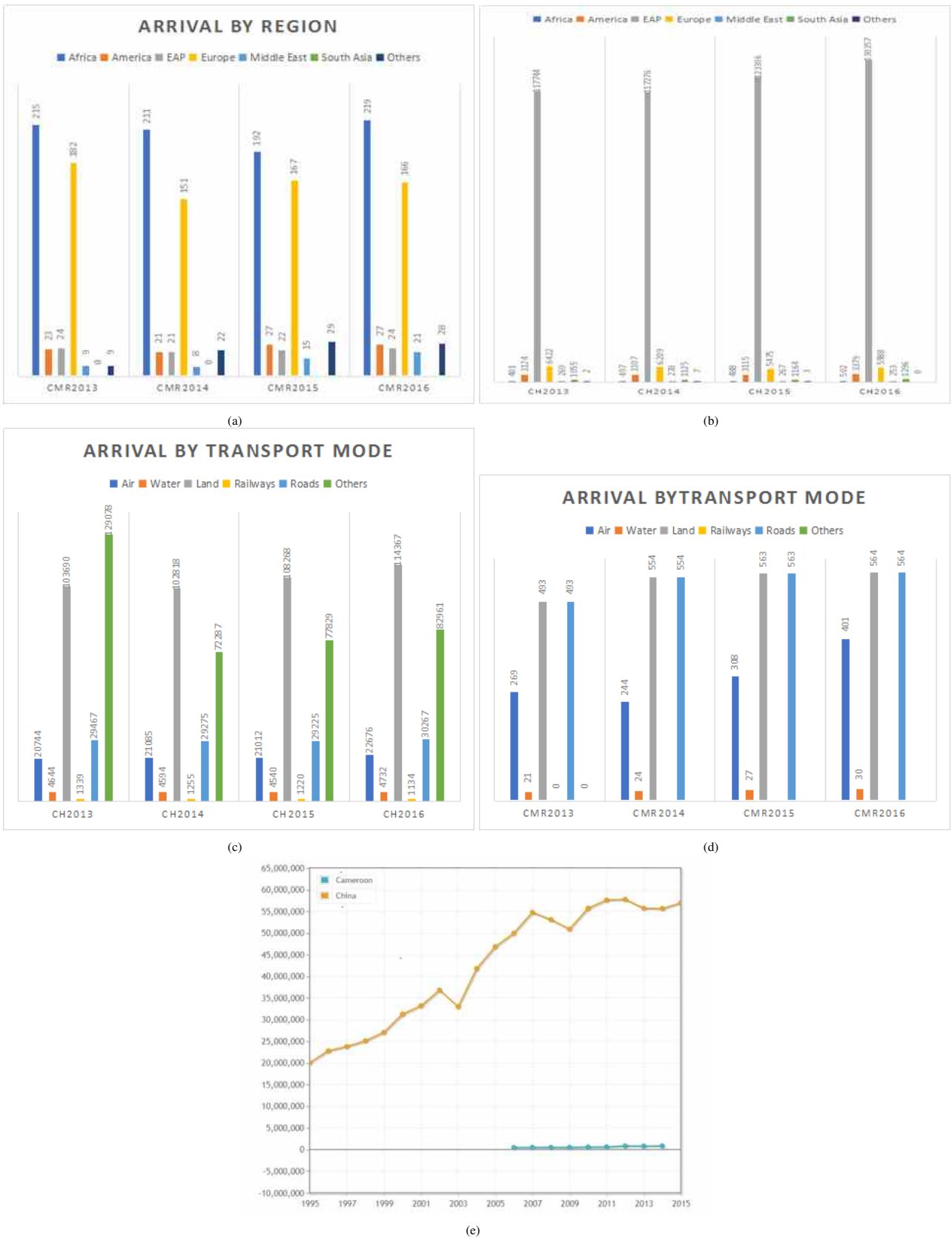


Figure 3. China vs. Cameroon's inbound tourists

Table 2. Inbound tourism (arrival by transport mode)

Arrival by Region	CMR2013	CH2013	CMR2014	CH2014	CMR2015	CH2015	CMR2016	CH2016
Air	269	20744	244	21085	308	21012	401	22676
Water	21	4644	24	4594	27	4540	30	4732
Land	493	103690	554	102818	563	108268	564	114367
Railways	0	1339		1255		1220		1134
Roads	493	29467	554	29275	563	29225	564	30267
Others	0	129078		72287		77829		82961
Total	783	129078	822	128498	897	133820	994	141774

Table 3. Determinants of E-tourism

Extended of Agreement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Undecided (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	$\sum(w*f)$	$R=\sum(w*f)/N$	Rank
Affordable	80	110	10	0	0	870	4.35	4
Convenient	90	105	5	0	0	875	4.375	2
Efficient	65	100	35	0	0	830	4.15	5
Fast	70	80	5	40	5	770	3.85	8
Trustworthy	10	70	110	10	0	680	3.4	9
Effective	45	135	20	0	0	825	4.125	7
Up-to-date	80	120	0	0	0	880	4.4	3
Easy to use	60	110	30	0	0	830	4.15	5
Informative	90	110	0	0	0	890	4.45	1

Table 4. Relationship between rankings and age, gender and country of origin

Extended of Agreement	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

Note: * $p < 0.05$ Table 3 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

5 Conclusion and discussion

The adoption of e-commerce and other ICTs in general is critical for government initiatives. These can be in terms of encouraging the use of ICT, informing and setting up an appropriate e-commerce regulatory framework. Competition for both telephone and ISP services is a key area where government policy can make a difference in e-commerce access and adoption. Governments in developing countries need to ensure accessible and competitive telecommunications markets that offer a range

of high-speed Internet access technologies and network services (particularly broadband) of acceptable quality and price, so that consumers can choose between different technologies and services.

Changes in government policy are seen as crucial to creating an environment for the widespread use of the Internet in many developing country industries. The government's investment and participation in the provision of Internet services and the elimination of import duties would result in cost reductions, which in turn will make equipment more accessible and promote internet connection. The government must create a national vision, a strategic plan, and e-commerce policy guidelines for tourism. All tourism stakeholders should be involved in developing e-commerce strategies. It is also the responsibility of policy makers to establish the appropriate laws, regulations and service standards to build trust and consumer confidence. There is a widespread comparison between entrepreneurship and franchising^[15]. Entrepreneurs should follow business models adapted to their own e-business goals and the world of tourism.

Stakeholders should also find ways of incorporating SMTEs Small and Medium Size Tourism Enterprise into alliances across the industry. This will encourage SMTEs to stop competing at the destination level and develop mu-

tually beneficial networks. In line with this collaboration, they need to develop and execute networking or strategic alliances through collaborations with other SMTEs or large firms, particularly in the area of brand management, customer relationship management, and human resources management. As far as marketing is concerned, association with e-shopping would allow SMTEs to conduct internet-based e-commerce without bearing all the start-up costs, price increases, advertisement and technical difficulties that all merchants in the mall can share instead. E-shopping alliances would enable SMTEs to take advantage of e-commerce systems such as interactivity, mass customization, real time, and a customer database.

SMTEs may need to re-design their website at the established stage to focus more on "customer retention" than on "customer acquisition." They should also try their own digital brand to develop and manage. Brand power is more important on-line than off-line because the e-business main stage is the virtual world where consumers depend more on recognized brands. Finally, all policy makers and entrepreneurs must work together to raise awareness of e-commerce for investors, workers and customers through training and education. By encouraging and enabling tourism investors to take advantage of new Internet and e-commerce technology, e-commerce cannot be introduced.

Technology advancement has an impact on knowledge diversification. The role of information as the tool for liberating and unlocking a nation's wealth has been affirmed equally by various literature. Tourism has also been influenced by the influence of information and communication technologies ICTs, a result of the synthesis of information and technology. Creation of tourism and e-tourism has been explored from the perspective of investment. Different types of internal and external factors influencing e-tourism investments that are worth noting in this paper and in this research project. These factors are structural weaknesses in the national economy, population size, national GDP levels, man-made and natural disaster, limited knowledge of the technology available, lack of awareness, lack of confidence in e-commerce, system maintenance costs, lack of skilled human resources, resistance to e-commerce adoption, insufficient e-commerce infrastructure and small e-commerce market size. In the area where developing countries is experiencing strong growth with the democratization of Internet access, the arrival of 4G, E-tourism, the tourist and hotel sector are also experiencing growing development. Having become aware of the challenge that this represents, tourism and the hotel industry, several countries have created web platforms in order to develop this potential and contribute to the growth of attendance at their respective destina-

tion. The Internet is increasingly becoming the leading source of information on tourism, hotels and online sales of tourism products, gaining significant market share each year. As a result, in order to meet the growing demand, specialized e-commerce sites have already been launched in those countries. Based on our analysis we were led to observe that Cameroon in the field of e-tourism lacks a lot of adequate development for the purpose. A better e-tourism presence that, if developed well, can be an important contribution to improving tourism and bringing better revenues that would help the country develop better in terms of infrastructure and finances. For it to be done at the political level Cameroon needs to encourage companies and SMTEs embarking on e-tourism by facilitating laws to facilitate entrepreneurs to more invest in e-tourism, also improve infrastructures, telecom and better internet connection for a good visibility of Cameroon e-tourism. Also awareness among the population is important in order to use more of the computer tool and assessors to promote Cameroonian products and image.

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