Information and Communications Technology in the Tourism Sector of the Maldives: an Institutional Perspective

Vizaad Ali            Rowena Cullen   Janet Toland
Victoria University of Wellington           Victoria University of Wellington   Victoria University of Wellington
New Zealand              New Zealand      New Zealand
Vizaad.Ali@vuw.ac.nz     Rowena.Cullen@vuw.ac.nz     Janet.Toland@vuw.ac.nz

Abstract
For many small island developing states tourism is a significant area of business. The increasing reliance on information and communication technology in the tourism industry has become one of the major challenges facing developing countries. This paper reports on research which investigated the adoption and effective use of e-commerce in the tourism industry of the Maldives. After a grounded theory analysis of interview data three domains were identified as significant, Sector, Country and Information Systems. These three inter-related domains are used to identify the institutional influences affecting the use of e-commerce in the tourism industry of the Maldives.

1. Introduction
For many Small Island Developing States (SIDS), tourism has become a leading economic activity and the use of ICT to promote tourism and to overcome the geographical dispersion has become particularly important. The Maldives is no exception to this, with its unique natural resources making the industry the main economic driver of the country. The tourism resorts in the Maldives represent a classic example of enclave tourism, where each island is a self-contained resort and tourists have little interaction with the rest of the country.

Given the important economic role of tourism, SIDS, need to adapt, improve, and utilize modern ICTs and innovative management strategies to address growing competition and to seize global opportunities in order to remain competitive in the marketplace. In a study done by the International telecommunication union (ITU) in the Maldives, Minges and Gray [1] argue that the “Maldives could leverage its large tourism industry to become a leader in e-tourism applications” (p. 48). Indeed, ICT is already widely used in the tourism sector of the Maldives. Currently, all resorts provide the facility to send and receive emails, and online booking is organized through the tour operators. All resorts have relevant details hosted on websites, either locally or internationally. However, Minges and Gray [1] emphasize that, in order to obtain the maximum benefits from ICT opportunities, tourism organizations in the Maldives need to provide both detailed information to consumers and the ability to process reservation requests online. The government of Maldives also believes that tourism organizations in the Maldives should leverage e-commerce technologies to take advantage of the global information network in order to increase the national and international competitiveness of the sector [1-2]. Although this vision exists, little is being done in practice; this research focuses on developing an understanding of ICT usage among the tourism organizations of the Maldives.

This article draws upon institutional theory in order to build an understanding of how tourism organizations in the Maldives operate in the contextual environment of their country.

2. SIDs and ICT
It is believed that e-commerce offers the potential to eliminate geographical barriers for many remote and isolated states, allowing them to do business by reducing their distance from key markets [3]. According to the Commonwealth Secretariat “for many SIDs remoteness, smallness and isolation can be overcome and the development of modern communications capacities could become the engine of growth, development, and diversification” [4, p.8].

However Read & Soopramanien [3] argue that the adoption of e-commerce in SIDs is constrained on both the supply and demand side [3]. The supply side fails to achieve a critical mass of domestic economic
activities such as investment in infrastructure, since domestic demand is insufficient for efficient output. The demand side is constrained by the limited size of the domestic market for services, retailing and wholesaling. This requires domestic firms to find ways of accessing global trade networks in order to reap the benefits of large-scale production [3]. Thus, openness to trade is necessary for small developing states [3, 5-6]. In addition, alongside the large investment in infrastructure, small developing states experience a critical need for investment in human capital to overcome labor constraints. Therefore, these countries experience a double barrier to the adoption of e-commerce [3].

When analyzing the official national websites for small developing countries for content and function Mohammed [7] noted that the challenges faced by small developing states include limitations in finance and resources, which affect their economic survival and ability to compete in the international market. Wresch and Fraser [8] in examining the barriers to e-commerce in the Caribbean region also affirm that SIDs face particular issues. They show that competition in the international market; limited expertise, unwieldy legislation; and deficiencies in both telecommunications infrastructure and services such as software, e-payment, and delivery hinder e-commerce.

Given these particularities of SIDs, most of which are structural in nature and therefore beyond the control of any individual country. SIDs face a myriad of issues in using ICTs to overcome the barriers of distance. This article uses the context of the Maldives to develop an understanding of the deeper underlying forces that influence the use of ICTs in tourism organizations located in SIDs.

3. ICT and Tourism

There is a poor understanding of ICT usage in the tourism industry of SIDs. The current body of literature fails to address the complex nature of the problem. However, there is a large body of research in various fields related to the study under investigation. Research related to technology adoption in developing countries and ICT for development (ICT4D), has shown that a number of factors affect technology adoption at organizational level and also noted that factors external to the organization such as availability of resources, and local conditions affect the strategic use of ICT [See 9, 10-17]. Although there is limited research focusing on ICT and SIDs, it is believed that ICT has the potential to overcome remoteness, smallness and isolation [3-4]. Studies focusing on the use of ICT in the tourism industry or e-tourism have shown that the use of ICT is unavoidable in the tourism industry and that ICT will continue to be a crucial element in the success of the tourism industry, especially for developing countries [See 4, 13, 18]. Studies focusing on tourism and SIDs stress that tourism is the main economic contributor for many SIDs and that most SIDs experience major inherent challenges in developing their tourism sector [13, 19-21]. However, there is no clear understanding on the use of ICT in the tourism industry of SIDs.

4. Institutional Theory

The study of institutions is widespread throughout various disciplines such as economics, political science, and sociology [22]. Despite this there is no consensus on the definition of the term “institution” [23]. Following one of the principal theorists in the field, Scott [22, p.49], this article defines institutions as “multi-faceted, durable social structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources.” Institutions can influence the laws, regulations, standards, and other supply-push and demand-pull forces [24-25]. Such influences articulate the organizational norms, morally adopted socialization practices and traditions [26]. Institutions can both facilitate and retard IT diffusion through strategies such as; knowledge building, knowledge deployment, subsidy, innovation directive, mobilization, and standard setting [24].

Although there is no agreed-upon, single definition of institution, generally institutional theorists [27-30] have focused on how the institutionalization of organizations is a product of the pressure emanating from internal and/or external organizational environments. As Miranda and Kim [31] describe, the internal or the internal-to-organization environment perspective considers organizations to be shaped by socially constructed persisting patterns of activities among organizational members. Chatterjee et al. [32] have applied institutional theory to the behaviors and cognition of individuals within organizations, focusing on three aspects: structures of significance, structures of legitimating, and structures of domination, all of which influence individual behavior. Internally, institutionalization arises from the structures and processes among organizational members and/or groups. The external or external-to-organization
environment perspective considers organizations to be shaped by forces from the external environment that alter patterns of organizational activities [31]. Forces in the external environment include those related to the government, professional, and other related organizations, especially those within the same sector. A study by Gibbs and Kreamer [15], identified external pressure in the form of government promotion and legislation to be key determinants of the scope of e-commerce use. More recently, Zhu [17] used institutional theory to understand the external environment and more specifically the legal and policy issues of e-commerce adoption in different countries.

Institutional theory also highlights the importance of the institutional environment in shaping organizational structure and actions [22]. Organizational norms are likely to be based on powerful forces that exist in the environment. Institutional theory posits that isomorphic pressure (the pressure that forces one unit in a population to become similar to other units in the same environmental conditions) and the pressure for legitimacy makes organizations more similar to one another or homogenized [29-30]. DiMaggio and Powell [30] argue that the homogenization emerges out of structuration [33]. Structuration theory posits that human agents create social structures and these creative actions produce and reproduce these structures. Regardless of the source of institutional pressure, institutional theory specifies three mechanisms or forces which increase the homogeneity or organizational structures in an environmental context: mimetic pressure, coercive pressure, and normative pressure [30].

Mimetic pressure causes organizations to imitate actions of other organizations, in order to avoid being perceived as less technologically advanced [34]. It has been shown that organizations tend to imitate structurally equivalent organizations because they share similar economic network positions in the industry, similar goals, commodities, customers, and suppliers, and also because they experience similar constraints [35]. Imitation is more likely to arise when conditions are uncertain [30]. It is argued that organizations tend to imitate the structurally equivalent organizations which are perceived to be successful [36-37]. Organizations also experience social pressure to join the institutional bandwagon, or to mimic other organizations, simply in order to avoid appearing different from others [30] and sometimes they need legitimacy within the social structure [38].

Coercive pressures are those exerted by resource dominant traders and parent corporations [15], upon whom organizations are dependent [30]. According to DiMaggio and Powell [30], coercive pressure mainly stems from the resource-dependence perspective. Dominant actors who have control over certain scarce resources may demand that other organizations who are dependent on them adopt certain structures or programs that serve their own interests, and these resource dependent organizations often comply with such demands in order to secure their own survival [39]. Coercive pressure also stems from political influence and the need for legitimacy. The pressures from authoritative bodies such as the government enforce certain regulations or mandates for organizations to adopt certain organizational structures that are perceived to be legitimate. Complying with these regulations enables the organization to benefit from rewards and avoid negative sanctions [30]. Institutional researchers have shown that coercive pressure such as regulations are vital to create a conducive environment for e-commerce adoption [15, 17].

Normative pressure results from frequent contact with other suppliers, customers, or trade organizations [15]. The normative pressure manifested through dyadic inter-organizational channels of firm-supplier and firm-customer relationships enables organizations to learn about innovations along with their associated benefits and costs [35]. Much of this type of pressure is a result of increasing professionalization. This stems from concern about the level of education and the professional training that organizations receive. According to DiMaggio and Powell [30], the training of professionals creates “a pool of interchangeable individuals who occupy similar positions across a range of organizations and possess a similarity of orientation” (p. 152).

Organizational decisions are not necessarily driven only by rational goals of efficiency but also by social, cultural, and legal factors [15]. According to Orlikowski and Barley [40], this perspective offers a vantage point for researchers to conceptualize “the digital economy as an emergent, evolving, embedded, fragmented, and provisional social production that is shaped as much by cultural and structural forces as by technical and economic ones” (p. 154).

The pressure from these institutional forces also encourages the organizations to adopt innovations. Philips, Lawrence, and Hardy [41] argue that collaboration is an important aspect of institutional
Institutional theory provides a theoretical understanding of how the effective use of ICT is influenced by the internal and the external organizational environments. Furthermore, institutional theory describes how the institutionalization of organizations is shaped by powerful forces that exist within the environment. This article uses institutional principles to explore the institutional arrangements affecting ICT and e-commerce integration and usage in tourism industry organizations in the Maldives.

5. Methodology

This research was conducted under the interpretivist paradigm, and the primary source of data was interviews with tourism organizations, industry leaders, government authorities, and supporting industries. The data was analyzed using a combination of the grounded theory technique developed by Glaser and Strauss [42] and the use of aspects of Goldkuhl’s [43-44] multi-grounded theory. Two phases of data collection were conducted from November 2007 until the end of February 2008, and from March 2009 until June 2009 respectively. Interviews were carried out with a total of 21 organizations covering local chains, international chains, locally owned resorts, safari vessel operators, travel agencies and supporting organizations such as government agencies and telecommunications service providers. Interviews were conducted on a semi structured basis. Additionally, documents such as electronic sources, letters, memoranda, diaries, receipts, maps, journals, newspapers, regulations and laws, were also used as secondary data. The analysis process involved constant comparison with the empirical data as well as related theories.

6. Findings

When the data was analyzed using constant comparison three major domains emerged: Country, Sector and Information Systems (IS). As Table 1 shows each of the three domains includes both institutional influences and factors. These domains, institutional influences and factors emerged when grouping the open codes generated from the comparative analysis method of grounded theory. The institutional influences are the focus of discussion in this paper.

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<th>Domain</th>
<th>Institutional Influences</th>
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6.1. Institutional Influences in the Country

The adoption of ICT and e-commerce by tourism sector organizations in the Maldives is closely associated with developments in the tourism sector to bring about institutional change. These institutional changes strongly influence the way issues relating to resource limitations and local conditions are addressed.
6.1.1. Resource limitations

Some of the most significant institutional aspects influencing resource limitations are related to the entry of renowned international chains and the high end market trends experienced by the tourism sector. For instance, technological services providers’ are experiencing an increase in demand for high quality infrastructure, especially from up-market tourism organizations, irrespective of the cost of providing the services. The service providers are compelled to establish a sound technological infrastructure to gain legitimacy from these tourism organizations and in order to sustain or expand their businesses. In addition the tourism organizations, especially up-market tourism business, are obliged to provide quality services, such as high speed broadband access, to their customers. Although this level of service in the institutional environment requires the establishment of sound telecommunication infrastructure, the demand is insufficient to cover the costs of providing high quality services across the nation. It is often the mobile tourism service providers or the safari vessel operators who are looking to have such services established. However, most of these are small businesses and unable to create a sufficiently high demand for these services, given the cost involved in getting access to them.

Similarly, the expansion in tourism services in the tourism organizations has resulted in increased demand for human resources. Since the very beginning of the tourism industry in the Maldives, engagement of locals in the tourism industry has been limited. High staff turn-over and employment of staff on a short-term contract basis is common in the industry. To overcome these human resource issues, many tourism businesses, especially the tourist resort islands, have been managed by employing a large number of foreign employees on a short term contract basis. However, because most businesses also lack a planned approach to resolving the long term human resource management shortages, this practice undermines the sustainability of management practices including ICT activities. Thus, the new establishments in the tourism sector tend to imitate a practice that they perceive as successful, the employment of foreign labor on short term contracts, and this trend persists among the tourism sector organizations.

6.1.2. Local conditions

Within the country, the local conditions were influenced by a number of forces within the institutional environment. The findings show that the majority of the tourism organizations seek to adopt the most common methods of dealing with physical environmental issues. Most of the issues identified as social cultural influences reflect social structures in the country. While these may be invisible they have a strong influence on organizations’ behavior, for instance, the keenness to adopt technology increases the tendency to use ICT in the organization. These structures along with features of vulnerability such as small population, dependency on imports, the frequency of natural disasters, lack of economies of scale and the salty, humid, tropical environment, compel various elements in the tourism sector to become more alike, irrespective of their management approaches. These issues lead to the importance of formulating policies that would address the institutional demands for the efficient and effective use of ICT. For example, the Maldives have taken some strategic initiatives to improve local conditions, such as eliminating a state monopoly on telecommunications. However, the existing policies are insufficient while government authorities and tourism associations claim to be strengthening the legal and regulatory framework to encourage e-methods of doing business in the country. These regulations are not well implemented, bringing into question the effectiveness of Maldives tourism master plans and the national development plans.

6.2. Institutional influence within the Tourism Sector

The sector is not in harmony, meaning that the environment is not conducive for all members of the industry. Well-established large businesses have somehow been able to create a favorable environment for their businesses while the “small” players or small businesses with less power are driven along on waves of institutional environment and institutional change. Furthermore, these changes, influenced by issues of collaboration, strongly affect the practices within the sector.

6.2.1. Collaboration

A strong institutional aspect is the role of collaboration or the extent of interaction and coalition between and among government authorities and tourism organizations. One of the issues is that the most prominent business people in the country,
being the tourism sector elites, strongly influence the government and the supporting industry organizations. Similarly, engaging the prominent business elite in senior positions in the government creates opportunities for them to harness the institutional environment in their favor. The harmony of the sector is plagued by accusations of corruption among elites and senior government officials. Additionally, the findings show that the less powerful businesses have developed a sense of cynicism towards the government, which in turn affects the level of engagement in adopting reasoned strategies, such as participating in tourism promotional activities. Furthermore, the lack of collaboration is further compounded by poor relationships within government organizations as well as in tourism organizations.

6.2.2. Sector practices

An element of coerciveness and normative sanctions within the sector are reflected in sector practices. A significant issue of institutional change within the tourism sector is the approach to marketing management, which is strongly influenced by customer expectations. Given that customers are becoming increasingly knowledgeable and make complex decisions based on the choices accessible through the Internet, the tourism sector is compelled to change from traditional ways of relying solely on the chartered market or tour operators. Another institutional aspect is that the organizations are driven by perceived competitive pressures. Many of the tourism sector organizations are changing their product, market, and approach to management and also recognize the dramatic changes in the hospitality industry due to ICT. A number of organizations are adopting strategies such as branding, repositioning their market, changing their products offerings, and creating customized services in order to strengthen their market position. Irrespective of the size of the organization, tourism organizations tend to adopt or adjust their strategies to conform with up-coming trends to modernize their offering in ways that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful in identifying a niche within the competitive market.

6.3. Institutional influence in the IS Domain

Perception of ICT and Exploitation of ICT are the outcome of IS understanding within and among the members of the organizational field resulting from the interplay between the tourism sector and local conditions within the country itself. A number of activities described within the institutional influences reflect that the institutional pressure to conform is driving the organizations to become more alike and to utilize ICT without due caution or strategic planning.

6.3.1. Perception of ICT

Perception of ICT is largely influenced by the institutional field. The “fit” between individual organizational requirements and trends in the sector get out of alignment. The awareness and exposure to technology are often bound by practices within the industry organizations, merely imitating the approach of international chain resorts does not actually lead to efficiency and the use of advanced ICT applications can actually become a burden, as small operators struggle to make best use of these applications. The top-down approach to managing most of the sector organizations widens the gap between organizational requirements and sector trends, reducing the opportunities to gain efficiency. In most of the organizations, the work environment is structured in such a way that the operational staff have less say in strategic planning activities of their organization. The situation is intensified by the lack of knowledge available in the organization. Under these circumstances, executive management with less coordination and strategic planning tends to follow other organizations’ approach to management, which they perceive as successful, leading to isomorphism.

6.3.2. Exploitation of ICT

Such isomorphism is also reflected in the exploitation of ICT. For instance most of the organizations had adopted or expressed their desire to adopt the well known high-tech software applications, or join the software bandwagon, irrespective of the organizational capabilities or their approach to management. Similarly, while most of the organizations perceive the importance of web development, existing websites are often neglected, partly due to limitations in getting access to the resources and services required for e-commerce. However, irrespective of the state of their own websites, all sector organizations had a presence in well-known electronic distribution channels and perceived engaging in such strategic networks as crucial.
7. Tracing the Institutional Influences to Institutional Theory

Institutional theory explains how external structures and practices propagate among organizations within and across institutional fields; or in other words why organizations tend to become similar over time, and resemble other organizations with the same environment. The concept that best describes this process of homogenization is isomorphism [30], which, the authors argue, emerges out of the complex interplay of social structures’ influences, as identified in Giddens’ [33] structuration theory. This isomorphism resulting from organizational interconnectedness has forceful implications for the effective use of ICT in the organizations. Firstly, the level of interconnectedness or collaboration has the potential to transform the institutional field [41, 45]. The findings show that the collaboration stems from the relationships between and among the members of the institutional field. The level of collaboration highlights the importance of the institutional field in shaping the tourism sector. However, as highlighted in the literature review, Phillips et al [41] describe the institutional field as more contingent on the structure of power within the field. Furthermore, according to DiMaggio and Powell [30], the three mechanisms or forces that increase homogeneity in an institutional environment are mimetic pressure, coercive pressure, and normative pressure. They note that these mechanisms are not always empirically distinct, but provide mechanisms to facilitate analysis.

7.1. Coercive pressure

Coercive pressure stems from formal and informal pressure for compliance with institutional rules and the practices of the society within which organizations function. According to the findings, the actions of formal institutions such as government authorities to create an institutional environment that fosters ICT usage among the tourism sector organizations were inadequate. Thus, the coercive pressure experienced by the tourism industry to use ICT effectively, was more external and customer-driven. Given that the success of the tourism industry depends on providing services to customers, the activities in the tourism sector demand that organizations seek ways to meet customer expectations. The organizations are compelled to ensure the level of services meets the customers’ standards or expectations arising from the image that the tourism sector of the Maldives portrays. The findings show that the tourism sector organizations examined provide basic services such as the Internet access and highlight the organizations’ perception that having a particular standard of services is a necessity to uphold their image in the market. Such coercive pressure was also felt by the organizations to use software applications such as Property Management system (PMS) to facilitate the provision of services, in conformity with sector practices. Such practices have become informal structures or standards that are perceived as the basics in engaging in the tourism industry.

7.2 Normative pressure

Normative pressure is caused by the power of collective structures as well as through professional, business, and other key organizations [46]. The research findings show that it is the norm for all tourism sector organizations to use software applications such as PMS to manage their businesses, and that implementing software applications to manage day-to-day activities is part of their establishment. As discussed earlier, one of the significant issues that strongly influence ICT practices within the sector is the prominence of high-tech software application designed for the hospitality industry. The software applications provider has a presence in the country and nearly all the up-market tourism organizations have implemented it. It is perceived as the right way to gain a competitive edge among the international chain resorts. Thus, using PMS and other software applications to manage the tourism sector organizations was perceived as normative behavior among the tourism sector organizations irrespective of their type of business, their capabilities, and their approach to implementing the applications.

7.3 Mimetic pressure

Mimetic pressure may cause an organization to behave like other organizations in the environment, in response to some strategic uncertainty [30]. The findings show that this is one of the most significant institutional mechanisms present among tourism sector organizations in the Maldives. The practice of ICT adoption within organizations varies depending on their positioning in the market, but there are strong similarities in approaches to ICT adoption across the different types of organizations. For instance, most of the international chain resorts tend to mimic the locally owned businesses in their approach to overcome the vulnerability issues, while the local businesses tend to mimic international chain
resorts in their approach to management. This has both good and bad impacts. On one hand, the locally managed resorts tend to use high-tech software applications without due caution and strategic planning. On the other hand, one of the positive developments in this regard seems to be that the locally owned and/or managed organizations were developing their own websites as strategic marketing measures to make effective use of ICT in their organizations.

Social as well as organizational structures and coercive, normative and mimetic pressures have created legitimate forms and routines within the tourism sector environment, so reinforcing institutional homogeneity. The three mechanisms are not distinctive: in instances where organizations are coerced by a prominent leader or the professional organization into imitating their peers the organizations are becoming increasingly similar but not necessarily more efficient. In other words, tourism sector organizations tend to follow what other similar organizations are doing, not because they understand what they are doing, but because they perceive it to be a factor in their success.

7.4 The new institutional force

The tourism sector included industry organizations along with supporting organizations, such as government authorities, associations and private-sector organizations. A new institutional focus identified within the tourism sector was the level of collaboration. This article has shown that factors relating to issues of collaboration strongly influence the organizational field in shaping the tourism sector to strategically align sector practices in using ICT. In the Maldives, as in many other developing countries, “governments fill a critical function in terms of creating an environment that is conducive to the greater use of ICTs” [12, xiv]. The lack of collaborative practices between government agencies is closely related to challenges faced in using ICT effectively [47]. The findings show that the uncoordinated relationships between and among government authorities, industry organizations, and supporting industry organizations negatively affect sector practices in tourism organizations.

This paper argues that the barriers for collaboration are inherently social/political rather than technical, in this instance. Governance issues inhibit the strategic planning objectives of the tourism industry of the Maldives and the industry is influenced by the vested interests of the business elites in the country. This has led to a lack of harmony within the tourism industry. Furthermore, the low level of collaboration among and within tourism industry organizations mitigates against a productive work culture/environment. The findings show that the level of collaboration or the relationship between the government authorities and tourism sector business elites plays a major role in shaping the institutional environment of the Maldives. The level of collaboration within the institutional field has the potential to shape the rules, norms, and resources in the institutional field in the Maldives. In other words, the findings of this research support the argument of certain researchers [41, 45] that collaboration has the potential to transform the processes in the institutional field. However, the findings show that this potential is not being realised due to lack of collaboration within and among the tourism sector organizations in the Maldives. The findings of this current research also support the view that the tourism sector in SIDs is dominated by the elites [48-50]. Worth noting is that, given the smallness of the country, the impact of the level of collaboration is a critical aspect within the institutional field. It significantly affects the level of ICT usage in the tourism sector of the Maldives.

8. Conclusions

The adoption and integration of ICT and e-commerce in the Maldives’ tourism sector is shaped by institutional influences or forces emanating from the institutional environment of the country. In other word the institutional environment plays a significant role in shaping the level of ICT usage in the Maldives’ tourism organizations.

While a number of studies have been conducted into ICT adoption in developing countries, few of them focus at the industry level in a SIDS. By taking into account the industry environment or the institutional field of the industry, the nature of forces (as tabulated in Table 1) associated with ICT and e-commerce adoption and integration can be understood, explained, and evaluated. This research has shown that ICT and e-commerce adoption and integration in the tourism sector is affected by conditions within the Sector itself and within the Country as well as by the IS domain itself. The relationship between the three domains is recursive; all three interact with and influence each other. In addition, these three domains are affected by the international pressure shaping the institutional field of the tourism organizations in the Maldives.

Although the approach to tourism in the Maldives -
enclave tourism, means there is less interaction with the local culture than there may be in other SIDs. Pressures coming from outside the country not only have a strong influence on the way the economic benefits the country receives from tourism, but also affect the use of ICT and e-business in the tourism organizations. Tourism organizations in the Maldives tend to imitate the approach to managing ICT and e-business used by international chains, in the belief that they need to do this in order to find a niche among the international competitors.

Although institutional theorists have noted the importance of networks and inter-organizational connections, this research has shown that these relationships are critical in shaping the institutional field in SIDS, like the Maldives. Collaboration between tourism industry organizations has the potential to shape the rules and norms, as well as the resources in the institutional field. The level of collaboration shaping the institutional field of the tourism industry in the Maldives, is determining the use of ICT and e-commerce among tourism organizations affecting social, economical and cultural well-being of the country.

The findings of this research have practical implications for future ICT and e-commerce usage. Users of ICT and e-commerce in tourism organizations and their supporting industry organizations need to be aware of the conditions in the country as well as the IS domain itself. This broader understanding of the situation in SIDs will help practitioners to manage and develop better strategies, policies and regulations more conducive to the environment of SIDs.

This article has demonstrated how applying a distinctive view – the institutional perspective to the tourism industry in the Maldives, can improve understanding of how ICT and e-commerce can be more successfully utilized in the tourism industry, a critical area of development for many SIDS.

This study also has limitations, as it is based on the experience of selected organizations from one country the reader should be careful in generalizing these findings to other settings. Further research in similar settings such as other SIDS would better establish the external validity of the findings.

9. References


