

Abstract

The primary objective of the study is to evaluate the effect of the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a tool for the improvement of the profitability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourist sector of Guatemala, on the basis of a diagnosis of the current situation of the use of ICT and e-commerce for SMEs in 2015, in the main tourist areas of the country.

In this research, in the first place, the theoretical factors that led the SMEs to make use of ICTs were determined and discussed; subsequently, the main variables that explain and differentiate tourist sector enterprises on the basis of the degree of implementation of the use of ICTs were identified, in order to then determine their degree of competitiveness within the national tourist sector.

Finally, the conclusions and recommendations, that make it possible to verify, in the specific case, what the theory exposes with respect to the use of ICTs matches the results obtained with the SMEs evaluated.

The research aims to be a reliable source of information for public and private entities of the Guatemalan tourist sector, that will allow them to have a clearer perspective on the use and adoption of new ICTs, in order to help them develop new comparative advantages and differentiating features, as they face an economic landscape in an increasingly globalized and competitive world.

ICTs' impact on profitability of SMEs

Tourism is an economic and social phenomenon that contributes to the development and well-being of nations, whose expansion benefits multiple industries, representing about 9-10% of the world Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generating 1 of every 10-11 direct and indirect jobs. It is also the main source of foreign currency for one third of the developing countries and for over one half of the least developed countries, where it can represent up to 40% of their GDP.

In the last decade, new ICTs have had an enormous impact on the tourist sector in the entire world. This impact is still in its first phase in Latin American countries, where the potential of e-tourism is particularly promising. For these reasons, countries such as Guatemala, which is located in Central America, have a high potential for diverse types of tourism (cultural, archaeological and adventure among others). Guatemala considers tourism a vital component of its development strategies and policies in general, and is investing in its growth because it is considered a key factor to promote socio-economic progress, due to its linkages to other economic activities in favor of the dispossessed.

To maximize its tourist potential, it is necessary that companies in the tourist sector of Guatemala (mainly hotels, tour operators and travel agencies), promote and commercialize their own tourist offer on-line, based on the collaboration between the public and the private sectors, thus improving the visibility of Guatemala as a country of destination and collaborating with the local tourism industry in order to react in a better way to the market demand, meeting the needs of potential tourists through a fast and secure access to information, the preparation of customized trips and facilitating on-line payment.

Main results

To analyze the current situation of new TICs applied to the Guatemalan tourist sector, it is important to observe how the pioneering companies in adapting to these technologies have strengthened their competitiveness and have increased their market share. Most of these companies are located in the more developed tourist areas, which are shown as blue circles on the map. They have improved their dominant position in the tourism market, while those that have not been able to accommodate to the new technologies have been losing weight within the tourist market and are being increasingly relegated to the point of endangering their own continuity. The majority of these companies are located in areas of scarce tourist development and are shown as red circles on the map.

Indicator	Micro %	Small %	Medium %	Large %
Proportion of firms that use computers	42,91	74,83	87,50	100,00
Proportion of employees who use computers regularly	28,09	30,78	25,83	33,18
Proportion of firms that use Internet	66,09	88,74	96,88	100,00
Proportion of employees who use Internet regularly	27,74	30,56	24,68	33,18
Proportion of firms present in the web	34,95	62,25	93,75	100,00
Proportion of firms que reciben pedidos por Internet	8,65	26,49	28,13	100,00
Proportion of firms that receive orders by Internet	5,88	18,54	21,88	100,00
Proportion of firms that use Internet classified by access mode:				
Narrow banda	19,72	43,05	40,63	0,00
Fixed broad band	6,92	10,60	31,25	100,00
Mobile broad band	39,45	35,10	25,00	0,00
Proportion of firms that use Internet classified by type of activity:				
Send of receive e-mails	57,09	86,75	96,88	100,00
Use instant messeging or discussion forums	33,56	60,93	75,00	100,00
Obtaining information about goods and services	27,34	48,34	84,38	100,00
Access to other financial services	5,88	12,58	34,38	50,00
Providing services to customers	26,99	45,70	78,13	100,00
On-line sale of products	5,88	12,58	34,38	50,00
Internal or external hiring	21,80	39,07	65,63	100,00
Training of personnel	13,84	24,50	43,75	100,00

