

Effect of E-Business Adoption on the Quality of Travel Agency-Supplier Relationship in Thailand

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Abstract

The emergence of e-business (the business of buying and selling goods and services on the Internet) has created a new business paradigm, which impacts marketing channels of the service industry, including tourism. This research study applies quantitative methods to examine whether antecedent factors pose impact on e-business when e-business factors affect the relationship between travel agencies and their suppliers. Methods: the structured interview was performed on site. The sample comprised 409 retail travel agencies in Thailand selected by stratified sampling method. The conceptual model was explained by path analyses using SEM. Results and Discussion: For the travel agency, customer pressure yielded the greatest impact on e-payment whereas normative pressure created the most impact on e-procurement. Both customer and normative pressure influenced the travel agencies' short-term trust with their suppliers; however, the latter created greater impact. In addition, e-business adoption caused impact on the agencies' short-term trust toward the suppliers as well as their long-term commitment either directly or indirectly via perceived reciprocity as a mediator. Interestingly, this research work unexpectedly found that e-payment was a key contributing factor in building agencies' short-term trust with their suppliers.

Keywords: E-Business Adoption, Travel Agencies, Trust with Supplier, Long-Term Commitment, Perceived Reciprocity

Introduction

The emergence of e-commerce has created a new business model, of which particularly important aspect is the new business paradigm which impacts marketing channels. E-commerce is defined as the business of purchasing and selling goods and services on the Internet (IDM, 2012). E-commerce may involve some activities such as direct retail online sales to consumers, business-to-business (B2B) transaction, and B2B electronic data interchange. Therefore e-commerce business is significantly powerful in certain segments of the service industry, including tourism where the Internet has steadily gained popularity during the past two decades (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

Also, e-business from the supply chain management (SCM) point of view is currently of great interest. In the past, research studies regarding SCM were mainly conducted in the field of international transportation and trading, which pointed out to merely tangible goods. There were few research studies as to service businesses. Thus this research work aims to select one

of the service businesses, tourism industry as it is one of the world's fastest-growing industries, and also the area where the Internet is gaining considerably more importance. There was a lot of evidence of growth and development in the field of tourism due to information technology such as e-airlines (Buhalis, 2004; Weaver & Lawton, 2008). As a result, relevant academic research will undoubtedly benefit the tourism sector.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Over a decade ago, travel agencies use internet as simply as an additional mode of traditional communication (Özturan & Roney, 2004). Today, the rapid developments of online social networking and high-speed internet connectivity along with the recent advances of portable devices, however, have allowed people to use mobile devices anywhere and anytime. E-communication flourished because of the openness, speed, anonymity, digitization, and global accessibility characteristics of the internet (Isaac & Zeadally, 2014). So the customer plays a more active role in the search for information. Moreover, one of the most popular online services which have received a lot of attention in the last decade has been electronic commerce which allows the electronic transfer of transactional information (Asokan, Janson, Steiner, & Waidner, 2000; Yu, Hsi, & Kuo, 2002). E-payment and e-banking are examples of e-commerce which including signing contracts, fund transfers, or the distribution of intangible digital goods. As mentioned, a travel agency is pressured by clients while the level adoption of e-business may correlate with the extent of pressure.

From an institutional perspective, even though the adoption of e-business innovation was determined as market orientation and technological opportunism, some firms climbed on the bandwagon by adoption based on how many other organizations have implemented the innovation (F. Wu & Lee, 2005). Normative pressures are significant antecedents of online order taking which constitutes one of the most high-profile, externally visible facets of e-business. In parallel, numerous businesses have feared being left behind competitors if they do not adopt e-communication and e-payment innovation (F. Wu et al., 2003).

The adoption of e-business is technological innovation in business strategy (Varadarajan & Yadav, 2002). This research study have points out three sections of e-business, including e-communication, e-payment, and e-procurement. E-communication is referred to as online channels to communicate with other parties and consists of three components. E-payment (electronic payment) is defined as any payment transaction involving the purchase of goods or services completed on the Internet. E-procurement or e-purchasing is an online transaction between a firm and its supplier. Hence, the hypotheses of this study are outlined as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The adoption of e-communication between the travel agency and its customers has a positive influence on the adoption of e-procurement.

Impact of customer pressure on e-business adoption

Over a decade ago, travel agencies simply used the Internet as a tool for communication, in addition to their traditional methods (Özturan & Roney, 2004), and the customers therefore played a more active role in the search for information. Based on this conclusion, the following is predicted.

Hypothesis 2: The greater the customer pressure, the higher the intensity of the level of e-communication adoption as a communication tool.

One of the most popular online services which has received a lot of attention in the last decade is electronic commerce (or e-commerce), which allows the electronic transfer of transactional information (Asokan, Janson, Steiner, & Waidner, 2000; Yu, Hsi, & Kuo, 2002). Hence, the hypothesis is created as follows:

Hypothesis 3a: The greater the customer pressure, the greater the intensity of the level of e-payment adoption.

Hypothesis 3b: The more e-communication the firm adopts, the greater the intensity of the level of e-payment adoption.

Impact of perceived normative pressure on e-business adoption

Normative pressure is a significant antecedent of online order-taking which constitutes one of the most visible and complex facets of e-business. Also, numerous businesses have feared being outpaced by their competitors if they do not adopt e-communication or e-payment innovation (Wu et al., 2003). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are put forth.

Hypothesis 4a: The greater the perceived normative pressure, the greater the implementation of the e-communication.

Hypothesis 4b: The greater the perceived normative pressure, the greater the implementation of the e-payment.

Electronic commerce has been of great interest for a decade because of its ability to manage large purchase orders, simplify purchase payment, expand supplier bases, reduce paperwork, and eliminate order errors (Min & Galle, 2003). On this basis, the following hypotheses are investigated.

Hypothesis 5: The greater the perceived normative pressure, the greater the implementation of the e-procurement.

Effects of e-business on travel agency-supplier relationship

The relationship quality has been discussed for two decades in terms of its significant influence on the customer's anticipation of future interaction with salespeople. According to this study, the continuity of relationship between travel agencies and suppliers built by online inbound communication (e.g. sending suppliers regular updates on new product plans or provide specific online information about product specifications that suppliers must meet) may contribute to their mutual short-term trust and the agency's long-term commitment to its supplier. Therefore, the hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 6a: The greater the intensity of their inbound communication, the greater the degree of trust between the travel agency and its supplier.

Hypothesis 6b: The greater the intensity of e-procurement, the greater the degree of trust between the travel agency and its supplier.

Hypothesis 6c: The greater the trust between the travel agency and its supplier, the greater the degree of the agency's long-term commitment to its supplier.

One way to achieve long-term relationship and loyalty that encourage customers to remain in the relationship was creating expectation for reciprocity (Liang, Chen, & Wang, 2008). Reciprocity is defined as actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others (Gouldner, 1960). The adoption of online communication had a positive effect on trust and this, in turn, posed a favorable impact on perceived reciprocity (Andreu, Aldás, Bigné, & Mattila, 2010). Hence, whether their mutual short-term trust and the agency's long-term loyalty to its supplier may be modulated by perceived reciprocity is hypothesized. Therefore, the hypotheses go as follows:

Hypothesis 7a: There is a positive relationship between trust and perceived reciprocity in travel agency-supplier relationship.

Hypothesis 7b: Perceived reciprocity between a travel agency and its supplier will have a positive impact on the agency's commitment to its supplier.

To conclude, travel agencies have to adjust their business strategies to be compatible with their travelers' behavior. This study uses quantitative methods which point out to how information technology influences business between a travel agency and its supplier. The result will show antecedent environmental factors affecting relationship between travel agencies and suppliers in terms of trust and commitment.

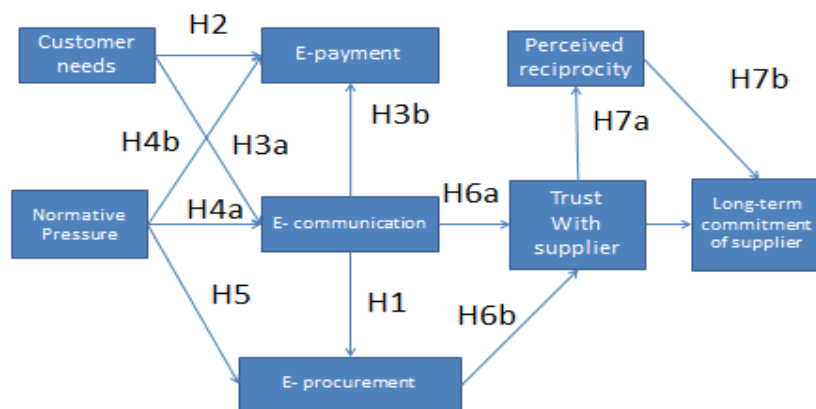


Figure 1 Conceptual Model

Research Methodology

The total number of tourism businesses registered in Thailand is 6,650. The sampling method was selected based on these two conditions: First, the population size can be accurately measured; secondly, demographic information such as names, addresses, phone numbers, websites and Facebook accounts is accessible. Therefore, stratified random sampling method was applied. The sampling target in this study was 1,359 overseas tour companies. Thailand's Tourism Authority divides the country into six areas for the tourism business: Bangkok, the northern, the central, the eastern, the western and the southern; and the northeastern region. The numbers of the overseas tour companies in each region are 848, 275, 107, 88, 27, and 14, respectively. The sample size was calculated by Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1967). The sample size in this study was 409 samples from all six areas. First, 20 companies were in the northeastern area (4.89%). Second, 23 companies were in the western and the southern areas (5.62%). Third, 30 companies were in the eastern area (7.33%). Fourth, 86 companies were in the central area (21.03%). Fifth, 62 companies were in the northern area (15.16%). Finally, 188 companies were in Bangkok (45.97%).

Measurement

Figure 1 shows possible relations between the factors. The conceptual model shows relations with antecedent factors, and the method to identify the model is Structural Equation Model. Structural Equation Model is a useful tool to calculate many regression models simultaneously and also is a convenient means to analyze data in path analyses. The factor names are showed in

Table 7 .

Table 7 Factor names and their corresponding model names

| Factor Name | Model Name |
|-------------|----------------------------|
| CP | Customer Pressure |
| NP | Normative Pressure |
| OB | E- communication: outbound |
| IN | E- communication: internal |
| IB | E- communication: inbound |
| EC | E- communication |
| EPAY | E- payment |
| EPRO | E- procurement |
| TRUS | Trust with suppliers |

| | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|
| RCP | Perceived reciprocity |
| LTR | Long-term commitment to suppliers |

Research Results

The two different e-business adoption levels.

Hypothesis 1: The adoption of e-communication between the travel agency and its customers has a positive influence on the adoption of e-procurement.

Based on H1, e-communication has a positive influence on the adoption of e-procurement with the standard estimate of 0.405, S.E. 0.100, t-value 4.044, $p < .001$.

Impact of customer pressure on e-business adoption.

Hypothesis 2: The greater the customer pressure, the greater the intensity of the level of e-communication adoption as a communication tool.

Based on H2, customer pressure has a positive influence on e-communication with the standard estimate of 0.121, S.E. 0.029, t-value 4.198, $p < .001$.

Impact of perceived normative pressures to e-business adoption

Hypothesis 3a: The greater the customer pressure, the greater the intensity of the level of e-payment adoption.

Based on H3, customer pressure has a desirable influence on e-payment with the standard estimate of 0.405, S.E. 0.060, t-value 6.718, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 3b: The more e-communication the firm adopts, the greater intensity of the level of e-payment adoption.

H3b was rejected. The standard estimate was 0.105, S.E. 0.124, t-value 0.846, $p = 0.398$.

Hypothesis 4a: The greater the perceived normative pressure, the greater the implementation of e-communication.

Based on H4a, perceived normative pressure has a positive influence on e-communication with the standard estimate of 0.148, S.E. 0.037, t-value 4.042, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 4b: The greater the perceived normative pressure, the greater the implementation of the e-payment.

Based on H4b, perceived normative pressure has a positive influence on e-payment with the standard estimate of 0.317, S.E. 0.076, t-value 4.196, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 5: The greater the perceived normative pressure, the greater the implementation of e-procurement.

Based on H5, perceived normative pressure has a favorable influence on e-procurement with the standard estimate of 0.486, S.E. 0.059, t-value 8.195, $p < .001$.

Effects of e-business on relationship between travel agencies and their suppliers.

Hypothesis 6a: The greater the intensity of e-inbound communication, the greater the degree of trust between the travel agency and its supplier.

H6a found that the intensity of e-inbound communication has a positive influence on the degree of trust between the travel agency and its supplier with the standard estimate of 0.396, S.E. 0.111, t-value 3.553, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 6b: The greater the intensity of e-procurement, the greater the degree of trust between the travel agency and its supplier.

H6b found that e-procurement has a favorable impact on the degree of trust between the travel agency and its supplier with the standard estimate 0.155, S.E. 0.059, t-value 2.636, $p = 0.008$.

Hypothesis 6c: The greater the trust between the travel agency and its supplier, the greater the degree of their long-term commitment.

H6c concluded that trust between the travel agency and its supplier has a positive effect on the degree of the agency's long-term commitment to its supplier with the standard estimate of 0.377, S.E. 0.052, t-value 7.250, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 7a: There is a positive relationship between trust and perceived reciprocity in travel agency-supplier relationship.

H7a concluded that trust between the travel agency and its supplier has a positive influence on perceived reciprocity in travel agency-supplier relationship with the standard estimate of 0.680, S.E. 0.056, t-value 12.145, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 7b: Perceived reciprocity between the travel agency and its supplier will have a positive impact on the agency's commitment to its supplier.

H7b found that perceived reciprocity between the travel agency and its supplier has a positive influence on the agency's long-term loyalty to its supplier with the standard estimate of 0.180, S.E. 0.046, t-value 3.915, $p < .001$.

Findings Path Analysis

Figure 2 and Table 8 present standard estimates after modifying the structure model by removing regression path from e-communication to e-payment. It was found that the path was not supported in Hypothesis 3b. Table 8 shows the value of relationship between significant antecedent factors. The result of the final structure model showed CMIN/DF = 1.848, NIF = 0.849, CFI = 0.924, TLI = 0.918, RMSEA = 0.046.

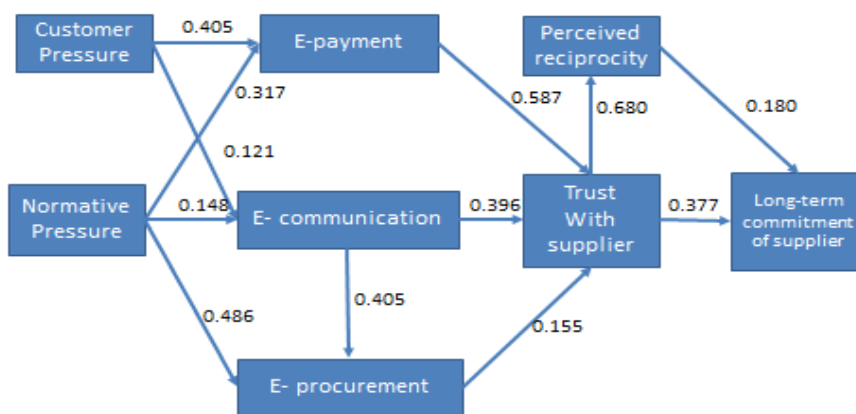


Figure 2 Antecedents and effect of e-business in travel industry

Table 8 Result of the final structure model

| Relationship | stand. Estimates | S.E. | t-value | p |
|--|------------------|-------|---------|-----|
| E-communication to E-procurement | 0.405 | 0.100 | 4.044 | *** |
| Customer pressure to E-communication | 0.121 | 0.029 | 4.198 | *** |
| Customer pressure to E-payment | 0.405 | 0.060 | 6.718 | *** |
| Normative pressure to E-communication | 0.148 | 0.037 | 4.042 | *** |
| Normative pressure to E- payment | 0.317 | 0.076 | 4.196 | *** |
| Normative pressure to E- procurement | 0.486 | 0.059 | 8.195 | *** |
| E-communication to Trust | 0.396 | 0.111 | 3.553 | *** |
| E-procurement to Trust | 0.155 | 0.059 | 2.636 | ** |
| Trust to long-term commitment to suppliers | 0.377 | 0.052 | 7.250 | *** |
| Trust to perceived reciprocity | 0.680 | 0.056 | 12.145 | *** |
| Perceived reciprocity to Long-term commitment to suppliers | 0.180 | 0.046 | 3.915 | *** |
| E-payment to Trust | 0.587 | 0.051 | 11.541 | *** |

*** P < 0.001, ** P < 0.05

Table 9 shows the total effect of environmental factors on the adoption of e-business and e-business on relational consequences.

Table 9 Total effect

| | CP | NP | EC | EPO | EPAY | TRUS | RCP | LTR |
|------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|
| EC | .121 | .148 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| EPO | .049 | .546 | .405 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| EPAY | .405 | .317 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| TRUS | .293 | .330 | .459 | .155 | .587 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| RCP | .199 | .224 | .312 | .106 | .400 | .680 | .000 | .000 |
| LTR | .146 | .165 | .229 | .078 | .293 | .499 | .180 | .000 |
| IB | .215 | .264 | 1.778 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| OB | .144 | .177 | 1.194 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| IN | .121 | .148 | 1.000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |

Discussion

Customer pressure has the greatest impact on e-payment whereas normative pressure has the greatest impact on e-procurement. Both customer and normative pressure pose impact on trust toward suppliers; however, the latter poses greater impact than the former, both of which are related to perceived reciprocity between the travel agency and its supplier. When compared to customer pressure, normative pressure yields greater effect on perceived reciprocity and the agency's long-term commitment to the supplier.

Customer pressure has favorable influence on both e-payment and e-communication. From the client's point of view, e-business created communication, coordination, sharing and searching for information (Lee, 2001; Cosma, Bota, & Tutunea, 2012), and perception of good or service quality (Xu & Koronios, 2004). Although some sections of tourism were not affected by e-business such as restaurants which depend more on offline factors, including popularity of the location, consumer-generated content, for instance, online reviews on Trip Advisor might finally yield positive effect on travel business (Ganzaroli, De Noni, & van Baalen, 2017). However, customer pressure had greater influence on e-payment than e-communication. According to Lee (2001), despite the fact that e-business had an advantage of receiving orders from clients promptly, there was a disadvantage of clients' double-checking with other service providers upon the order-fulfillment process. Therefore, companies might not be concerned with customer pressure in terms of e-communication due to this upside.

Normative pressure has positive influence on all three domains of e-business, but creates the greatest influence on e-procurement. Normative pressure was one of the four factors affecting the adoption of e-procurement rather than e-communication, relationship with suppliers and other factors (Altayyar & Beaumont-Kerridge, 2016). In Thailand, the influence was also present in Central Retail Corp, a leading department store and retail chain operator that made use of e-procurement (Thai News Service, 2008). However, the social context especially in developing countries might vary and might be poorer than that in developed countries (Choi, Park, Rho, & Zo, 2016).

Normative pressure has positive influence on e-payment; for example, in Thailand, the National E-Payment system implemented by the Ministry of Finance commenced its service on January 1, 2017 (Thai News Service, 2016). In addition, Thai travel SMEs which succeed in the adoption of e-business for business promotion (stage 1) and operation in their organization (stage 2) might be ready for adopting e-payment (stage 3) (Choochinprakarn,

2016). However, in Thailand there are a few reasons why normative pressure creates less influence when compared to e-procurement. Firstly, even though the cost of e-payment was lowered by the inexpensive cellphone-based mechanism, it was still impossible to see to what extent such transaction would benefit the real world because its high cost was related to its patent applications (Chan, 2014). Secondly, nations in Asia with natural monopolies such as China still had ambiguity concerning the scope of the e-payment regulations in the country. It favored domestic suppliers, and at the same time also reserved the right to revoke foreign suppliers' access to the Chinese market (Block, 2014). In contrast, the European countries valued benefits, perceived obstacles of e-business, possessed technological readiness, competitive pressure and trading partners (Oliveira & Martins, 2010).

Normative pressure has positive impact on e-communication. According to bandwagon theories, organizations adopt innovations in response to pressure caused by the large number of adopters, but not because of the benefit and the efficiency of the innovation. (Abrahamson & Bartner, 1990). However, some may be open to new technology for its benefit to clients such as in Romania where the majority of tourists were using the Internet for online communication and for seeking information (Cosma, Bota, & Tutunea, 2012).

As a consequence, both customer and normative pressure play an important part in e-business adoption, there are plenty of challenges for such adoption in developing countries. For example, in Arab countries the firms were commonly regarded as slow adopters and lagging far behind the developed countries (Alroushan, 2015). In Thailand, large firms in travel business utilized e-business merely 24% of overall e-commerce business. (The National Statistical Office, 2013). However, the majority of SMEs in the trade sector (68.8%) used e-business (Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion, 2012). In China, according to a survey report of the China Tourism Academy (China Tourism Academy, 2011), most tourism websites focused on providing basic information about services and travel destinations while applications for accommodation, payment, and customer relationship management (CRM) dimensions were not well deployed (Cao & Yang, 2016). In visible of many organizations have learning and implementing Social customer relationship management in these firms for develop capability of CRM (Jermstittiparsert K, Sutduean J, & Sriyakul T, 2018)

Therefore, there are suggestions for some opportunities to cope with such challenges. Firstly, firms may accept customer pressure by requesting clients' feedback. For example, in Thailand, the Tourism Economic Review (2016) remarked that the tourists' dissatisfaction with the availability of Wi-Fi and Internet services in public places needed to be resolved. Secondly, firms may accept normative pressure by benchmarking with developed countries. E-business adoption has impact on agencies' short-term trust toward suppliers. The quality of the relationship between travel agencies and suppliers usually come from a long-lasting bond created by offering assurance. Introducing technological innovations is vital in managing channel relationships (Coughlan, 2006; Osmonbekov, Bello, & Gilliland, 2009). One convenient and easy way to access communication between the firm and its suppliers is adopting e-business (Wu & Lee, 2005; Wu et al., 2003). However, sometimes e-business causes conflict instead of positive relationship owing to increasing demand tasks. Thus, the increase in conflict may provide an explanation for failure in e-business adoption and negative returns on investment in technology (Osmonbekov et al., 2009; Webb, 2002).

E-business adoption has effect on travel agencies' long-term loyalty to their suppliers either directly or indirectly via perceived reciprocity as a mediator. In a long-term relationship, e-business directly creates convenience of continuity in a relationship between a firm and its suppliers, making long-term commitment. However, national integrity (perceived social norms in the supplier's country) is still a concern even with much past experience (Koh, Fichman, & Kraut, 2012). With respect to this exception, perceived reciprocity was finally

found as a mediator between agencies' short-term trust toward suppliers and long-term commitment to suppliers. Reciprocity involves the mutual exchange of favors and is characterized by mutual reinforcement and help by the two parties (Miller & Kean, 1997).

As an outcome, there are some practical implications. On the one hand, e-business adoption can continually build short-term trust with suppliers and then directly create long-term commitment. On the other hand, long-term commitment via perceived reciprocity as a mediator can be created by, for example, different types of contact include email newsletters to keep buyers informed about updated capabilities, new products, new people, technological trends, and so on (Carr, 2006).

There are three practical implementations of this research which Thailand's travels industries including government sector must aware. Firstly, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports should support a domestic payment gateway for tourism. Since the number of revenue from up country travellers is quite amount yet a lot of transactions fee from payment gateway happened outside Thailand. Domestic payment gateway will create domestic currency flow and employment. Secondly, the Ministry of Commerce should encourage the merchant business to accept various currencies instead of Thai baht in order to be convenient to the tourist. Finally, the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Educations should consider academic courses about IT technology's skills for preparing Thai people going to ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Thailand will go on with Thailand 4.0 policy at the finally (Chinachoti P, 2018).

There are also some practical implementations of this research which private sectors must aware. The private sectors should learn technology and new business models for keeping up to date. Today, the private sectors have many options for investing in technology in the enterprise. For example, buying, installing, and running one's own, or using outsource methods in some high-investment systems. The service can be rented from other operators with different advantages and disadvantages as seen in various researches.

Limitations and Further Research

There are some limitations in this study, and there are many possibilities in the future. Firstly, this research study is conducted in only one country, Thailand; therefore, in the future, further research should be carried out in other countries, either developing or developed countries. Secondly, technology is fast-changing, and e-business has wide variety, so there will be various factors arising in the future. This research work defies e-business in only three factors including e-communications, e-procurement and e-payment; however, it is possible that a new factor may emerge in the near future, while the existing factors may have changed. Thirdly, this study uses only supply chain management perspective to determine relationship between antecedent factors and consequences of the adoption. In the past, this kind of perspective was rare because the fast-growth of technology preceded the research study. Further research can be done from many perspectives for a deeper understanding about the relationship between tourism companies and suppliers.

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