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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TOURISM NETWORK AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN THE SOUTH OF MOROCCO: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

With the arrival of internet, business rivalry has become increasingly violent. The use of information technologies has become a strategic alternative for small business companies. Adopting websites and social media is considered as the perfect step for the survival of small companies working in tourism. In addition to this, technology has an impact on the management system of the organisation, guaranteeing the improvement of productivity, performance and competitiveness of small companies. The literature review demonstrates that the appropriation of technologies based on intentions and perceptions makes companies more competent. Our paper aims to verify the level of use and appropriation of the technology by the rural tourist companies owners affiliated to the Rural Tourism Development Network (RDTR) located in the south of Morocco. We look at how the owners of these small rural tourist companies, based in this area, perceive the technology, to understand the sense of ownership of Information and Communication Technologies within these companies and to analyse the integration of the web strategy in their organisation. We have selected a mixed analysis method on a sample of 30 companies' members of RDTR, south of Morocco.

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Introduction:-

Nowadays, the tourism sector has become a major player in the global economy. This sector is undergoing a strategic revolution at all levels: from the redistribution of tourist destinations to the expectations and needs of customers, through the management mode of tourist entities. These tourist companies have become the heart of the debate of many theorists and tourism professionals. Indeed, the appearance of Internet, website and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), has created major changes in the tourism sector.

Thus, "Innovation" is the ideal solution remaining to tourist companies. Indeed, the use of website and ICT in the internal management system has become a life-saving solution for rural tourist companies (RTC) in order to raise the bar in the face of competition that goes beyond borders. Integrating, therefore, a web strategy within an RTC differs from one owner to another.

In this introduction, we would like to present the general framework of our paper, a general overview of rural tourist establishments and their need to adopt a strategy focused on the use of the website and ICT. We will then formulate

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our problematic, our starting questions, before moving on to the methodological and epistemological framework of our research.

Background

In the era of globalization, the appearance of the Internet has made competition in the world of business more difficult than ever. The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has become a strategic step for small businesses. Adopting a website and ICTs is considered the most suitable solution to survive for these small tourist entities.

Beyond survival, ICTs have an impact on the organization's structure and management system. ICTs can have an impact on the improvement of productivity, performance and competitiveness of small businesses. This impact can be shown on several areas: (1) to reduce personnel costs, (2) to develop communication within the organization, (3) to improve the marketing strategy, and (4) to facilitate the visibility of the company on the internet in order to reach a much-enlarged population.

Purpose

This paper aims to verify the level of use and appropriation of the website and ICT by the owners and managers within rural tourist establishments in the Souss Massa region, Morocco. We are looking to find out how the owners of RTC perceive the website and ICT, to understand the feeling of ownership of ICT within these RTC and to analyze the integration of web strategy in these small rural tourist accommodation establishments from the Souss Massa region, Morocco.

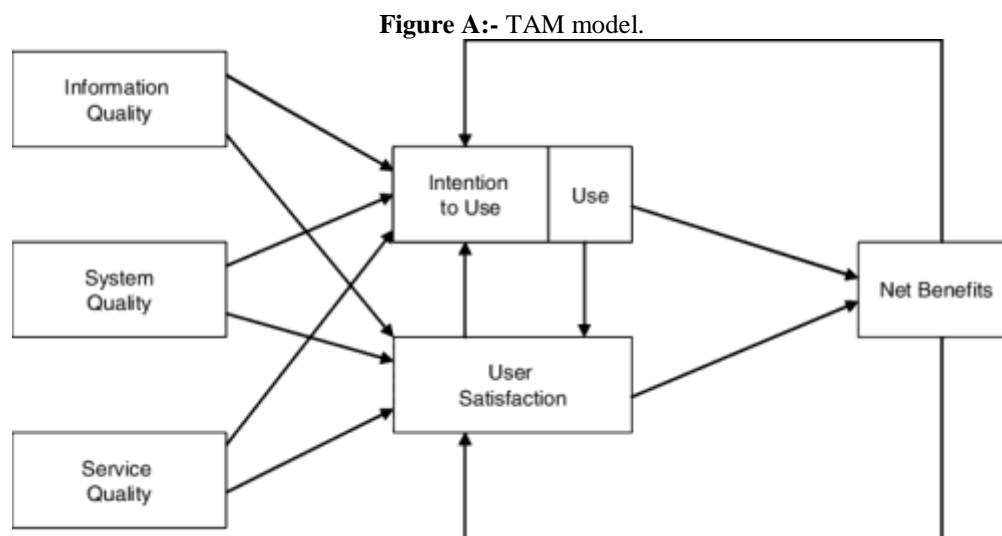
From a theoretical point of view, this research aims to contribute to enriching scientific research on the phenomenon of appropriation of website and information and communication technologies. From the methodological point of view, we present a work based on a mixed methodology: quantitative and qualitative. And finally, from the organizational point of view, we present to the owners of small rural tourist establishments a model on which they can position themselves and which can serve them in analyzing the web strategy of their establishments. This study aims to show owners that the choice of this strategy is based, not only on technical skills but also on personal characteristics.

Theory

The literature review reveals that ICTs have brought profound changes affecting individuals and organizations (Victor & al, 2007). Scientific research has shown that ICTs have positive effects on small businesses (Dyerson et al. 2016), although studies have revealed that many small businesses do not fully benefit from the benefits of ICTs, due in particular to the lack of assimilation of the importance of these technologies on the performance of these small organizations. Several researchers have been interested in studying the phenomenon of ICT appropriation in small companies. Some followed the individual approach; others adopted the organizational approach, while a third group preferred to study the environmental approach.

Nowadays, researchers are studying the phenomenon of technology appropriation based on intentions and perceptions.

According to DeLone& McLean (1992, 2002, 2003), the influence events include the receipt of the information, and the application of the information, leading to a change in recipient behaviour and a change in system performance. The DeLone& McLean success model (1992, 2002, and 2003) consists of six variables which are theoretically connected (Figure A).



DeLone & McLean (2003)

The information system output is calculated by Information Quality. “Use” is seen as the demand or consumption of IS output. “User Satisfaction” describes the reaction of the recipient to the use of the IS output. The impact of information on user/receiver behaviour is measured by Individual Impact. Organizational Impact defines the influence of information on overall organizational success.

D&M commented on the model: “This success model clearly needs further development and validation before it could serve as a basis for the selection of appropriate IS measures”. Based on this limitation, information system success research conducted meta-analyses and standardized measuring methods to validate the IS Success Model.

When studying the rural tourism performance, and in order to reflect the changing nature of rural tourism in certain rural areas, it is mandatory to study the evolution of the rural tourism development model (Lewis, 1998; MacDonald, Jolliffe, 2003). A lot of theoretical tourism development models have been published (Butler, 1980; Harris, 2000; Kotler, 1991, 1999; Stabler, 1997; McKercher, 1993). These theories aim to clarify that the evolution of tourism can be adapted to the rural tourism development.

There are so many important tourism development theories that analyse the advancement of the tourism, which is relying on the travel life cycle (Butler, 1980; Butler, Miossec, 1993). These theories explain the evolution of tourism in a cyclical form. Consequently, the changes that are happening in the tourism field are mainly due to the motivation of the tourist that keeps changing throughout the time (Streimikiene, D., Bilan, Y. 2015) not to the social and economic reasons.

Methodology:-

The use of Information and Communication Technologies has become a real requirement for companies working in the tourism sector, but there is no promise that such use can be enough. Many internet websites and social media belonging to touristic entities from the territory of Souss Massa are not up to date. This allows us to ask these following questions:

-Is there a relationship between the use of ICT and the performance of rural tourism companies operating in Souss Massa region, Morocco?

-What is the impact of these information technologies on the organisation of these tourism companies?

To answer this, we will adopt a hypothetic-deductive methodology to respond to the following hypothesis:

-The introduction of Information and Communication Technologies has a positive impact on the performance of rural tourism companies operating in the territory of Souss Massa.

-ICT contributes to the development of rural tourism in the territory of Souss Massa.

Data was collected through Internet and with the use of databases in institutions working in tourism such as: Souss Massa regional council, Souss Massa regional council of tourism, chamber of commerce of Agadir, Souss Massa regional delegation of tourism.

This has enabled us to get a large data of rural touristic entities based in the territory of Souss Massa.

The number of touristic companies we had collected from the above-mentioned institutions is 30, and they are located in the following areas:

- (1) Agadir Ida Outanane;
- (2) Inzegane Ait Melloul;
- (3) ChtoukaAit Baha;
- (4) Tiznit;
- (5) Taroudant;
- (6) Tafraout;
- (7) Tata;
- (8) Zagora.

The targeted people of these entities are: Owners and their representatives. We used questionnaire and interviews to collect data corresponding to our problematic.

We find it useful to employ both tools. Indeed, this combination is called "mixed methodology" which allows the strategic mix of quantitative and qualitative data in a coherent way to improve the results of the research.

Results And Conclusion:-

With the help of the questionnaire, we were able to generate data on 30 rural tourist companies from the SoussMassa region. The particularity of our sample is that these companies who took part in this survey are part of the Sustainable Tourism Development Network (RDTR) which works in the Souss Massa region. All the rural touristic companies are connected to internet and all are equipped with ICT except for five establishments that do not have website.

We used SPSS software to test all the variables. Following the results of our study, we can answer our initial question and confirm that the appropriation of information and communication technologies (ICT) by the owners of rural tourist companies' members of RDTR is a guarantee of success of the web strategy of these companies. We also confirm the validity of the TAM Model that we have applied in the case of the web strategy in the field of rural tourism in the region of Souss Massa.

The dimensions of appropriation, namely: The perception of ease of use, the perception of use and cognitive absorption, positively influence the performance of RTC (endogenous and managerial effects) and their organizational alignment. This explains why the owners give importance to aspects that affect the improvement of the image of the ETR, the saving of time, the acceleration of transactions, the reduction of costs, and the improvement of the quality of services. On the management side, these are profiles that rely on the work productivity of employees, the circulation of information internally, the responsiveness of employees to customer requests, the control of tasks and the reorganization and simplification of work procedures, to improve the performance of the tourist establishment.

With regard to organizational alignment, the appropriation of ICT and the website in particular, fully participate in the change of many elements in the RTC, such as: rules within the RTC, organizational management, production processes and work organization.

The results of our survey show that the owners of rural tourist establishments in the Souss Massa region are influenced by the pressures of the external environment. This corroborates the data of the literature which insists on the fact that the competitive environment of small companies encourages them to get involved in organizational change and to arm themselves with technologies in order to survive in the services market.

1) Innovation in research. Through this study, we have confirmed the validity of the TAM model in the field of rural tourism. By applying and testing these components (PEOU, PU and CA), we contribute via this work to the advancement of scientific research in terms of understanding the elements that push an owner of a tourist company to adopt and appropriate ICT and the website in particular.

The contribution of the pressures of the competitive environment to the adoption of ICT by the RTC of the Souss Massa region is another aspect that we have noted from this research work. Indeed, we will, via this work, enrich the theory in this sense since the research that has raised this point at the level of urban or rural tourism in Morocco, are rare.

There are many studies on strategies for the adoption and appropriation of ICTs and websites, but few that deal with the field of rural tourism. Our research can explain the link between the appropriation of ICT and the success of a web strategy at the level of rural tourism.

We also distinguish ourselves from the fact that our study on the appropriation of technology is developed according to a mixed qualitative-quantitative approach, since to our knowledge this kind of study was done according to a purely qualitative method. We therefore chose to do a research that largely incorporates a quantitative aspect to better confirm the measures of appropriation and the concepts. To do this, we have chosen to apply it to tourist establishments that operate in the rural of the Souss Massa region, which reduces the size of our sample but the homogeneity of the latter has helped us to deliver much more reliable and accurate results of the rural hotel industry.

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