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Strategies for E-Commerce Adoption in a Travel Agency

Anita Smith
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Anita Smith

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Strategies for E-Commerce Adoption in a Travel Agency

by

Anita Kinlaw Smith

MBA, Webster University, 2005

BBA, Campbell University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2018

Abstract

In 2016, online travel sales increased 8%, resulting in profits increasing to over 565 billion U.S. dollars. Traditional travel agencies in brick-and-mortar storefronts are facing challenges related to competing with online travel agencies (OTAs), attracting new customers, and retaining existing customers. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the e-commerce processes, business models, and strategies that leaders of traditional travel agencies use to compete with OTAs. The study sample consisted of 8 travel professionals from 3 small travel agencies located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The conceptual framework for this study was Rogers's diffusion of innovation theory. Data for the study were derived from semistructured interviews, review of travel agency documents and websites, and review of interview transcripts. Data analysis and methodological triangulation included coding, organizing, interpreting, and summarizing data to identify themes. Four themes emerged: the effect of e-commerce on travel agents' performance, competing with online travel agencies, marketing strategies to attract and retain customers, and e-commerce processes used in travel agencies. Fifty percent of travel agents' business declined, and performance decreased because customers used OTAs or e-commerce websites to purchase vacations. Travel agents specialized in niche' travel destinations to compete with OTAs. Travel agents differentiated products and services to attract and retain customers. Leaders may use the findings to develop strategies, improve business processes, and profitability, thereby, increasing revenues, creating jobs, and providing income for families.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my parents, Mr. Teddy Kinlaw (rest in peace, my dear Dad) and Mrs. Charlesetta Kinlaw (I love you dearly, Mom), for your passion and commitment to the importance of education, and for your continued love and support throughout my life and during this doctoral journey. You have taught me to strive for excellence, pray through setbacks and adversities, and never give up; reach for the stars and achieve greatness in life! Thank you for your guidance, prayers, inspiration, and encouragement, and for being positive role models for me and our family.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The Internet has changed how companies and consumers transact business. E-commerce and e-business tools are necessary for a company's success, bringing added value and cost savings to the organization (Mojoodi, Najafizadeh, & Ghasemi, 2013). The travel industry has experienced major changes because of advanced information technology (IT) and e-commerce adoption (Kumar, 2017). More than 122 million people use the Internet to plan business and leisure trips (Chang, 2013). The emergence of online travel agencies (OTAs) and the effect of Internet technology have changed the landscape for traditional retail travel agencies (Beritelli & Schegg, 2016). Electronic marketing is threatening the future stability of retail travel agencies (Bhat & Shah, 2014).

Background of the Problem

IT and e-commerce are affecting traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies because consumers have begun acting as travel agents and booking travel without the help of traditional travel consultants (Elhaj & Barakeh, 2015). The Internet has quickly turned into a new distribution channel that allows customers to transact business online with numerous travel suppliers (Hashim, Ismail, Awang, & Safri, 2014). Online travel spending in the United States has surpassed \$565 billion, and sales are predicted to grow 8% annually (Agag & El-Masry, 2017).

Ninety-one percent of consumers in the United States use the Internet daily to conduct business transactions (Poggi, Carrera, Gavaldà, Ayguadé, & Torres, 2014). The Internet has affected the travel industry since 1990, resulting in agencies developing new

business models. Business-to-business (B2B) e-commerce and business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce is changing how companies operate and presenting challenges to executives in the travel agency industry. Customers demand convenience, lower costs, and accurate information when searching for and buying travel products and services from e-commerce websites (Thakur, 2018). Many leaders who operate e-commerce businesses listen to the needs of consumers and develop strategies to improve business practices and satisfy customers (Thakur, 2018). E-business is an essential part of a company's business process and performance (Mojoodi et al., 2013).

Brea-Solis, Casadesus-Masanell, and Grifell-Tatjé (2015) noted that the advantages of incorporating e-business tools into a company's business model include the following: (a) sales and revenue growth, (b) distribution channel improvements, (c) access to globalized markets, and (d) 24-hour operations. Many retail businesses are failing to adapt to changes in technology, and to learn new ways of doing business. Some businesses have closed in less than 5 years because of lack of knowledge to promote products and services.

Other retail businesses may benefit from the findings of this study; if their leaders decide to incorporate e-commerce processes into their business models. If pursued, e-commerce can result in maximized profits and sales, increased Internet use, customer satisfaction, and future growth (Han, Kuruzovich, & Ravichandran, 2013). The success and future of e-commerce for retail travel agencies depend on how well travel managers and consultants learn, train, invest, and understand the elements of websites and software

packages. Travel personnel should be willing to adapt and change business processes and learn to use advanced computer technology (Del Chiappa, 2013).

Problem Statement

The adoption of e-commerce in large organizations has resulted in competition and disintermediation for 74,000 traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies in the United States (Lam, 2016). Eighty percent of small to medium-sized businesses use e-commerce to conduct sales transactions (Ma, Chai, & Zhang, 2018). Online travel sales reached more than \$564 billion in 2016 (Wong & Wei, 2018). Online travel sales are expected to grow 8% annually through 2020 (Wong & Wei, 2018). The general business problem is that the emergence of online travel agencies threatens the future of traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies. The specific business problem is that some traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers and owners lack strategies to adopt e-commerce processes into business models.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies that traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers and owners need to adopt in integrating e-commerce processes into business models. The research entailed in-depth semistructured interviews of travel industry professionals who represented a sample of six travel consultants and two travel agency managers. The participants were selected from a population of small travel agency businesses within the mid-Atlantic region that adopted e-commerce processes into business models. The sample size for qualitative case

studies can vary from one to 16 participants, ideally attained through interviewing qualified participants (Robinson, 2014). Study findings included strategies that leaders may use to increase employee productivity, sustain travel businesses, and expand into global markets. By applying the findings of this study, travel agency leaders can make better business decisions, increase sales volumes, gain competitive advantage over rivals, maintain performance, and re-establish business operations.

Nature of the Study

Three methods are commonly used to conduct research studies: (a) quantitative, (b) mixed, and (c) qualitative (Yin, 2017). A quantitative research method helps a researcher focus on human experiences and understand relationships among defined variables (Moustakas, 1994). The quantitative research method was not selected because the research objectives did not involve testing hypotheses (Thamhain, 2014). A mixed research method includes quantitative and qualitative information into a single study (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). The mixed research method did not meet the needs of this study because testing hypotheses and evaluating statistical variables was not necessary.

A qualitative research method helps scholars collect data through open-ended questions (Hesse-Biber, 2016). In interviews, open-ended questions help participants elaborate on answers. Qualitative researchers can collect data from observations, interviews, documentations, and focus groups (Gross, Blue-Banning, Turnbull, & Francis, 2015). I selected a qualitative case study design to interview participants and explore strategies needed to adopt e-commerce processes into agencies.

Some important research designs that are applicable to qualitative studies are: (a) grounded theory, (b) ethnography, (c) narrative, (d) phenomenology, and (e) case study (Cahyadi & Prananto, 2015). Scholars may choose a grounded theory design to analyze data and develop new theories, when existing theories do not explain the phenomena of interest (Wiesche, Jurisch, Yetton, & Krcmar, 2017). A grounded theory design was not appropriate because new e-commerce theories were not developed.

The ethnographic design includes observing, interpreting, and describing the participants' values, behaviors and patterns. The ethnographic design did not support my research because the participants' patterns or behaviors were not examined. A narrative design involves justifying, telling, or living stories in chronological order. A narrative design was not chosen because telling a story was not the goal of this study.

A phenomenology design involves detailed descriptions and meanings of participants' lived experiences (Giorgi, 2015). A phenomenology design was not suitable for this study because the participants' human views, worldviews, or experiences were not investigated. A case study research design is an empirical inquiry that investigates the experiences of people, companies, or groups within a bounded system, and examines contextual detail and rich descriptions of complex phenomena that emerges from a research study (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Researchers who use the case study design may ask participants questions that relate to *how* and *what* (Yin, 2017). I selected a case study research design for this study to interview participants in real-life settings where manipulation did not occur.

Research Question

One central research question guided the study: What strategies do traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers and owners need to adopt e-commerce processes into business models? The participants were asked the following questions:

1. How are the roles of travel agents impacted because of e-commerce technology?
2. How do you address competition from online travel agencies?
3. What strategies do you implement to attract, retain, and satisfy your customers?
4. What effect does incorporating e-commerce technology into the business model have on your business?
5. What are the benefits of e-commerce for you and your customers?
6. How can e-commerce create additional revenue for you?
7. How do you incorporate e-commerce technology into your business model?
8. What innovative ways for adopting e-commerce can help grow your business?
9. What else would you like to add regarding e-commerce?

Conceptual Framework

The diffusion of innovation theory (DIT) developed by Rogers (1995) served as the conceptual framework for this study. Rogers introduced DIT to individuals and groups, presenting a new idea of innovation and diffusion; hoping that organizations would implement and adopt technology over time. The key tenets of DIT includes asking

business leaders: (a) what, (b) why, and (c) how quickly innovative ideas and technology are operating within firms (Oliveira & Welch, 2013); explaining the potential outcome of technology adoption to leaders; and helping business owners decide whether they want to adopt an innovation (Weigel, Hazen, Cegielski, & Hall, 2014). E-commerce adoption may have a positive outlook within companies; if adopted, it may increase an organization's productivity (Stieninger, Nedbal, Wetzlinger, Wagner, & Erskine, 2014).

Computer technology is rapidly changing how managers operate businesses and manage communications, enabling a unique customer experience (Rust & Huang, 2014). Since the mid-1970s, many scholars, educators, researchers, and firms have studied the process of adopting innovations (Sahin, 2006). Rogers's theory has influenced several other diffusion and adoption theorists, such as Deffuant, Hut, and Amblard (2005); Pennington (2004); and Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, and Davis (2003). Lucas and Moll (2014) applied Rogers's DIT theory to determine firms' productivity and growth levels that may influence managers' decision to adopt electronic technologies into organizations. Perla and Tonetti (2014) used Rogers's DIT theory to analyze the adoption patterns and growth rates of firms that incorporated computer technology. Sampson (2015) examined Rogers's DIT theory to analyze the adoption rate of information technology in companies.

For this study, DIT served as a framework to help travel leaders and consultants create innovative ideas, develop strategies to compete with OTAs, and adopt technology (Benhabib, Perla, & Tonetti, 2017). DIT theory was relevant and applicable to present

new, innovative ideas to leaders, and to research and analyze growth rates of e-commerce adoption in organizations. The use of DIT theory was appropriate to explore innovation and diffusion ideas to help travel agencies increase sales and revenues, productivity, and performance. Business leaders may benefit from IT adoption; however, many leaders are hesitant about adopting IT because of limited resources (Abou-Shouk, Lim, & Megicks, 2013).

Operational Definitions

In this section, I provide the operational definitions for terms commonly used in the travel and tourism industry. The purpose of the operational definitions is to help readers understand unique terms frequently used in travel companies. The travel industry terms ensure clarity and accuracy.

Disintermediation: Disintermediation is direct interaction between travel suppliers and customers. Disintermediation prevents customers from interacting with traditional intermediaries – travel agents (Almunawar, Anshari, & Susanto, 2013).

E-commerce: E-commerce is also referred to as electronic commerce. E-commerce is a term used by consumers and businesses conducting transactions online. E-commerce involves buying and selling products using the World Wide Web or Internet (Huseynov & Yildirim, 2016).

Internet: The Internet is a global wide area network of private, public, business, government, and other entity networks linked together by wireless, electronic, and optical technology (Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier, 2015).

Online travel agencies (OTAs): OTAs provide online travel booking and reservation services to consumers 24 hours a day (Marinković, Senić, Kocić, & Šapić, 2013). OTAs allows consumers to book vacation packages, cruises, hotel accommodations, rental cars, and more using numerous travel websites.

Reintermediation: Reintermediation occurs when businesses win back customers they have lost through disintermediation, and when businesses adapt innovative processes to retain customers (Viljoen, Roberts-Lombard, & Jooste, 2015).

Traditional brick-and-mortar: A traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency provides travel products and services to corporate and leisure customers in a storefront location (Zare & Chukwunonso, 2015). A traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency operates during daily work hours between 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.

Travel supplier: Travel suppliers constitute a group of companies that establish business relationships with travel agencies. Travel suppliers work directly with travelers to offer products and services at lower costs (Chao, Chen, & Yeh, 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

When conducting a study, researchers may make assumptions that certain information is automatically true, without providing the necessary evidence to prove it (Paul & Elder, 2013). Limitations are uncontrollable weaknesses within a study that may be out of the researcher's control. Delimitations are elements of a study that the researcher has control over, known as the population and sample size (Kamati, Cassim, &

Karodia, 2014). In this section, I discuss personal assumptions, limitations, and delimitations related to this study.

Assumptions

Assumptions are generalizations that relate to a study; however, the researcher cannot control the outcome (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this study, I assumed that each participant would answer the questions honestly and accurately during the interviews, and possessed the knowledge to provide relevant information about e-commerce processes, business models, and strategies that traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers and owners use to compete with OTAs. The participants answered the questions and conveyed information about travel agency processes and strategies openly without coercion.

Limitations

Limitations are constraints that influence a study and determine its internal and external validity (Brutus, 2013). A limitation was the short timeframe of the study. The current study was limited to eight participants from three travel agencies in the mid-Atlantic region. The small group of participants limited the findings' applicability to a larger population. Travel leaders in other regions could benefit from the study findings.

Delimitations

Delimitations represent the scope and define the boundaries of a study; the researcher is in control (Yin, 2017). A delimitation in this study was the sample size of

eight participants from small brick-and-mortar travel agencies. The study was restricted to travel agents and managers from one metropolitan area. The boundaries of this study included participants from traditional travel agencies in the mid-Atlantic region. Another delimitation was the inability to collaborate with travel employees from larger geographical regions, who incorporated e-commerce processes into company business models.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The study is of significance to leaders and executives in the travel industry because the findings may help owners and managers innovate, re-engineer business operations, and develop business strategies that are needed to adopt e-commerce into business models. Based on the findings from this study, travel leaders can hire software developers to design affordable websites and e-commerce systems to attract clients and improve sales. Adopting e-commerce technology may assist travel leaders in entering new markets, increasing revenues and customers, and improving business operations (Astuti & Nasution, 2014). The data from this study may add value to leaders in the travel industry because previous researchers have not performed research on e-commerce adoption strategies in a travel agency. I shared the study findings with travel leaders and recommended strategies to improve business practices and operations, which may help the travel agencies survive and stay in business beyond five years.

Implications for Social Change

Business owners and managers of small to medium-sized travel agency companies may benefit from this study; the findings may convince leaders to changing daily operations, promoting new products, and implementing creative marketing strategies. Travel agency owners and managers may be supported in making adequate decisions to integrate e-business applications into business models. Leaders can become knowledgeable about the different technologies that could help their companies reach online markets; specifically, in relation to discovering new ways of operating brick-and-mortar travel agencies.

Owners and managers may be empowered to make practical decisions by incorporating the Internet into business models and discovering ways of attracting and retaining customers for future travel needs. Software developers may benefit from this study in terms of their ability to evaluate end users' e-commerce systems designs. Information systems managers may benefit from this study by gaining improved ability to analyze powerful strategies and technological systems for companies that could prove successful for many years. The success of adopting e-commerce in travel agencies depends mostly on the skill level and performance level of travel consultants and managers. When consultants or managers are not technologically well informed, the adoption e-commerce may be meaningless and useless to the organization. Everyone in a company should receive the proper training and have the technological skills to be productive. Positive social change may result from this study. By targeting potential

customers based on age, gender, income, education, job position, and traveler preference, sales may increase, and financial performance may improve.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The objective of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies that traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers and owners may use to adopt e-commerce processes into business models. A case study design was used. Sources for identifying peer-reviewed and scholarly journal articles for the literature review include ABI/INFORM Complete, Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete/Premier, Emerald Management Journals, Google Scholar, Pro Quest, Research Gate, Sage Premier, Walden University Library, and Wiley Online Library. Keywords and concepts related to the literature review included *retail travel agency*, *online travel agency*, *e-commerce*, *business-to-business e-commerce*, *Internet adoption*, *Internet technology*, *the role of the travel agents*, *travel suppliers*, and *disintermediation*. Two hundred and fifty-five references were cited, of which 87% were published in the previous five years, and 92% were in peer-reviewed journals.

Introduction

Ninety-one percent of U.S. consumers use the Internet to book travel online rather than going to a brick-and-mortar travel agency, because of the speed, time, convenience, and satisfaction of using IT. The Internet gives consumers the advantage of making travel purchases online, dealing directly with travel suppliers (Hashim, Ismail, Awang, & Safri, 2014). Internet travel sales totaled more than \$565 billion in 2016 (Agag & El-Masry,

2017). Internet sales are going to increase continually over time; as more companies adopt Internet application systems (Del Chiappa, 2013).

Economic growth and IT development stimulates high demand among international travel customers (Wei-Lin & Hsin-Pin, 2012). Travelers actively search various websites (e.g., Expedia, Priceline, and Travelocity) on the Internet to meet their travel needs and find deals. The travel industry has faced drastic changes regarding B2B e-commerce and B2C e-commerce, because many people are purchasing travel products and services on the Internet (Siddiqui & Khan, 2016).

Travel agencies should adopt e-commerce technology to increase competitive advantage and boost marketing activities (Menon & Yao, 2017). Information and communications technology, e-commerce, and e-business applications has a major influence on businesses worldwide. Internet application systems such as e-commerce and B2B have experienced growth since 2011.

Conceptual Framework

During the last decade, technological innovations have changed people's lives and the way that owners conduct business (Dash, Bhusan, & Samal, 2014). Travel agents use the Internet to market products and services, provide customer service and support, perform electronic transactions, and gather information. The Internet is an electronic platform whose users seek to implement technological innovations, establish new business practices, and change the competitive advantage of many industries, including the travel and tourism industry (Xiang et al., 2014).

Diffusion of innovation theory, as developed by Rogers (1995), was the conceptual framework that grounded this study. Diffusion is a process where innovation is communicated through various channels over time (Rogers, 1995). Rogers revealed that individuals perceive DIT as *new ideas*, within social systems; whereby, they can determine its rate of adoption. By applying DIT, one can move from understanding an innovation to ascertaining whether individuals and firms are interested in it, and finally deciding if someone accepts or rejects it (Schleper & Busse, 2013).

DIT may be applied to provide individuals and organizations with innovative processes to adopt IT, and to evaluate innovative technology processes in a company (Alvarez, Buera, & Lucas, 2013). DIT characterizes individuals based on the perceptions of their propensity to adopt technology. Further, DIT characterizes organizations based on the adoption stages of implementing new technology (Doyle, Garrett, & Currie, 2014). DIT may be used to explain how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread throughout diverse cultures to individuals and firms (Frattoni, Bianchi, De Massis, & Sikimic, 2013).

Rogers (1995) purported that five diffusion characteristics determine an innovation's rate of adoption: (a) relative advantage, (b) compatibility, (c) complexity, (d) trialability, and (e) observability. *Relative advantage* is an innovation that is perceived to be better than the idea it superseded (Kohles, Bligh, & Carsten, 2013). What matters is whether an individual perceives the innovation as advantageous. Mann, Smith, and Baker

(2017) asserted that schools and the Internet are directly linked to promoting relative advantage because both are involved in the dissemination and retrieval of information.

Compatibility involves the extent to which an innovation is perceived as following the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters. Any idea that is compatible with a society's norms has a greater chance of adoption by members of that society compared to an idea that is not compatible (Fallan, 2015). *Complexity* involves the extent to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use. A new idea that is simple to understand could be adopted more rapidly than an innovation that requires the adopter to develop new skills and understandings. The Internet is easy to navigate for most users, but some users who lack computer skills may find that learning to navigate it can be difficult (Lawson-Body, Willoughby, Illia, & Lee, 2014).

Trialability is directly linked to innovation adoption (Fallan, 2015). A consumer can test a product or service on a "trial" basis, evaluate it, and determine if they want to accept or reject it. When a customer decides to try an innovation and experiences dissatisfaction, the individual may not adopt or purchase the product or service.

Observability involves the extent to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. When individuals see the results of an innovation, they are more eager to adopt the product or service. Observability relates to knowing when an innovation is available and visible to end-users (Stanko, 2016).

Introduction to E-Business

E-business improves efficiency, productivity, and performance in many businesses and industries around the world (Sun & Ifeanyi, 2014). E-business enhances revenue generation for small and large firms (Franco, Santos, Ramalho, & Nunes, 2014). Many leaders are developing business models to evaluate the effect of e-business (Wynn, Martin, & Lau, 2013). E-business can reach customers globally and can promote success in business operations (McElheran, 2015). Leaders who implement e-business in their firms must reorganize and restructure continuously, and teach their employees how to implement an IT strategy (Chong, Ooi, Bao, & Lin, 2014).

Internet technology affects business processes by moving physical activities online or making physical activities more cost effective than traditional methods for suppliers and customers (Porter, 2001). E-commerce has dominated the travel industry worldwide and has allowed businesses to grow and provide for customers' needs (Akaka, Vargo, & Schau, 2015). Many consumers are leaving traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies and turning to e-commerce websites or OTAs to plan and book personal and leisure travel (Bilgihan, 2016).

In 2016, online travel sales exceeded \$565 billion because of Internet travel commerce (Agag & El-Masry, 2017). In 2016, 36.7 million U.S. customers purchased travel products and services over the Internet using electronic devices, an increase of 16.0 million since 2012 (Law, Leung, Lo, Leung, & Fong, 2015). Internet technologies and applications allow customers to acquire and purchase travel and tourism products directly

from travel suppliers (Morosan, 2014). Consumers are looking for cost savings when shopping for travel.

E-commerce and e-business are both prime components of business strategy and very important for economic development (Georgiadis & Chau, 2013). When implementing business processes and technologies into their organizations, leaders in traditional travel agencies should ensure that processes flow effectively, and that information is available to meet customers' needs (McElheran, 2015). Business owners who adopt e-commerce technology into their organizations generate more revenue than business owners who do not adopt technology (Khan, Liang, & Shahzad, 2014).

Many travel agencies, retail, and wholesale companies implement the same business structure. The stakeholders are similar: customers or travelers and technology providers; suppliers; and intermediaries (i.e., retail travel agencies and wholesalers); (Soto-Acosta, Colomo-Palacios, & Popa, 2014). The retail, wholesale, and travel and tourism companies also procure the same e-commerce business models. Wholesale travel agencies use the B2B business model and retail travel agencies use the B2C business model (Tussyadiah, 2015).

Definition of E-Business

Throughout this literature review, the terms *e-commerce* and *e-business* are used interchangeably. E-business (electronic business) involves transactions, information, and technology in all business aspects. E-business relates to companies that use information and communications technology to enhance the following processes effectively: customer

engagement, internal management, and production (Mazzarol, 2015).

E-business is conducted over the Internet and includes buying and selling transactions, collaboration with business partners, and provision of services to customers (Aithal, 2015; Levina & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2015). E-business may involve designing a website, exchanging data files, and purchasing or selling goods online using a company's website (Clemes, Gan, & Zhang, 2014). E-business enhances core business processes through the Internet and business systems (Wynn et al., 2013). E-business has transformed into a major aspect of business performance that adds value to organizations (Lee & Kim, 2014).

Three categories of e-business applications are (a) internal business systems, (b) enterprise communication, and (c) electronic commerce. Internal business systems include enterprise resource planning (ERP) and customer relationship management. ERP is a huge enterprise system that integrates and enhances the core business processes in organizations. ERP improves supply chain performance, eases the flow of information, and reduces cycle times (Almajali, Masa'deh, & Tarhini, 2016).

Enterprise communication involves email, conference calls, and voice mail. Enterprise communication systems allow team members to operate in real time using video conference applications or enterprise websites (Johnston, Yoakum, & Singh, 2013). Electronic commerce incorporates online purchasing, B2B, B2C, and supply chain management. E-commerce mobile applications allow users to purchase commercial transactions from online stores, such as Alibaba, Amazon, Bonanza, eBay, and

Google (Madden, Banerjee, Rappoport, & Suenaga, 2017).

Users can pay for purchases with credit cards, PayPal accounts, and online store cards. PayPal is an electronic alternative payment system through which users can set up a free account online by entering an email address. Users can send, transfer, or request money using a debit or credit card. Mobile devices enable customers to conduct business transactions, banking operations, and personal communications from any geographic location (Brynjolfsson & Smith, 2013).

The methodology of assessing e-business systems occur in five stages (see Appendix A). The main stages of assessing an enterprise e-business system are (a) determining the organizational and economic parameters, (b) determining modules, (c) determining investment amounts, (d) determining benefits, and (e) determining summary indicators. Senior managers and IT personnel in small to large corporations should assess the full potential of information and communications technology and should seek to adopt e-business applications into business models to reduce costs and staffing; therefore, being careful to migrate properly from traditional business processes to electronic digital processes (Lucia-Palacios, Bordonaba-Juste, Polo-Redondo, & Grünhagen, 2014). E-business systems' success depends on an organization's implementation of a powerful business strategy (Ramdani, Chevers, & Williams, 2013). Hiring the right consultants for IT adoption improves an organization's and manager's chances of successful e-business implementation (Mayeh, Ramayah, & Popa, 2014).

Consultants are valuable because they can contribute expert knowledge, while collaborating on IT projects. Company leaders should envision where they want the organization to go in the future, such as having an e-business strategy and moving towards trends in e-commerce applications (Bradford, Earp, & Grabski, 2014). Owners and managers who are interested in adopting e-business technologies into small to medium-sized enterprises should become knowledgeable and create awareness about the benefits of these technologies.

Business leaders should understand how to acquire technology and learn how to apply it in business operations (Chong et al., 2014). Owners and managers should receive adequate training on e-business technology adoption and website features and functionality. Jones, Simmons, Packham, Beynon-Davies, and Pickernell (2014) asserted that owners and managers seek immediate return on investment, increased sales, technology assistance, education, and support services before they decide to invest in information technologies.

Business-to-Business E-Commerce

In 2010, the travel and tourism industry experienced a major increase in online travel and bookings, because of advanced Internet technology and networks (Vladimirov, 2015). B2B e-commerce involves conducting transactions between companies or government entities over the Internet or World Wide Web. B2B transactions replace complex written and verbal negotiations over complementary services, prices, or products between repeat customers or trading partners or associates (Zahay, Schultz, & Kumar, 2015).

Global networks and emerging patterns of diffusion are the key factors that drive B2B e-commerce (Hanna, 2016). Leaders who operate global companies can achieve economies of scale from B2B investments. E-commerce provides growth opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises. In 2012, B2B online transactions in the United States reached more than \$5.6 trillion, representing more than 70% of Internet revenue (Janita & Miranda, 2013). Hanninen (2017) predicted that B2B e-commerce sales would increase to \$6.7 trillion by 2020.

Travel leaders use B2B as a business tool to achieve competitive advantage, increase efficiency in business transaction processes, and capture global markets (Pawłowski & Pastuszek, 2016). Business leaders collaborate with each other and sell products and services with partners who are wholesalers, distributors, retailers, and manufacturers, rather than customers. Travel agency partners may negotiate lower prices on supplies and make real time transactions over the Internet to improve productivity and efficiency (Sila, 2013).

Business-to-Business Models

B2B models became popular since the 1990s, largely because the Internet provides firms with new online platforms to conduct business. Some e-commerce corporations provide services to customers without charging fees. The B2B model is used to determine how new online businesses exchange products and services to buyers and sellers and evaluate if they can survive. Business models create value for customers, create market attractiveness, improve innovation, and provide companies with a stable

income (Bohnsack, Pinkse, & Kolk, 2014). Leaders need business models to create economic value and overcome market barriers.

Two types of business models used in electronic commerce are (a) business-to-business and (b) business-to-consumer. Business models provide structure to an organization, ensure that the company is profitable, and differentiate themselves from competitors by marketing various products and services. Business models convert ideas and technologies into outcomes and create opportunities such as cost and revenue (Fleisch, Weinberger, & Wortmann, 2014). Computer technology that connects travel businesses with retailers, distributors, and suppliers is necessary in developing a successful and profitable e-commerce business model.

The business model is a reflection of the firm's realized strategy. It is the logic of the firm, the way it creates value, and how it creates value for stakeholder (Remane, Hanelt, Tesch, & Kolbe, 2017). In e-commerce, a business model explains Internet-based businesses roles and strategies (Günzel & Holm, 2013). E-commerce business models are commonly used by organizations in some fields such as technology and information systems, strategic management, and innovation management (Abdelkafi, Makhotin, & Posselt, 2013; Schneider & Spieth, 2013).

A well-organized business model should identify a target audience, the value of the network, a value proposition, and a revenue strategy (Foss & Saebi, 2016). The business model should determine the cost structure and profit earnings for a business. The business model is a guide or a plan that shows how each company creates, delivers, and

capture value (Frankenberger, Weiblen, & Gassmann, 2013). The business model is designed to create value to customers, develop key relationships, increase revenue streams, and establish new business processes (Pedersen, Rahbek, Gwordz, & Hvass, 2016). Value proposition is the fundamental basis for successful Internet businesses, in which they offer value to consumers and business buyers (Muzellec, Ronteau, & Lambkin, 2015). Value proposition is known for its commercialization practices that are employed to make suggestions about the provider's capabilities and enable customers to create value (Carvalho & Jonker, 2015).

The B2B model is a business process that takes place between two companies and helps leaders develop new services, perform operations better, and collaborate with business partners (Pine, 2015). The B2B model is an important business strategy that is commonly used by many firms. E-procurement websites function as B2B business models because purchasing agents buy directly from suppliers and accept bids or offers to purchase at a specified amount or price (Gangele, Pathak, & Verma, 2017).

Business-to-Consumer E-Commerce

B2C e-commerce improves productivity by attracting global buyers and selling directly to individual consumers (Sohaib & Kang, 2014). B2C transactions are conducted between retail firms and consumers and do not require a large investment from consumers (McElheran, 2015). The United States Census Bureau reported in 2014 that B2C transactions were \$1.5 trillion; they are anticipating that sales would grow to \$2.4 trillion in 2018.

B2C e-commerce is well positioned to reach customers and to leverage customer co-creation to develop new products (Pee, 2016). Business leaders are maintaining a competitive advantage, benefiting from customer co-creation by leveraging presence online, and adopting IT applications into organizations (Liao, 2016). Internet technology has caused major changes in the travel industry, regarding B2C e-commerce (Bilgihan, Okumus, Nusair, & Bujisic, 2014). B2C e-commerce websites should attract customers worldwide. The websites should include cultural factors, known as localization, to attract local customers (Sohaib & Kang, 2014).

The characteristics of website designs may influence customers' loyalty and trust when purchasing products or services (Nejad, Amini, & Babakus, 2015). Developing effective B2C websites to attract customers require easy navigation, appeal to diverse cultures, access to good content information, and professionally designed with visual graphics (Cyr, 2013). Culture is an important variable that should be considered when designing information systems for usability (Guo, Ling, Dong, & Liang, 2013).

B2C e-commerce is rapidly growing and providing opportunities for traditional travel agency firms (Wang, Malthouse, & Krishnamurthi, 2015). Expedia, Priceline, and Travelocity serve as business-to-consumer OTAs. Travel agencies may focus on 12 critical success factors of B2C e-commerce to achieve efficient operations in the competitive travel and tourism industry. The 12 critical success factors are: (a) product content and variety; (b) privacy policy, (c) purchase procedure, (d) pricing, (e) promotion plan, (f) payment model, (g) product mix, (h) product search and order tracking, (i)

assurance, (j) identity verification, (k) return and refund policy, and (l) real-time transaction.

Critical success factors are described as “the limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, ensures successful competitive performance for the organization” (Rockart, 1979, p. 85). The primary components of critical success factors must be implemented in a company to thrive (Tsironis, Gotzamani, & Mastos, 2017). Travel managers must understand the importance of critical success factors to have optimal resource allocation, reduce operating costs, improve customer satisfaction, adopt technological innovations (Freeman & Thomlinson, 2014), address the issues of corporate renewal (Jones, Singh, & Hsiung, 2015), and attract more potential customers (Ferreira & Fernandes, 2015).

The critical success path for B2C e-commerce management includes technical context, product context, and service context. Many researchers conducted studies on B2C e-commerce IT adoption in the travel and tourism industry. However, researchers of the earlier studies did not provide managers with strategies to improve customer service and increase revenues (Hwang, Zhao, & Gay, 2013; Liu & Wilkinson, 2013; Raisbeck & Tang, 2013).

Developing and applying B2C e-commerce systems in a travel company may help travel managers and consultants to distribute products and services online (Engelbrecht, Kruger, & Saayman, 2014). Adopting B2C e-commerce systems may give customers the convenience to purchase travel from websites (Engelbrecht et al., 2014). To attract

potential customers, travel managers should focus on customer benefits, rich product content, easier purchase procedure, better privacy policy, and competitive product pricing (Jones et al., 2015).

Traditional and electronic businesses in the retail trade market use the B2C model to increase sales. Business leaders who use B2C models work hard to meet customers' needs, present products and services to consumers, coordinate meetings with potential clients, and enable customers to purchase goods and services (Nica, 2015). The B2C model helps organizations increase selling to consumers, broaden target markets, enhance the quality of goods and services, and manage customer relationships (Mangiaracina, Marchet, Perotti, & Tumino, 2015). Many leaders use the B2C model to improve their business processes.

The B2C model benefits consumers and helps company executives manage business operations and increase sales and revenues (Nica, 2015). Some advantages of B2C models are (a) instant communication, (b) adaptability of goods and services when needed, (c) worldwide accessibility, and (d) personalized products and services (Bahaddad, Houghton, & Drew, 2013). Some disadvantages of B2C models are (a) system integration difficulties, (b) technologies and business requirements gap, (c) management transformation and (d) business process reorganization (Bahaddad et al., 2013).

Travel managers and executives often look for effective ways to manage B2C e-commerce applications properly to obtain a competitive advantage in the travel industry

(Muzellec et al., 2015). Travel agency leaders can execute B2C e-commerce services to survive in the travel and tourism industry. Some managers are still struggling to maintain e-commerce websites proficiently and measure financial performance adequately. E-commerce websites should market a company's products and services, and maximize profits (Ilbahar & Cebi, 2017). Travel leaders may not realize the benefits of adopting e-commerce into organizations (Ghandour, 2015).

Advantages of E-Commerce

E-commerce has changed the way that companies conduct business and has changed the state of the economy (Jahanshahi, Zhang, & Brem, 2013). Travel agencies may facilitate e-commerce applications to process different tasks simultaneously, such as online sales, deliveries, and payments. Traditional brick-and-mortar stores are finding it difficult to compete with online marketers. Some advantages of e-commerce include cost reduction, brand recognition, globalization, competitive advantage, supply chain improvement, and profitability (Perrigot & Pénard, 2013). Some advantages of incorporating e-business tools into a company's business model are: (a) sales and revenue growth, (b) distribution channel improvements, (c) access to globalized markets, and (d) 24-hour operations (Savrul, Incekara, & Sener, 2014).

Some benefits of incorporating e-commerce into travel agencies are (a) sales, revenue, and profits growth; (b) improved customer satisfaction; and (c) effective partnerships with travel suppliers (see Appendix B). E-commerce provides customers and retailers many advantages (Wen, 2012) such as (a) wider selection of products and brands

available, (b) product and service information, and (c) access to websites 24/7. For retailers, e-commerce provides (a) an opportunity to sell products and reach global customers instantly over the World Wide Web, (b) cost savings of doing business online (savings on rental space, labor, and storage), and (c) time saving and increased profitability.

Travel leaders may achieve competitive advantage over online competitors by using McCarthy's four marketing mix model: product, price, promotion, and place (see Appendix C). Leaders in the travel industry can identify target markets for products or services and develop a marketing mix to enhance sales (McCarthy, 1960). When using McCarthy's four marketing mix model, leaders can ensure profitability and sustainability, and may compete effectively and proficiently (Azadi & Rahimzadeh, 2012).

Product Strategy

In traditional markets, customers rely on product suppliers and retailers to help them inspect products and services and compare prices, which could result in higher prices and increased shopping time. In virtual or Internet markets, consumers can search products and services, compare prices anytime, and find close substitutes, which results in cost savings, convenience, and added value (Bag & Biswas, 2013). Company leaders cannot achieve competitive advantage simply by lowering costs. Business owners and managers can differentiate products and services from industry competitors and focus on product bundling, which prevents customers from comparing individual products or services (Nuseir & Madanat, 2015).

Price Strategy

When logged on the Internet, customers can search millions of products or services and compare prices among many suppliers. For these reasons, businesses are forced to lower prices and compete with other companies. The Internet has a major influence on businesses; causing increased competition among rivals. Lower prices and product offerings promote intensive price competition among sellers (Peter & Donnelly, 2015). Business leaders can implement pricing strategies to sell products over the Internet.

Promotion Strategy

Many executives spend several thousand dollars on advertising their e-commerce businesses to customers. Advertising using trade allowances, discounts, and other mass marketing ideas are no longer successful, because customers can search the Internet to learn about products and prices. When customers become comfortable using the Internet, they can buy products and services that meet individual or family needs (Amaro & Duarte, 2013). To become successful at e marketing, businesses can develop innovative promotional products that differ from those of competitors (Ekanem & Abiade, 2018).

Place Strategy

E-commerce businesses commonly refer to supply chain or value chain as place strategy. Place is the distribution and delivery of products and services. Business leaders can differentiate products and services over competitors by delivering products to customers much faster and efficiently (Thomas, Gómez, James, & Mansfield, 2014).

Many firms contract with UPS, DHL, and Fed-Ex carriers because they provide fast and efficient delivery service to customers and have economies of scale in distribution. To achieve competitive advantage, leaders may create positive value that exceeds and outperforms competitors and delivers outstanding value to customers (Quintal, Thomas, & Phau, 2015). Business owners and managers need resources, tools and methods, and strategies to achieve objectives, assess the conditions of competitors, and determine the threats and barriers of new entrants in the market.

The Role of Travel Agencies

The role of travel agents who work in traditional brick-and-mortar storefront agencies are diminishing, due to the emergence of the Internet and new innovative computer technology. Travel agents are facing challenges re-inventing roles and increasing sales and revenues because of online travel agencies and travel intermediaries that have emerged in the global marketplace (Zare & Chukwunonso, 2015). E-commerce gives consumers the option and freedom of searching for trips online, comparing prices for popular destinations, and booking leisure and business travel online, without using the services of traditional travel agents in brick-and-mortar retail storefronts (Bandara & Silva, 2016).

The travel agents' roles are described as booking tickets and searching for affordable prices on behalf of clients, providing clients with accurate product and destination information, solving problems for clients, keeping abreast of current promotions and amenities, helping clients with financial transactions, and making

recommendations for alternative trips in the event of hurricanes and emergencies (Anuar, Fahmey, Nasir, & Ahmad, 2017). Travel agents are responsible for serving as intermediaries between customers and travel suppliers (i.e., airlines, hotels, and cruises) and finding luxurious vacations at economical prices for customers. Negotiation, communication, and mediation skills are key elements in the role of travel agents. Travel consultants and managers must build, develop, and maintain good relationships with new and existing customers to maintain a competitive advantage over OTA rivals (Chao et al., 2015). Business leaders are realizing that providing great customer service and lowering costs can result in retaining loyal customers, instead of recruiting new customers.

Travel agents could sustain business if they can adapt to the new business environment and create strong relationships with customers and providers (Kaewkitipong, 2010). Travel agencies can face costly mistakes if they make inaccurate forecasts of changing market demands, or if they improperly manage revenue and expenditures. Developing an accurate forecasting-revenue business model is important for travel agencies (Lim, Chung, & Weaver, 2012). Travel agencies may consider incorporating modern technology into business models in order to survive.

The future role of travel agencies is constantly discussed because of the emergence of the Internet and new entrants into the global electronic marketplace, and travelers purchasing leisure and personal travel online through suppliers, eliminating the need to conduct business with travel intermediaries in the distribution chain (Thakran & Verma, 2013). The travel industry has a plethora of information that is beneficial to

travelers. When booking a trip, travel agents should ensure that they provide new and existing customers with detailed information to meet travelers' needs and help them make the best purchasing decision (Fountoulaki, Leue, & Jung, 2015).

The emergence of Web 2.0 and the popularity of social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Linked In, and You Tube are leading potential travelers to online domains. Web 2.0 and social media are emerging as the best online platforms for making travel decisions and improving travel information accessibility (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013). The Internet and web capabilities give customers the freedom and convenience to search travel agency websites at home, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, organize travel packages, and pay for vacations online through secured travel websites. E-commerce is dictating the future of the travel industry.

Types of Travel Agencies

Two types of travel agencies exist: (a) traditional and (b) online. A traditional travel agency is a company that advises people when they are travelling to international countries or throughout the United States. The online travel channel includes the travel distribution supply chain, pricing and search engines, global distribution systems, supplier portals, and reservation offices (see Appendix D). The travel suppliers in the online channel use e-commerce to transact business directly with consumers. Travel agencies give customers information about hotels, cruises, vacations, rental cars, vacation protection plans, weather conditions, currency exchange rates, and other travel related information. After receiving valuable travel information, customers book personal

vacations with travel agents in brick-and-mortar storefronts.

Online travel agencies sell vacations to customers over the Internet. An example of these web agencies are Expedia, Hotwire, Priceline, and Travelocity. The websites give customers the option of creating or customizing vacations, cruises, adventures, and hotel packages. Consumers like the flexibility and convenience of online shopping and booking travel online, without using a traditional travel agent. Consumers who are aware of e-commerce can readily access websites with ease and compare prices on multiple platforms, without leaving home or visiting physical stores. Travelers search e-commerce websites for value, price match, and convenience (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou, 2013). Customers can enjoy the freedom of shopping for travel products and services online, from any global location. Managers and consultants can easily process payments over the telephone with the use of clients' debit or credit cards, electronic bank transfers, and checking or savings account information. E-commerce has made business owners, managers, customers, and consultants' lives easier and more productive. Both traditional travel agencies and online travel agencies perform some of the same services:

- Accept commissions to sell domestic and overseas tickets for airlines, hotels, cruises, rental cars, tours, and handle unaccompanied baggage on behalf of travelers. Accept commissions to take charge of formalities for leaving and entering a country and visa procedures on behalf of travelers.
- Solicit or receive domestic and overseas tourists, and arrange tours, meals, lodging, and transportation.

- Arrange domestic and overseas sightseeing tours, meals and lodging, and provide all other necessary services on behalf of package tours and self-organized tour groups.

The travel and tourism industry were affected by the Global Financial Crisis and global events that occurred in the United States (i.e., 9/11 terrorist attacks, widespread epidemics, and natural disasters) that caused profits to decrease. Travel agencies sales and revenue forecast and changing market demands depend on the state of the economy. Travel agencies cannot survive in a highly competitive market if they do not accurately predict the needs of changing market demands, resulting in financial risks (Huang, 2013).

Small to medium enterprises in the travel and tourism industry are mainly characterized by the different information systems they use to operate businesses. Small to medium enterprises survival in the travel and tourism industry depends on creativity and advanced technology (Baggio & Del Chiappa, 2014). Business leaders should consider adopting e-commerce in organizations to increase profits and survive beyond five years in the industry.

Traditional Travel Agencies

The fast growth of reputable Internet travel agencies is detrimental to the survival of brick-and-mortar retail agencies and has placed the role of traditional travel agents in jeopardy (Del Chiappa, 2013). Traditional travel agents are major performers in the tourism distribution system and they account for more than 25% of travel activity in the distribution system (McKercher, Mak, & Wong, 2014). Traditional brick-and-mortar

travel agencies are losing market share because many travelers are purchasing vacation and business packages from online travel agencies.

Traditional travel agencies can market products and services favorably and provide exceptional quality service if they want to survive (Aydin & Yildirim, 2012). Diversification of travel products and services such as tours, airline & hotel reservations, and religious packages are primary indicators of profitability for retail travel agents (Almunawar & Anshari, 2014). Traditional travel agencies may consider adopting mobile technology and offering mobile services to customers while they are traveling for business and leisure trips (Schmidt-Rauch & Schwabe, 2014).

Online Travel Agencies

The online travel market has experienced tremendous growth since 1997. During the period of 1997 to 2013, e-commerce sales grew 40% and reached \$91 billion (Sharma, Kulshreshtha, & Paygude, 2015). Since that time, online travel sales have surpassed \$830 billion (Sharma et al., 2015). Airline tickets account for 86% of online sales and hotel reservations account for 14% of online sales (Kerstetter, Lee, Lee, & Moon, 2015).

Since the early 1990s, e-commerce has rapidly grown in the U.S. travel and tourism industry (Miao, 2014; Zhao, 2013). The growth of e-commerce in the U.S. travel industry is related to the change from walking into traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies and being helped by travel agents, which has resulted in the change of customers using travel websites or OTAs to book travel products or services (Miao, 2014;

Zhao, 2013). When consumers purchase travel products or services from OTAs, they expect to receive value, loyalty, and quality service (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou, 2013).

Consumers should be informed that OTAs are not responsible for handling monetary transactions, solving dis-satisfied customers problems, or ensuring that travelers' vacation experiences are memorable. OTAs work for companies that are focused on selling travel products and services and receiving commissions from various travel suppliers. Traveling is a major part of a customer's way of life; clearly, e-commerce has empowered consumers to purchase online with confidence. OTAs should focus on providing exceptional service and giving consumers a positive online customer experience (Couture, Arcand, Sénécal, & Ouellet, 2015).

Home-Based Travel Agencies

Home-based travel agencies (HBTAs) became a new entity of the travel industry in the 1970s. Home-based travel agents are individuals who operate and sell travel products or services out of home offices (Bowden, 2007). HBTAs were called outside sales agents and were linked to a travel company or a host agency that provided each agent with marketing resources, technology access, training and education, supplier contracts, and accreditation courses. Home-based travel agents receive travel benefits, discounts, and commissions for travel sales, depending upon the vacations, cruises, and other travel products that they book for clients (Bowden, 2007).

From 1999 to 2008, 75,000 travel agents their lost jobs in the United States (Kim, Bojanic, & Warnick, 2009). Many people became home-based travel agents. Travel suppliers supported them and recognized that HBTAs were valuable members in the distribution channel. HBTAs were devoted to building businesses, developing client relationships, and managing administrative duties (Bowden, 2007).

Some home-based travel agents operate businesses in the same way that traditional brick-and-mortar agencies does. For example, HBTAs have independent businesses; hire and train employees; sell hotel, vacation, business, and tour packages; provide customers with in-depth knowledge about destinations and excursions; and solve complex problems for customers. Home-based travel agents specialize in niche markets, such as cruises, tours, honeymoons, or group travel to receive higher commissions. HBTAs are aligned to a host agency or larger travel agency (Bowden, 2007).

Five types of home-based travel agents operate businesses in the United States (see Table 1). The types of HBTAs are (a) independent, (b) niche' market, (c) referral, (d) non-HBTA, and (e) hybrid. Travel agents who operate their businesses from home are placed in categories based on relationships that they have with specific host agencies (i.e., Cruise Planners, Nexion, Travel Quest, and Uniglobe). Two types of home-based travel agents are independent agents and affiliated agents. An independent agent has experience in the travel industry and has a proven sales volume. An affiliated agent works part-time and has no prior experience in the travel industry.

Table 1

U. S. Home-Based Travel Agency Business Models

Type of HBTA	Description
Independent	Operates independently from a home office in conjunction with a host agency.
Niche' market	Specializes in particular types of travel, based on clients' interest. Deals directly with suppliers, not the host agency.
Referral	Refers business to a host agency. Does not make travel arrangements for customers.
Non-HBTA	Operates in conjunction with a host agency, but from commercial premises.
Hybrid	Operates as a non-HBTA, but with a team of agents working for them.

Travel Agency Disintermediation

The intermediation, disintermediation, and remediation cycles focus on changes that occurs in the travel and tourism industries; however, intermediation, disintermediation, and remediation is impacted by electronic commerce technology adoption (Schmidt-Rauch & Schwabe, 2014). Disintermediation occurs when the middleman (mediator) has been eliminated from the supplier, intermediary, and consumer network (Kaewkitipong, 2010). The evolution from intermediation to disintermediation begins with the customer and ends with the supplier (see Appendix E).

Almunawar, Anshari, and Susanto (2013); Del Chiappa (2013); and Schmidt-Rauch and Schwabe (2014) investigated large-scale disintermediation in the travel and tourism industry. The researchers found that disintermediation could be minimized if travel agencies focus on specializing in niche markets, complement travel consultant roles by adopting e-commerce technology, improve online marketing, and implement new travel distribution strategies. Kracht and Wang (2010) conducted studies that focused on the growing complexity of the distribution process, while Thakran and Verma (2013) studied the emergence of new online distribution channels. Kracht and Wang (2010) discovered that the advancement of the Internet has caused an increase in travel intermediaries, which results have shown that the tourism industry has turned into a complex global environment. Thakran and Verma (2013) indicated that the advancements in the digital era has provided new ways of marketing to clients; the advancements resulted in a complex task for travel agencies. Some scholars have predicted that travel intermediaries are disappearing, and that new travel intermediaries and distribution channels will replace them (Viljoen, Roberts-Lombard, & Jooste, 2015).

The future stability of traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies is threatened by travel intermediaries such as (i.e., airlines selling tickets directly to customers through company websites, and new travel intermediaries becoming popular in the industry); (Standing, Tang-Taye, & Boyer, 2014). The growing number of transactions conducted electronically, between the travel industry and travel customers, has caused problems for traditional intermediaries (travel agents) in the industry (Almunawar et al., 2013). Thirty-

eight million consumers in the U.S. booked travel-related products and services electronically in 2017; statistics revealed the number of travelers may increase to 2.8 billion in 2020 (Law, Chan, & Wang, 2018).

Advanced technology, specifically the Internet, has caused disintermediation in many traditional travel agencies; disintermediation has caused turbulent economic conditions in the travel and tourism industry (Viljoen, Roberts-Lombard, & Jooste, 2015). Internet applications are changing how products and services are distributed to customers (Berne, Garcia-Gonzalez, & Mugica, 2012). Travel disintermediation results from suppliers being eager to distribute products or services via emerging online technologies, such as social media and mobile technologies (Thakran & Verma, 2013). Travel agency owners and managers may retain customers and sustain businesses through reintermediation (Viljoen, Roberts-Lombard, & Jooste, 2015).

Reintermediation occurs when businesses win back customers they lost through disintermediation, and when businesses adapt innovative processes to retain customers (Viljoen, Roberts-Lombard, & Jooste, 2015). Reintermediation is viewed as former disintermediated travel agents who offer value to suppliers and customers who re-enter the distribution process (Thakran & Verma, 2013). Travel agents in brick-and-mortar storefronts can succeed if they attempt to reacquire customers from online travel agencies and find new ways of conducting business and retaining customers through reintermediation. Traditional travel agents use eight reintermediation factors (a) product knowledge, (b) personal interaction, (c) differentiated product, (d) low service fees, (e)

high quality service, (f) coexistence with technology, (g) corporate segment, and (h) leisure segment (see Appendix F) to retain customers and add value to businesses (Viljoen, Roberts-Lombard, & Jooste, 2015).

The future of traditional travel intermediaries remains unstable because consumers educate themselves by researching and purchasing travel products directly through travel suppliers and bypassing travel consultants (Morosan, 2014). Some scholars are uncertain about the future of travel intermediaries and recognize that online technologies are causing disintermediation in the travel industry (Ku, Yang, & Huang, 2013). The future of e-commerce tourism will focus on adopting new technologies, adapting to businesses and intermediaries, and developing new trends to target consumer market demands (Mihajlović, 2014). Travel agencies can implement new technologies into new business processes to stay competitive and regain lost customers (Mihajlović, 2014).

Travel Suppliers

Many travel suppliers establish businesses online using websites and voice phones to reach customers and advertise products and services (Leung & Joseph, 2014). Three main components in the travel industry's supply chain are: (a) suppliers (e.g., airlines, hotels, rental cars, and tour providers); (b) travelers and customers; and (c) intermediaries, travel agents, inbound and outbound operators (Almunawar, Anshari, & Susanto, 2013). Travel suppliers can reduce costs and increase quality products by using technologies.

Travel suppliers offer consumers inventory of hotel rooms, rental cars, and airline seats using online portals. Airlines and railway suppliers indicate that they sell products and services without intermediaries. Travel suppliers transact business directly with customers using the global distribution system. Some consumers do not visit travel agencies regularly to purchase leisure vacations. Most consumers search the Internet and purchase from OTAs; therefore, causing disintermediation in brick-and-mortar agencies. The global distribution system supports global transactions and bookings, and provides information on availability, prices, distribution, tickets, and invoices (Leung & Joseph, 2014).

Destination management companies (DMCs) are another type of travel supplier that offers new products and provides consumers with professional knowledge of various travel destinations. DMCs create and organize programs for business and leisure clients, and they specialize in tours, activities, events, and transportation (Spasić, Pavlović, & Stanić, 2015). Clients who use DMCs may take advantage of incentives, such as (a) one contact and payment for several services from different providers; (b) knowledge, experience and on-going relationships with venues; (c) creative ideas for planning different events; and (d) value-added services for program design, logistics, and supplier management and accounting (Spasić, Pavlović, & Stanić, 2015).

E-Commerce Adoption

Traditional brick-and-mortar retail companies, threatened by online e-commerce retailers, are establishing themselves in online markets (Siddiqui & Khan, 2016). In 2017,

consumers in the U.S. spent more than \$760 billion in online travel purchases. Statistics revealed that 80% of customers who use the Internet and purchase products online are less than 30 years old (Siddiqui & Khan, 2016).

Abou-Shouk, Lim, and Megicks (2013) and Roma, Zambuto, and Perrone (2014) reported that travel agencies must find another approach to reach customers and increase profits. The researchers determined that adopting e-commerce could provide travel agencies with the knowledge and flexibility to survive in the industry. E-commerce adoption can be initiated from the slow adoption stage and progress to the final stage by using advance technology to perform electronic processing (Abou-Shouk, Lim, & Megicks, 2013). E-commerce adoption consists of various stages and different levels. The adoption process includes three stages: (a) adoption, (b) implementation, and (c) post-implementation. Studies have shown that productivity growth increases five times higher for organizations that decide to adopt e-commerce processes into business models than companies who decide not to adopt e-commerce (Abebe, 2014; Khan et al., 2014). E-commerce adoption processes could lead to improved business performance, increased sales growth, and enhanced management decision-making skills (Khan et al., 2014).

Some of the benefits of e-commerce adoption are (a) low transaction costs, (b) higher sales performance, (c) efficiency gains, (d) convenience for customers, and (e) increased employee productivity. Some added benefits of e-commerce adoption are competitive advantages, sales and revenue increase, customer satisfaction, and global market expansion (Inversini & Masiero, 2014). E-commerce adoption is affected by

internal and external factors (see Figure 1) such as: (a) competition, (b) pressure from buyers and suppliers, (c) innovativeness, (d) technology support, (e) relative advantage, and (f) compatibility (Savrul et al., 2014).

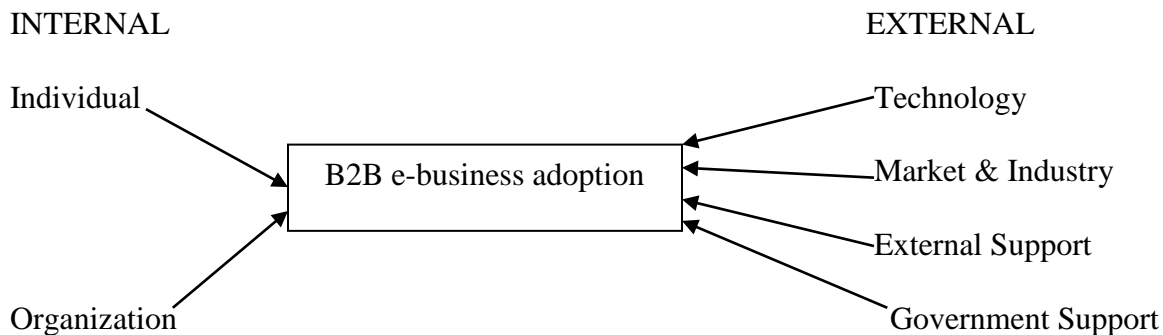


Figure 1 - Factors affecting B2B e-business adoption for small and medium enterprises.

Many travel agencies in the U.S. are not adopting e-commerce processes into their organizations. Some travel agencies lack the knowledge and capability of branding, differentiating, and selling products and services in e-commerce markets; as a result, revenues are decreasing, and customers are declining over time, because they only sell and market products in traditional brick-and-mortar storefront buildings. E-commerce strategies reveal companies' management of assets to achieve and sustain competitive advantage in online e-markets (Torres, Lisboa, & Yasin, 2014).

Some small business leaders are considering whether they should adopt e-commerce because it is cost effective, has a positive impact on business operations, and it could increase competition in global markets. Small business leaders can overcome obstacles such as limited financial and technological resources, and limited global

exposure when adopting e-commerce technology (Carlucci, De Gennaro, Roselli, & Seccia, 2014). E-commerce adoption has a positive effect on customers and businesses because they can conduct financial transactions online without having to walk into physical locations. Adopting e-commerce has made businesses and consumers lives easier and productive.

Transition

Section 1 includes the background of the study, the nature of the study, and the literature review. I used the literature review and Rogers's (1995) diffusion of innovation theory to position my research as a current business problem. In Section 2, I review the role of the researcher, the methodology and design, and explain the data collection process. In Section 3, I discuss the implications for social change, present and summarize the findings, and make recommendations for future research.

Section 2: The Project

The objective of this section is to describe the research design and methodology used in this study. Section 2 addresses the collection, validation, and analysis of data using statistical software. Section 2 also entails addressing selection of participants for in-depth interviews, ethical requirements for participants, and strategies to protect the participants' information. Further, I describe reliability and validity, discuss my role as a researcher, and summarize key concepts.

Purpose Statement

The intent of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies that traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers and owners can use to integrate e-commerce processes into business models. New emerging technology has threatened the role of retail travel agents. The target population for this study consisted of eight travel managers and consultants located in the mid-Atlantic region who had incorporated e-commerce processes into business models. Semistructured interviews were conducted at a private location, away from the business facility. Data triangulation was achieved by using participants' interview transcripts and peer-reviewed journal articles.

This study may contribute to positive social change by providing travel agency executives with knowledge about e-commerce technology, educating leaders about the advantages of e-commerce adoption, and informing leaders about the positive impact of e-commerce. Using information from this study can help travel leaders decide if adopting new technologies and learning new strategies could sustain businesses beyond 5 years.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers who perform qualitative case studies have many responsibilities. My role as the researcher in this study involved (a) collecting data, (b) defining methods of data collection, (c) analyzing data, and (d) presenting data results objectively and ethically. The criteria for assessing the quality of case study research include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). I served as the primary data collection instrument and developed a list of questions to conduct semistructured, open-ended interviews with the participants.

I selected participants, organized meetings, conducted interviews, collected data using a protocol, analyzed and validated the data, summarized the findings, and gave recommendations. I did not have a relationship with the study topic or participants. The research topic, “Strategies for E-Commerce Adoption in a Travel Agency,” was chosen because a knowledge gap exists in the travel industry concerning e-commerce adoption, which needs to be filled, if traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies want to survive in the future.

I enrolled in a 2-year travel and tourism course to become familiar with the roles and responsibilities of a travel agent. After completing the course, I received a certificate of completion and was designated a Certified Travel Consultant. Obtaining the travel certificate helped me learn various products, services, and business operations of travel agencies. I understood diverse client needs, navigated IT systems, sold travel products

and services to clients who were traveling to worldwide destinations, and helped agents build a creative marketing brand.

I gained valuable experience and worked with travel consultants, managers, suppliers, and intermediaries in the travel and tourism industry for 2 years. Interacting with travel personnel helps researchers establish rapport with participants, understand the perceptions of key travel stakeholders, meet business information needs, and support travel leaders with best practices and decision-making processes (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Training gives researchers an opportunity to observe and evaluate the participants' behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions about adopting e-commerce processes into travel agencies (Noblet, Thøgersen, & Teisl, 2014).

Adams and Miles (2013) suggested that researchers should adhere to three moral and ethical principles of the Belmont Report - (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice - to protect the privacy and human rights of participants when conducting interviews. Before the interview sessions began, I obtained informed consent from the participants, briefed them on the benefits of the study, and clarified any possible risks that might occur in the study. The travel managers received an executive summary of the findings after the participants' responses were coded and interpreted.

The bracketing technique was used to minimize possible researcher bias. Bracketing involves temporary suspension of any conceptions of the phenomenon under study. Researchers use the bracketing technique to reduce and minimize bias, by avoiding the sharing of beliefs, feelings, opinions, or knowledge about an investigation (Martirano,

2016). Researchers hope to find the essence of data being analyzed when using the bracketing technique (Crowell, 2002).

Before conducting the study, an interview protocol was developed by preparing a script, using a consent form, writing the interview questions, and having an interview checklist. Castillo-Montoya (2016) stated that an interview protocol guides the interview process and ensures that a researcher conducts a smooth interview. Researchers use interview protocols (written scripts) to stay on task during and after interviews. When developing interview protocols, researchers should ensure that interview questions are open-ended and neutral (Carrico, Boynton, Matusovich, & Parette, 2013).

Participants

The participants selected for this qualitative case study included managers and employees from travel agencies in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. I obtained access to the companies by researching travel agency databases, and contacting participants by telephone, email, and visits to offices. Eight participants, consisting of two managers and six travel consultants, were invited to participate in the interviews for this study. A small sample size that ranges from five to 50 participants is appropriate for qualitative studies (Huh, Verma, Rayala, & Bobba, 2017). The eligibility criteria for selecting the participants included (a) small to large travel agency firms that had been in business for 5 to 10 years, (b) employees and managers who had over 2 years of experience in the travel industry, (c) a minimum of a high school or college education,

(d) a travel agency certification, and (e) firms that incorporated e-commerce processes into business models.

I selected a purposive sampling technique for this study. Researchers use the purposive sampling technique to identify phenomena that serves the exact purpose of the research and its questions (Poulis, Poulis, & Plakoyiannaki, 2013). Researchers who conduct qualitative case studies choose the purposive sampling technique frequently. (Lucas, 2014). A researcher should substantiate the validity of the study before conducting a purposive sample case study (Rowley, 2014).

To gain access to the study participants, I contacted senior managers of the travel agencies to receive information on the most experienced travel consultants in organizations, and I reviewed company websites to collect information about the agencies' top officials. Face-to-face interviews were the most advantageous method to compile and assemble information from the participants. The participants' names were changed to protect rights and identities. Participants were identified by numbers ranging from one through eight (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2).

The participants read and signed consent forms and understood the goals and objectives of the study. I shared the benefits of participating in the study with all respondents. The participants were informed that being in the study is voluntary, that information is strictly confidential, and that incentives are not offered to them. If the respondents want to withdraw from the study, they could contact me by email or telephone.

Building and establishing a working relationship with the participants are necessary for a successful research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Site visits were scheduled at the company's private facility to observe the participants, become familiar with business operations, address ethical and privacy concerns, provide consent forms, explain the interview process, answer participants' questions before the interviews, and conduct the interview sessions at the business office. After the interview sessions were completed and the data were analyzed, I stored the hard copies in a locked file cabinet and secured the electronic files on my computer hard drive with password protection. The data is stored in my home office for 5 years. After 5 years, I will shred the paper files and permanently delete the electronic files.

Research Method and Design

Researchers who want to know the feelings, experiences, and opinions of individuals producing subjective data use a qualitative method for studies (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers use a qualitative methodology when they want to obtain participants' viewpoints about an issue or problem (Stake, 2010). The goal of this study was to explore strategies that traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers and owners need to adopt and integrate e-commerce processes into business models. To reach my goal, the qualitative methodology was selected for this study.

Researchers use the case study research design to understand the *how* and *why* of decisions made within companies, the impact on businesses, resources used, and best practices for organizations (Klonoski, 2013). A case study design was appropriate for this

study because researchers can ask participants' *how* and *why* questions during live experiences in travel agencies (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). After choosing the case study design, I learned business concepts and highlighted strategies that travel executives and managers used when adopting e-commerce processes into business models. I also learned innovative marketing techniques that travel professionals used to attract and retain customers; thereby competing with online travel agencies.

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are three research paradigms that are used in doctoral studies. Qualitative researchers focus on subjective experiences of human beings in a social environment, based on individual perspectives (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Qualitative research entails interpreting data from natural settings and gaining individual perceptions and experiences. Researchers should be aware of study participants' varying lived experiences (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Researchers who use qualitative research methodology can assess the qualities of participants' lived experiences in an inductive process that relates to theory development.

A qualitative method is used to explore marketing strategies and understand business processes in organizations (Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). A qualitative method is beneficial when determining how small businesses market products and services. Researchers who choose a qualitative method can collect data in multiple ways, such as face-to-face interviews, focus groups, observations, and document reviews (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). A qualitative method was appropriate for this study because I

learned about the experiences, processes, and events of consultants and executives in small traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies.

Quantitative research methods are comprised of surveys and experiments. Quantitative studies use statistical analysis to determine if significant differences exist between groups (Belk, 2013). Researchers who use quantitative methods may not ask participants probing questions to understand experiences and processes (Yin, 2017). Quantitative researchers use numerical data to validate existing hypotheses and generalize outcomes from a large population (Thamhain, 2014). A quantitative methodology was not chosen because it did not meet the objective of this study. The study did not include statistical data or hypotheses.

Mixed methods research captures experiences in both quantitative and qualitative areas (Zohrabi, 2013). In a mixed-methods study, researchers must compile and analyze quantitative and qualitative data into a single study (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). A mixed method approach is not sufficient because, in combining two methods, it would involve additional time and resources. The mixed method design was not feasible for my study, given the allotted timeframe to complete the study.

Case studies are used to collect shared information in order to explore *how* and *why* questions for a live phenomenon (Atchan, Davis, & Foureur, 2016). A qualitative case study design was used to explore strategies that traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers and owners may implement to adopt e-commerce processes into business models. Selecting a case study design for this study helped me to develop

research questions that were beneficial in understanding the agencies' business processes. Researchers who conduct case study designs should focus on contemporary events, instead of historical events, to investigate real-life contemporary phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Researchers may choose the case study design when they want to get in-depth understanding of real-life problems (Harland, 2014). Researchers who perform case studies should understand that complex phenomena may affect individuals, businesses, or groups (Yin, 2017). Upon researching the topic of e-commerce adoption in brick-and-mortar travel agencies, I discovered that past scholars did not thoroughly address the issue of e-commerce adoption in travel agencies. The case study research design was appropriate because it helped me explore and evaluate processes, experiences, and events in the travel industry (Yin, 2017). The benefit of using a case study design was the ability to gain valuable information from the participants' experiences and perceptions of e-commerce adoption and develop an effective strategy to remain competitive.

I conducted open-ended interviews to capture the experiences of the participants, and further understand the research problem. Data saturation was achieved after the sixth interview with the sixth participant; however, I facilitated two additional interview sessions and continued collecting and analyzing data from two participants. Data saturation was achieved when no additional information, emergent themes, or results could be duplicated. Data saturation was necessary to explore and analyze different

perspectives on the phenomenon, and to confirm that research data were sufficient and adequate to sustain and replicate the doctoral study.

Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of travel agency businesses in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. I received access to various travel companies by searching databases, reaching participants through telephone calls, emails, and visits to the organizations. The purposive sampling technique was chosen for this study. With this technique, a researcher purposefully selects and draws participants from a population to interview, retrieves information about live experiences, and evaluates information about the phenomenon (Suri, 2011). Researchers use the purposive sampling technique to interact with participants and obtain knowledge about a research topic (Chidlow, Plakoyiannaki, & Welch, 2014). Researchers choose the purposive sampling technique because it gives them flexibility to select the right participants, explore the research problem, and answer the research questions that guide the study (Yin, 2017).

The eligibility criteria for selecting eight participants from travel agencies were based on the following factors: (a) 18 years of age or older, (b) over 2 years of travel industry experience, (c) a high school diploma or college education, (d) travel agency certification, and (e) knowledgeable about e-commerce. A sample size of eight was adequate because it aligned with the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the richness of data. The eight participants were comprised of six consultants and two managers who were knowledgeable about e-commerce and represented agencies that had

integrated e-commerce processes into their business models. Determining the right sample size is a vital part of the research design process (Rao, 2012).

The participants were selected from travel agencies' databases. After searching the databases, I retrieved the contact information of managers, and they randomly selected employees who met the criteria for the study. Company letters were sent to travel agency managers to obtain permission to recruit and invite eligible participants to the study. I recruited individuals who were knowledgeable about e-commerce adoption and were willing to participate in the research study. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at a local facility, based on the interviewees' schedules and proximity of the business. The interview sessions lasted approximately 30-45 minutes.

The highest standard of excellence in qualitative research is achieved by data saturation (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Data saturation included interviewing many participants and receiving no current or latest information or emerging themes after conducting multiple interviews. At this stage of data saturation, the researcher should have enough information to replicate the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The researcher should not conduct more interviews because gathering new information will not add value to the study (Schiller et al., 2015).

The goal of this study was to collect enough data for sufficient and accurate information to investigate the lived experiences of agents in traditional travel agencies. After the interview sessions were completed, I performed member checking and acknowledged the accuracy of participants' transcripts. Member checking is a process by

which participants acknowledge that experiences are reflected in the results (Birt, Campbell, Cavers, Scott, & Walter, 2016). The participants were given 10 days to review the interview transcripts, reconstruct narratives, make necessary changes, and return the transcripts for final analysis.

Ethical Research

Ethical research involved maintaining integrity of the research and creating trust and cooperation with the participants (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). Researchers should adhere to the moral and ethical principles and avoid plagiarism and falsification of information when conducting research (Rupp, 2011). The interview sessions were conducted after I received permission from Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approval number for my study is 09-22-17-0260697. Employees 18 years of age or older were invited to participate in the study. Each participant was briefed on the potential risks, benefits, and research study overview. I obtained written consent forms from the respondents before the interviews commenced.

The participants were informed that being in the study was voluntary. During the research process, I developed trust with the participants, maintained integrity and confidentiality, and protected privacy. To ensure confidentiality in this study, I used a coding system to identify participants and protect identities. The participants were not placed at risk. Participants' could withdraw from the study at any time. The options to withdraw from the study included an email or telephone call.

To ensure ethical compliance with the Walden University IRB, the respondents' names were coded (i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2). Travel company names were not disclosed. The participants did not receive incentives or gifts. After the data were analyzed, I made paper copies and gave to each participant. The information is saved on my computer's hard drive with password protection for 5 years. I will destroy, shred, and delete all data after 5 years.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the data collection instrument for this qualitative case study. As the data collection instrument, researchers should establish relationships with participants and properly assess and analyze data (Mansfield, 2013). Data collection was implemented through semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews provided meaning and understanding of the respondents by preparing questions before the interview sessions began (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012).

Semistructured interviews helped me to ask probing questions, as needed, and make informed decisions about the participants in the study. All interviews were facilitated at a local venue, away from the office, based on the time, place, and flexibility of the participants' schedules. The interview questions were open-ended, and each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. Personal feelings, opinions, and biases were omitted from the study. The bracketing technique was used to minimize and possibly eliminate biases during the interview process; essentially, withholding my

knowledge and experience. The study participants shared personal feelings and opinions to help gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted at a location convenient for the employees and company managers. The concept of choosing an unidentified setting, away from the daily operations at the business facility, gave me maximum participation with each interviewee. Conducting face-to-face interviews offered the opportunity to interact with the participants. Interview questions were tailored to explore ways of incorporating e-commerce processes into the agencies' business model.

An iPhone 6S cell phone with Voice Memo Recording served to audio record the interviews, gather information, take notes, and analyze the data. An interview protocol (see Appendix G) was used to ensure that I stayed on task and asked the right questions in a timely manner. NVivo 11 software was used to identify codes, themes, and patterns.

When the interview sessions concluded, participants were given 10 days to review the transcripts for accuracy. Member checking and triangulation of data sources were implemented to enhance the reliability and validity of the study. Member checking and triangulation techniques were performed by emailing the interview transcripts to participants for review, feedback, and validation. Researchers should improve the reliability and validity of data by member checking (Milosevic, Bass, & Combs, 2015).

Data Collection Technique

Interviews are the most common method of data collection in qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Participants' can express feelings openly and share views

willingly during interviews (Yin, 2017). Interviews are an integral part of data collection when trying to understand processes, opinions, and experiences (Rowley, 2014). The data collection techniques that were used in this study included semistructured interviews, review of travel agency websites, documents (i.e. contracts, price quotes, credit card authorizations, and itineraries), and review of interview transcripts. An interview protocol was used to guide the interview process and receive necessary information that answered the central research question (see Appendix G).

I searched 35 travel databases, retrieved the executives' information from company websites, and called 16 travel agency leaders to find qualified participants for the study. Seven managers did not respond to my voice mail; five managers declined and said they were too busy; four agreed to participate; however, two declined after speaking with the owner; and two accepted the invitation to participate in the study. The two managers of the brick-and-mortar travel agencies referred me to 18 potential participants. One manager identified eight participants and the second manager identified 10 participants that met the eligibility criteria. A third manager declined to participate in the study; however, referred me to seven eligible participants. The three managers of the travel agencies provided me with a list of 25 qualified employees.

After receiving the list of employees from the managers, I emailed and invited 25 potential interviewees to participate in the study. Fourteen employees did not respond; five employees declined and were not interested; and six employees accepted the invitation. I called the two managers and six travel consultants to coordinate dates and

times for the interview sessions that were convenient with everyone's work schedules. The participants and I agreed to meet at a local facility because of the close proximity to everyone's residences. No incentives were offered to the participants; it was not a requirement. The study was strictly voluntary. The eight participants received the interview questions and informed consent forms through electronic mail. No one withdrew from the study.

At the beginning of each interview, the participants signed and returned a consent form. I introduced myself, explained the benefits of the study, and followed the interview protocol (see Appendix G). Field notes were taken to evaluate the participants' verbal expressions and emotions, the agencies' business processes, and products and services offered to clients. The notes were beneficial in analyzing company operations, reviewing marketing plans, creating ideas, drawing conclusions, and recommending strategies to grow travel businesses and compete with online travel agencies. A personal iPhone 6S cell phone with Voice Memo Recording was used to record the interview and download the audio content for transcription. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes. The eight participants were friendly, calm, relaxed, and eager to answer the interview questions with smiles and laughter. No extraordinary events were formulated during the interview sessions.

Member checking took place after the interview sessions to maintain accuracy of the recorded transcripts. I transcribed each interview and emailed the draft copy to participants for review and feedback. The participants were given 10 days to review the

transcripts for accuracy. Participants' reviewed and validated the data within the timeframe and did not have any additional changes. The member checking process was another technique to share the interview transcripts with participants and offer them the opportunity to revise, validate, and add value to the study.

Data Organization Technique

Data organization is an essential component of the qualitative research study (Marshall et al., 2013). Semistructured interviews were coordinated to learn how participants' feel and think, interpret information, and make sound judgments (Elsawah et al., 2015). Open-ended questions were prepared to measure each variable. NVivo 11 software, created by QSR International, was used to code and analyze the data. NVivo 11 is used by researchers who perform qualitative studies and collect, organize, analyze data from interviews, and convert the data into codes and themes (Georgiou, Westbrook, & Braithwaite, 2012).

Microsoft Word and Excel software were used to organize the data and label the folders. The participants' privacy was protected by using pseudonyms codes. An alphanumeric filing system was created to identify each respondent. The participants were labeled by an alphanumeric system (i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2). A researcher should develop an organized system of cataloging and labeling when accessing data (Wang, Biggs, & Skupin, 2012).

A reflective diary served to record the participants' responses, observe the participants' body language and nonverbal cues, gain an understanding of the

participants' experiences, and examine business processes during the research. Using a reflective diary during the interview sessions helped me to convey thoughts or ideas, make observations, analyze issues, draw conclusions from participants' responses, and find strategies that travel leaders could use to implement e-commerce processes into business models, and compete with online travel agencies. Maintaining a reflective diary enhances credibility and transparency in a research study, and helps researchers make decisions and interpret data (Houghton et al., 2013; Teusner, 2015).

After the study was completed, the data was converted to digital files and locked in file cabinets. Two backup copies of the data were saved. One copy was saved on a personal computer, and the second copy was printed and stored in locked file cabinets. Backup copies alleviated the data from being erased, due to negligence or computer difficulties. When the 5-year timeframe expires, I will destroy the digital and printed files and audio recordings.

Data Analysis

Researchers use many data analysis tools to analyze qualitative data. Five steps are included in the data analysis process: (a) compiling data, (b) disassembling data, (c) reassembling the data, (d) interpreting the data, and (e) making a conclusion about the data (Yin, 2017). The research questions, themes, and literature correlated with the conceptual framework of this study. I related the key steps identified in the data analysis process to the diffusion of innovations theory. DIT theory was relevant and applicable to present new, innovative ideas to leaders, compile information on how to integrate e-

commerce processes in organizations, analyze growth rates of companies who adopted e-commerce, help leaders understand the benefits of implementing e-commerce into business models, make better decisions, and develop strategies to compete with OTAs.

NVivo 11 software was used to code and analyze the data and upload interview transcripts, audio recordings, field notes, and travel documents. The NVivo qualitative analysis software was selected for this study based on the features of the program and recommendations by Zamawe (2015). NVivo is a popular analytical software that helps a researcher to sort and store data, identify patterns and themes, and code interview transcripts and audio files. NVivo gives scholars the options to import data from Microsoft Word (Zamawe, 2015). Researchers such as Bradley, Getrich, and Hannigan (2015) and Chandler and Reynolds (2013) reported that Microsoft Word is beneficial for converting transcripts into word documents. Using NVivo 11 software for this study helped me to organize words into categories and identify emerging themes.

Methodological triangulation techniques were integrated into this qualitative case study by using multiple sources of data. Methodological triangulation included reviewing audio recordings, field notes from diary, interview transcripts, nonverbal cues, travel websites and documents. Triangulation is the decision to use two or more sources of data to conduct a research study (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Using multiple data sources in the qualitative study such as audio recordings, reflective diaries, transcripts, nonverbal language, websites, and travel documents was necessary to achieve reliability and validity of the data. Qualitative researchers may use methodological triangulation

techniques to analyze a phenomenon (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012).

A reflective diary served to annotate the participants' responses, direct quotations, and experiences. The reflective diary was applicable in the data analysis process by helping me gain a better understanding of the interviewees' responses, reviewing the notes thoroughly, organizing data into categories, identifying common patterns and themes, and drawing conclusions about the data. The reflective diary was beneficial to help me indicate processes, business models, and strategies that travel agencies use to compete with OTAs. Writing thoughts and ideas in a reflective diary heightens the transparency of a researcher's study (Houghton, et al., 2013; Teusner, 2015).

During the interview sessions, the participants were observed for verbal and nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, body language, responses to questions, and behavior. Each participant was comfortable and relaxed in the quiet setting at the local venue. There were not any issues with the interviewees. Observing the participants' body language was valuable to increase the study's validity and provide a better understanding of the study's phenomenon (Pfaff, Baxter, Jack, & Ploeg, 2014).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability is a method that assures consistency, credibility, and dependability of research data and enables the researcher and participants to build trusting relationships that are free of biases or coercions (Noble & Smith, 2015). Reliability was achieved in this study when I conducted semistructured interviews and remained consistent in asking the participants the same interview questions and following the interview protocol (see

Appendix G). Using the interview protocol was effective when I documented and outlined each step in the interview process, as Yin (2017) suggested. Researchers should accurately record each step being used to prevent duplication (White, Oelke, & Friesen, 2012). Four main factors that enhanced the reliability and validity of data included: (a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability (Cope, 2014; Danque, Serafica, Lane, & Hodge, 2014; Kim & Li, 2013).

Reliability

Reliability and validity in research studies are established by having quality and rigorous data. Reliability provides consistent results from a researcher's perspective when comprising various researchers and various projects (Yin, 2017). Before each interview commenced, I remained consistent with the participants by being transparent and emailing the questions. When the interviews began, I built trust with the participants and did not deviate from the questions. No other interview questions were introduced to the participants. Reliability in qualitative research provides meaningful and interesting findings from readers and develops trustworthy results (Stevens, Lyles, & Berke, 2014).

Dependability is being consistent with the same outcomes under similar situations (Cope, 2014). Dependability was addressed in this current study by using instruments such as: (a) interview questions, (b) member checking, and (c) interview transcripts. Member checking included paraphrasing the participant's responses for each interview question into my own words and asking the participants to ensure that I interpreted his/her intended message for each question correctly. The participants reviewed the

interview transcripts within 10 days and verified that I transcribed it accurately.

Using multiple sources of instruments helped to explore strategies that leaders in travel agencies need to adopt e-commerce processes into business models (Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2013). Member checking is a process of exchanging and receiving accurate information from the participants (Houghton et al., 2013). To ensure dependability in the study, I maintained consistency by using the same interview questions, interview protocol, and observation protocol for all participants.

Validity

In qualitative research, validity occurs when the findings of the study are true and certain (Goldblatt, Karnieli-Miller, & Neumann, 2011). Validity is a method of confirming the authenticity, trustworthiness, and legitimacy of research data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Research validity in the current study included credibility and dependability of the data collection process and research findings (Mason, 2010). Validity comprises (a) credibility, (b) transferability, and (c) confirmability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Validity was achieved when I applied member checking, interview protocols, bracketing, and data analysis techniques.

To ensure credibility in the study, I used methodological triangulation techniques such as reviewing audio recordings, field notes from diary, interview transcripts, nonverbal cues, travel websites, and documents. In case study research, credibility is achieved when the researcher does an extensive evaluation of the data (Danque et al., 2014). Transferability was the process of justifying similar research studies and ensuring

that the information was legitimate (Hannes, Lockwood, & Pearson, 2010). To achieve transferability in the study, I provided in-depth descriptions of the participants' live experiences, interview location, research context, and data collection and analysis. Future researchers can apply the findings of this study in another research context.

Confirmability is the process of listening to each participant and recording your thoughts or ideas and eliminating biases in research studies (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). To ensure confirmability in the study, I prevented bias and did not ask probing or misleading questions. The bracketing technique was implemented to mitigate bias. A researcher uses the bracketing technique to minimize bias and avoid sharing opinions about the investigation (Martirano, 2016).

Data saturation occurred when I conducted multiple interviews, and no new information was offered by subsequent participants. Conducting further interviews was not necessary because the data would be redundant and repetitious. A researcher cannot achieve data saturation if meaningful information does not exist or add value to the study (Teusner, 2015).

Transition and Summary

The objective of Section 2 was to describe the data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, and data analysis process. Eight participants were interviewed using semistructured, face-to-face techniques. Data were coded, themed, and transcribed using NVivo 11 software. I address the findings in Section 3 and recommend strategies that travel leaders need to adopt and integrate

e-commerce processes into business models. The implications of the study are revealed.

I also provide reflections, applications to professional practice, and conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The objective of this qualitative case study was to explore the strategies that traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers and owners may develop to adopt e-commerce processes into business models. Data were collected by conducting in-depth semistructured interviews with eight participants from three travel agencies located in the mid-Atlantic region. I reviewed and analyzed the interview transcripts and undertook methodological triangulation by observing participants during face-to-face interview sessions and reviewing field notes from my reflective diary. Using a reflective diary helped me constantly compare participants' interview responses to identify emerging themes and explore strategies that leaders could use to integrate e-commerce processes into business models. A reflective diary was beneficial in observing participants' live experiences, interpreting the data, and presenting findings to travel leaders. I visited travel agency websites and reviewed travel documents (i.e. contracts, price quotes, credit card authorizations, and itineraries) to analyze how the agencies were incorporating technology into business models.

The participants were six travel consultants and two managers employed at three travel agencies located in the mid-Atlantic region. Table 2 includes a description of each participant. Participants were three men and five women between 29 and 65 years old, with an average age of 48. Two of the participants were 29 or 30 years old, and four of them were older than 50. At the time of the study, two of the participants had fewer than

5 years of experience, three had between 5 and 9 years of travel industry experience, and the two managers had 25 and 30 years of experience. Four of the participants held master's degrees, three had obtained bachelor's degrees, and the eighth participant held an associate's degree. Three of the participants (three agents) were employed at Agency A. One manager and two agents were employed at Agency B. One manager and one agent were employed at Agency C.

Table 2

Description of the Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Years of experience	Education	Agency	Position
P1	52	Female	5	Bachelor's degree	C	Agent
P2	54	Female	10	Bachelor's degree	A	Agent
P3	65	Female	25	Master's degree	B	Manager
P4	29	Female	6	Master's degree	A	Agent
P5	30	Male	4	Associates degree	B	Agent
P6	60	Male	30	Master's degree	C	Manager
P7	42	Male	9	Bachelor's degree	B	Agent
P8	49	Female	3	Master's degree	A	Agent

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question of this study was the following: What strategies do traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers and owners need to adopt e-commerce processes into business models? In analyzing data using a process of

data reduction and constant comparison of the participants' interview responses, I identified four emerging themes:

1. The effect of e-commerce on travel agents' performance,
2. Competing with online travel agencies,
3. Marketing strategies to attract and retain customers, and
4. E-commerce processes used in travel agencies.

The following presentation of the findings is categorized by themes. The presentation of each theme contains excerpts from the participants' interviews to illustrate each category in each theme. Also included is support of the categories and themes from the review of the literature.

Theme 1: The Effect of E-Commerce on Travel Agents' Performance

IT is changing the way that businesses operate and posing challenges for consultants and managers in traditional travel agencies in terms of roles and performance (Elhaj & Barakeh, 2015). When I asked the question of "how the roles of travel agents are affected because of e-commerce technology," the participants reported technology's positive (Category 1) and negative (Category 2) effect on business. The summary results in Table 3 show that several of the participants reported that traditional travel agencies provide personalized services (Category 3) not provided by OTAs, and they believed that brick-and-mortar travel agencies are still relevant (Category 4).

Positive effect. Several participants were positive about technology's effect on performance. The manager of Agency C (Participant 6) reported, "Travel agents'

performance is positively affected” by e-commerce, while Participant 8 commented that “e-commerce technology . . . provides value-added benefits to our customers and to our company.”

Although 93% of consumers use the Internet annually to book car rentals; flights; cruises; hotels; and luxury, business, and family travel without the assistance of travel agents in traditional brick-and-mortar storefronts, travel consultants believe that they are still needed and cannot be replaced (Standing et al., 2014). The manager of Agency B (Participant 3) supported Standing et al. (2014) when she reported, “Savvy travelers . . . know that the travel agent will advocate on their behalf when something goes wrong; they also know that they will not be directed to a calling center when they have questions.” Participant 7 stated, “There are some things technology cannot replicate, and the personal touch is one of them. The Internet is a valuable resource, but it cannot replace the expertise, guidance, and personal service of a travel agent.” Participant 8 reported that technology is a positive force in the travel agency:

[E-commerce] provides value-added benefits to our customers and to our company. The Internet has helped transform the travel industry. It helps educate the consumer by providing vast amounts of information about destinations and different travel options. Both consumers and travel professionals benefit from the Internet, which makes the possibility of travel to exotic places more imaginable.

Negative effect. In contrast, Participants 1, 2, 4, and 5 (all agents with 10 years or fewer years of experience) stated that e-commerce has negatively affected performance and travel agencies' business. Those participants reported that customers plan trips online, speak to travel suppliers and intermediaries, make travel reservations and accommodations, and conduct financial transactions without guidance from professional travel consultants in brick-and-mortar storefront locations. Participant 2 reported that the agency's office hours were a deterrent to growth of the business:

Online services are readily available because websites can be accessed at any time, as long as servers or networks are not down. However, a daily operational business must close its doors at a certain hour and re-open at the owner's discretion.

Participant 1 reported:

It is challenging to find customers and be productive because travelers are able to act as own travel agent by researching various locations and comparing pricing on the Internet within a matter of minutes. This is causing our business to drastically decline.

Participant 4 confirmed "My role as a travel agent is impacted because customers can act as own travel agents from home instead of visiting the actual agency. For this reason, our business has declined." Participant 5 reported that his "role as traditional travel agent is impacted by online travel companies...there is less incentive to physically travel to a traditional agent for booking vacations." These findings of negative effect are

similar to studies that reveal e-commerce might affect travel managers and consultants' performance and affect travel agencies' business (Elhaj & Barakeh, 2015). Zare and Chukwunonso (2015) reported that travel agents are challenged to re-invent roles due to increasing pressure from online travel intermediaries.

Agencies provide personalized services. The manager at Agency B (Participant 3) stated "the roles of travel agents have evolved" as agents provide personalized services that OTAs cannot provide. She indicated that "the travel agent will always be accessible and ready to advocate on their clients' behalf." Chao et al. (2015) emphasized that travel consultants must build, develop, and maintain good relationships with customers in order to maintain a competitive advantage over OTA rivals.

The second manager (Participant 6) pointed out that storefront agencies "provide clients with customized trips." The managers' comments provide evidence that travel agents are re-inventing roles, as suggested by Zare and Chukwunonso (2015). The literature in this study illustrates that travel agents can sustain business if they create strong relationships with customers (Kaewkitipong, 2010).

Brick-and-mortar travel agencies are still relevant. Both managers and one agent reported that work is still relevant. The manager of Agency C (Participant 6) was adamant that "there will still be a place for travel agents in storefront agencies." Both Participant 3 and Participant 7 stated that traditional travel agencies provide the personal touch that travelers cannot get from OTAs. Participant 3 (manager at Agency B) reported that "savvy travelers prefer to use the services of a travel agent when booking complex or

exotic trips.” Agent-Participant 7 at Agency B stated “there are some things that technology cannot replicate; the personal touch is one of them. The Internet is a valuable resource, but it cannot replace the expertise, guidance, and personal service of a travel agent.” These participants’ comments belie the opinion of Del Chiappa (2013), who reported that the growth of reputable Internet travel agencies is detrimental to the survival of brick-and-mortar retail agencies and has placed the role of traditional travel agents in jeopardy. The personal services component reported by managers and an agent in Agencies B and C support the assertion by Aydin and Yildirim (2012) that traditional travel agencies must provide exceptional quality service if they want to survive.

Summary. Table 3 includes a summary of the comments made by the participants. Half of the participants responded that e-commerce has a positive impact on the travel agency business and travel consultants’ performance; the remaining half indicated that e-commerce has negatively affected the agency and consultants’ performance, causing business to decline because customers interact directly with travel suppliers, book vacation packages online, and act as travel agents. However, the managers of Agencies B and C reported that they provided personal service and custom travel experiences for clients, notably assuring relevance in the travel industry.

Table 3

Summary of Participants' Responses by Categories in Theme 1 (Effect of E-Commerce on Travel Agents)

Participant	Positive effect	Business declined	Personalized services offered	Travel agents are still relevant
1		X		
3		X		
4	X		X	X
5		X		
6		X		
7	X		X	X
8	X		X	X
	X			

Theme 2: Competing With Online Travel Agencies

Competing with online travel agencies and developing strategies to reach customers are challenges for traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies. When I asked the participants “how they addressed competition from online travel agencies,” they indicated that some common ways of competing with online travel agencies are (a) interacting directly with clients, (b) finding a niche market, (c) negotiating deals for clients, (d) being loyal to customers, and (e) accepting price match offers from customers (see Table 4).

Interacting directly with clients. The eight participants stated that customer service is a top priority in efforts to compete with OTAs. The manager at Agency B

(Participant 3) reported that her consultants and managers give clients direct and personal attention during emergencies and crises. Participant 4 declared, “We are loyal and go to great lengths to satisfy our customers by finding them better deals at cheaper prices and tailoring personalized packages to meet customer needs.” When travel agents search for better deals for clients, Participant 1 reported:

Travel agencies need to ensure that they are equipped with up-to-date high-speed Internet connections to allow for fast communication with clients. Because we have the technical functions, our productivity has increased, along with customer satisfaction. We are loyal to our customers and help to satisfy them.

Finding a niche’ market. Business owners can achieve sustainable growth by specializing in niche’ markets and differentiating products and services to meet customer demands (Lu & Zhang, 2016). Fifty percent of the respondents specialized in niche’ markets. Participant 5 reported providing the same “superb customer service” as the other participants reported, but also stated that he “specialize[s] in reaching potential customers by finding niche’ markets through Millennials, sports fans, and health and wellness groups.” Participant 2 stated, “We compete with online travel agents by specializing in niche’ markets.” Participant 1 reported on how her agency specializes in niche’ markets: “We specialize in niche’ markets by offering honeymoon and destination wedding packages to customers and booking entertainment and dinner packages for clients traveling to major cities, such as New York, Las Vegas, San Diego, and Atlantic City.”

Participant 4 proclaimed that her agency was unique because of knowledge about popular destinations:

Our travel agency specializes in niche markets by being destination specialists and servicing our client needs when traveling to popular destinations around the world, such as Paris, London, Phuket, Punta Cana, and Dubai. We are trained and [have become] knowledgeable about these destinations because customers continuously ask us about them. This is what makes our agency unique.

Negotiating deals for clients. Business leaders use the B2B model as a business tool to collaborate with each other to make deals with wholesalers to negotiate lower prices (Sila, 2013). In the interviews, all of the participants indicated that they were able to negotiate the best deals for clients. Participant 2 stated, “We negotiate deals and offer our clients discounts on exclusive vacation packages and luxury travel.” Participant 5 reported, “What I can offer to a customer is guaranteed loyalty, starting with superb and fast customer service and ending with a great deal, or even a one-time discount that competition cannot match.” Other participants indicated how they provide deals for clients:

Our agency offers deals and discounts to our clients to places such as Tahiti, Asia, Dubai, the Mediterranean, and other exotic locations. Accessing all the venues, airlines, and hotel suppliers quickly, gets our customers the trip of their dreams and keeps them happy. (Participant 1)

Our agency can offer clients deals when creating quotes for them and contacting

different hotels and resorts at different destinations. Instead of me having to send them a brochure to visualize destinations, it is all connected to a quote. They can actually see destinations. I always send sales emails, which will give them at least six options for the same destinations. It helps them to come to a decision very quickly. This is a big plus. (Manager at Agency B, Participant 3)

We are loyal and go to great lengths to satisfy our customers. At our travel agency, we welcome customers who bring in information that they found online (price match). We use the information to try to find them better deals at cheaper prices. (Participant 4)

We personalize products and services, offer deals and discounts, and allow price match, to build loyalty among customers. If your travel agency provides tangible offerings that match your clients' specific needs and your competitors do not offer it, your travel agency will have a solid competitive advantage. (Manager at Agency C, Participant 6)

Our travel agency competes with online travel agencies by giving our customers the best personalized service. We also allow the customers to price comparison (price shopping) and [we] match other travel agency prices, if they find a better deal on the Internet. We also negotiate the best deals and offer discounts on cruises, vacation packages, and car rentals to our clients. (Participant 8)

The guidance we offer our travel clients, paired with the deals we are able to negotiate, means that online travel companies are not able to offer the same

personalized customer service that we give our clients. We are able to pair our specialized knowledge of cruise, leisure, family, business, adventure, and luxury vacation planning with the resources of many of the world's largest travel brands. Most of our competitors don't have a big brand for people to connect with. We also have the tools to help customers arrange the rest of travel at excellent value.

(Participant 7)

Being loyal to customers. Improvements in customer service might help leaders achieve competitive advantage over rivals (Dan, 2014; Jahanshahi et al., 2013). All of the travel consultants and managers believed in doing what it takes to satisfy and meet client needs; particularly, delivering high quality service with prompt, timely, and accurate information. The participants agreed that keeping loyal and satisfied clients happy could result in referrals from family, friends, and colleagues, when they have a memorable travel experience. Participant 4 reported that her agency uses “the information [that the customer found online] to see what our customers are interested in, and what types of vacations they favor, so we can tailor personalized packages to meet their needs. Participant 6 stated, “If your travel agency provides tangible offerings that match your clients' specific needs, and your competitors do not offer it; needless to say, your travel agency will have a solid competitive advantage.” Participant 6 also confirmed that taking care of people and improving customer service is important as a travel consultant. The manager at Agency B (Participant 4) reported:

I always tell my clients that they have access to me, directly because they have

my direct number. For the most part, I will be communicating with my clients, even after the normal business hours close. They will be speaking to the same person every time they call because I am not an online travel agent.

Accepting price match offers from customers. Participant 2 reported that her agency “competes with OTAs by offering price matching” to clients. Participant 4 disclosed, “We are loyal and go to great lengths to satisfy our customers. At our travel agency, we welcome customers who bring in information. We use the information to find them better deals at cheaper prices.” Participant 8 explained how her agency could match prices clients found online:

Our travel agency competes with online travel agencies by giving our customers the best personalized service. We also allow the customers to price comparison (price shopping) and match other travel agency prices, if they find a better deal on the Internet. We also negotiate the best deals and offer discounts on cruises, vacation packages, car rentals, etc. to our clients.

Summary. All participants expressed that personal service, in one form or another, was necessary for them to compete with OTAs (see Table 4). Participant 2 stated, “Competition is the name of the game” in any business entity. Participant 5 acknowledged that being “loyal, having superb and fast customer service, and offering discounts to clients” is what attracts customers to our agency. Participant 6 mentioned that “going the extra mile for your customers is an easy way to build strong relationships and maintain a solid competitive advantage.” Participant 7 stated that professional

guidance, negotiation techniques, and promotions are strategies that help his agency compete with OTAs. Participant 8 purported that “Our travel agency competes with OTAs by giving clients the best personalized service.”

Table 4

Summary of Participants’ Responses by Categories in Theme 2 (Competing With OTAs)

Participant	Direct client interaction	Specialize in niche’ markets	Negotiate deals and discounts	Customer loyalty and satisfaction	Price match
1		X	X	X	
2		X	X	X	X
3	X		X	X	
4		X	X	X	X
5		X	X	X	
6	X		X	X	
7	X		X	X	
8	X		X	X	X

Theme 3: Marketing Strategies to Attract and Retain Customers

Consumers purchase 75% to 80% of travel bookings online, and travel agents process only 15% to 25% of bookings in storefront locations. Many customers use technology to book travel vacations because it yields faster results, such as rapid processing time over the Internet and seamless online payment transactions (Viljoen & Roberts-Lombard, 2016). Data from the existing literature confirmed that traditional travel agencies are experiencing disintermediation because travelers are bypassing travel consultants. Many travel intermediaries developed alternative strategies to position

themselves in the market better, a process called reintermediation. Reintermediation describes how businesses can win back lost customers after losing them through disintermediation (Viljoen, Roberts-Lombard, & Jooste, 2015). The travel agents' role is to bridge the gap between buyers and sellers in the industry.

An analysis of the interviews in the current study revealed that traditional travel agents in brick-and-mortar locations are revamping marketing strategies to retain customers and meet the changing market demands. When asked, "What strategies do you implement to attract, retain, and satisfy your customers," the participants indicated they are using social media, websites, referrals, mass emails, and flyers to reach customers (see Table 5). Travel agents are exploring ways to add value for existing customers; in fact, working to regain roles in the travel intermediation process. Travel agency owners and managers are using reintermediation strategies to retain or regain customers and increase revenue.

Social media platforms. Marketing strategies should reflect how business owners and managers may increase sales, build relationships with customers, and develop trust and loyalty (Ritter, 2016). Seven of the eight participants reported that they use social media to attract and retain customers. Social media plays a significant role in companies because it changes the way that businesses operate, and it helps employees interact more with their customers (Dewan & Ramaprasad, 2014; Taneja & Toombs, 2014). Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and You Tube are the most popular social media platforms that businesses and consumers are currently using in the e-commerce markets.

Participant 2 reported that her agency “use[s] social media as part of our marketing strategy to promote our products and services, and to convert potential travelers into customers.” The manager of Agency B (Participant 3) confirmed, “Social media plays a very big role in my business. [I brand] myself extensively on You Tube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.” Participant 4 reported that her agency let customers know about monthly promotions by using social media (i.e., Instagram and Facebook). In addition, Participants 5, 6, 7, and 8 indicated that travel agencies focus on building relationships with existing clients and finding new clients through social media platforms. Participant 3 reported:

I use several ways to attract customers. First, social media plays a very big role in my business. I have branded myself extensively on You Tube with videos. I have created lots of videos on You Tube that depict my business and what I do, the tours I am involved in, and different ways of attracting clients to what I do. I have also branded myself on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram; online branding does help a lot.

Participant 7 emphasized the importance of using social media platforms (specifically Facebook and Linked In) to grow a travel agency business:

I highly recommend a Facebook Page for your travel business. Get your clients to be fans and to post reviews of your services. Engage them with insights and tips. Get clients to write you endorsements on LinkedIn. Social media can build and expand your travel agency, and can help you more effectively meet clients’ needs,

and bring your agency into parity with your competitors.

Participant 8 discussed her social media presence:

As a travel agent, you need your name to be known in order to have a strong online presence. I use Facebook, Instagram, and You Tube to reach new and existing clients. Facebook makes it super easy to share content and photos to our network to entice them [clients] to travel. Instagram gives us the ability to connect with followers emotionally. I created a YouTube Channel to showcase videos of exciting destinations and places visited.

Participant 5 reported:

My travel agency maintains a strong social media presence (we have a Facebook Business Page and an official business Twitter handle) to gain new clients. We have started using Facebook ads, which allow you to pay for advertisements to reach a specific demographic and age group within my client base.

Participant 6 stated, “Our travel agency focuses [its] efforts on building relationships with existing clients and trying to find new clients through social media platforms such as Linked In, Twitter, and Facebook.”

Create websites. When creating marketing strategies, travel agents should consider choosing target markets and planning objectives carefully to reach clients. Marketing strategies help owners and managers establish brand awareness, promote businesses, and increase profits (Ritter, 2016). More than half of the participants had created websites. The manager of Agency B (Participant 3) admitted that using a website

to promote the travel business is very effective, “I use the website . . . promote my business and to build a larger clientele. Travel agents should create websites that are attractive and dynamic; websites that . . . are very pleasant and engaging.” Participant 4 recognized that customers have the option of booking online through various platforms. Therefore, the agency had to change its marketing strategy. Participant 4 confessed that:

E-commerce technology was not originally [part of] our business model.

However, more and more customers are using the Internet to book travel. We had to develop a search engine on our website, so customers can see some of our travel deals and book travel through us. We utilize a website that is attractive, has fresh content, and has highly interactive functions.

Participant 1 realized the travel agency needed to do more than word-of-mouth marketing to attract new customers and to retain existing customers:

It became imperative for our travel agency to modify and alter our traditional strategies in order to adapt and survive in the changing markets. We have hired someone to create an attractive website that promotes exceptional deals and discounts. The major benefit is high visibility for the agency and convenience for the customer. With an e-commerce website, an agency is not limited to its own geographical area. New customers can be reached via search engines daily.

Participant 5 added:

Our travel agency has a traditional .com website domain. Customers can easily book vacations online. My travel agents give out special codes that customers use

via the website, so that I can both track the performance of my top selling agents and ensure that the agents receive credit for drawing in business from our website.

Participant 7 provided advice when developing a website:

A good website is necessary to reach new customers and keep old customers.

Travel agency websites need three key things to attract customers: (a) wonderful graphic designs, (b) compelling and enhancing content, in (c) a user-friendly format that is easy to maintain regularly.

Referrals. The referral marketing strategy is another method of building an agent or manager's reputation, establishing trust, and developing long-term relationships with clients. When creating marketing strategies, travel agents should consider choosing target markets and planning objectives carefully to reach clients. Participant 7 reported how his agency used referrals, "We build our reputation with real traveler reviews on a referral service. By getting referrals, we develop trust and build relationships with our clients, and build our brand." Participant 3 reported:

I also am a member of a consortium called Travel Leaders. That is where I get a lot of my online queries. Travel Leaders allows me to ask my clients for reviews when they return from trips. That is a really big way for other perspective travelers to see how you work as a travel agent, what you offer, and how satisfied your clients are.

Mass emails. Participant 7 stated, "We send mass emails to our clients monthly to engage them, promote specials, and offer tips on various cruises, destinations, and tours.

We use different marketing strategies to give our clients the best value.” Participant 8 also reported, “Sending mass emails to promote our products and services, and handing out flyers and brochures to our customers, has caused our business to flourish and increase profits 20% in 8 months.” Participant 6 revealed, “Our travel agency integrates customer information across customer various channels (i.e. email, newspaper, flyers, websites, face-to-face). We email our existing customers bi-weekly. We keep in touch with them and share our latest news or services.”

Summary. Marketing strategies should reflect how business owners and managers can increase sales, build relationships with customers, and develop trust and loyalty. To become successful at e-marketing, leaders should develop promotional products that differ from those of competitors (Chang, 2013). Disintermediation could be minimized if travel agencies focus on specializing in niche markets, complement travel consultant roles by adopting e-commerce technology, improve online marketing, and implement new travel distribution strategies (Almunawar et al., 2013; Del Chiappa, 2013; Schmidt-Rauch & Schwabe, 2014).

Seven of the participants reported that they use social media to attract and retain customers. All the participants agreed that traditional travel agencies should modify marketing strategies to attract and retain customers. The participants indicated that retaining and attracting customers in the travel industry is challenging because new or existing customers can book online as travel agents or decide to book with OTAs. Sixty-three percent send mass emails as a marketing strategy to attract and retain customers.

Only 20% of the respondents rely on referrals and 50% advertise products and services in newspapers, flyers, or brochures. Five participants (63%) agreed that travel agencies should create websites that are interactive, appealing, and informative.

Table 5

Summary of Participants' Responses by Categories in Theme 3 (Marketing Strategies to Attract and Retain Customers)

Participant	Advertise (flyers)	Mass emails	Social media	Websites	Referrals
1				X	
2			X		
3	X		X	X	X
4		X	X	X	
5		X	X	X	
6	X	X	X		
7	X	X	X	X	X
8	X	X	X		

Theme 4: E-Commerce Processes Used in Travel Agencies

E-commerce in the travel and tourism industry has experienced significant growth in recent decades (Yin, Zhao, & Hu, 2013). The growth within the travel industry is due to customers leaving traditional travel agency storefronts to book travel and turning to OTAs to purchase travel and tour packages. Travel agencies must find another approach to reach customers and increase profits (Abou-Shouk, Lim, & Megicks, 2013; Roma et al., 2014). All the participants agreed that travel agencies must modify strategies to adopt

e-commerce processes to reach more customers and sustain a competitive advantage in the industry. When I asked the question “how do you incorporate e-commerce technology into your business model,” the participants shared some common e-commerce processes that travel agencies have adopted into business models: (a) B2C e-commerce models, (b) websites, (c) mobile applications, and (d) electronic payment systems (see Table 6).

B2C e-commerce model. B2C e-commerce has caused major changes in the travel industry (Bilgihan et al., 2014). Brick-and-mortar travel agencies can maintain a competitive advantage by leveraging presence online and adopting IT applications into business practices (Liao, 2016). Participant 8 acknowledged, “The availability of online sale methods has been beneficial to our travel agency.” Participant 5 reported that the B2C model is essential for the health of his agency:

We have incorporated the B2C model in our agency. Having convenient options for clients to book through my agency helps our business to remain sustainable in the future, and helps me compete with established online brands.

The manager at Agency C (Participant 6) also reported that his agency used a B2C e-commerce business model:

Customers can purchase our products and services directly by searching our website, using our mobile apps, or through one of our social media platforms, such as Facebook ads, Twitter, and advertising banners. We can also send our customers’ digital brochures and flyers of various destinations, based on leisure, business, or family getaways.

Participant 7 also reported that his agency uses a business-to-consumer model. In order to reach the travel consumer, he reported that the agency uses a host of marketing methods within that B2C model:

Your customer will be able to buy from you 24 hours a day. Your website addresses should be promoted everywhere including your stationery, sales forms, and advertisements. Social media can work together to help you build your audience, increase sales, and grow your business.

Participant 4 also reported on his agency's business model, "We use a B2C business model at our travel agency. We offer products directly to the consumer without them having to seek out other [ways to book] travel. We want to build relationships with current and prospective clients."

Websites. The participants indicated earlier, in Theme 3, that an important marketing strategy was to create a web presence for agencies. The website, as an e-commerce process, is an important component of the participants' businesses. Participant 1 indicated, "We have [incorporated] an e-commerce website into our business model. With an e-commerce website, an agency is not limited to its own geographical area. New customers can be reached via search engines daily." The manager at Agency B (Participant 3), in an effort to increase her online profile reported, "I use the websites that I create to promote my business. Technology has really made a big impact on my business, and I feel that this is the only way to decrease stress and to build a larger clientele." Participant 4 confirmed, "We had to use a simple strategy of making a search

engine on our website so that customers can see some of our travel deals and still book travel through us.” Participant 7 affirmed, “We have an e-commerce website; we sell our products and services around the world, 24/7. The sale of products and services on our website generate more sales and revenues for our agency.”

Mobile applications. Five participants (Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8) use mobile applications to meet customer needs. Participant 7 reported, “The travel agencies use mobile applications to reach a global audience and promote products with minimal cost.”

Other participants also commented on the use of mobile apps at travel agencies:

Our travel agency . . . keeps in touch with our clients by using mobile applications. We can access all the venues (e.g., airlines, hotels) quickly, at any time, to give our customers the trip of dreams. This was one of the biggest changes that we had to implement in our agency. (Participant 1)

With the popularity of smartphones today, the most innovative way to adopt e-commerce to grow my business is using mobile apps. The mobile app helps the travel agents push notifications to a customer’s cell phone in a strategic interval, advertising deals and/or new products in real-time to hundreds to thousands of users at the same time. The mobile apps provide customers instant and easy access to our services. (Participant 5)

Participant 8 stated, “We use mobile technology to grow our sales and improve customer service. We decided to adopt new mobile technologies (smartphones, tablets, and push

notifications) to target our travel customers with personalized offers and timely discounts.”

Electronic payment systems. The participants agreed that e-commerce is affordable and productive. All the respondents have adopted B2C e-commerce processes into business models and have adapted to using electronic payments. The participants accept debit and credit card payments, PayPal, and bank transfers as methods of alternative payments (see Table 6). Participant 2 commented, “We accept electronic payments for our travel products and services. Electronic payments can be received at the click of a button. Mail-in or hand-delivered payments may take longer to be received at the business.” Participant 1 also commented that, “Our clients can use alternative payment methods such as PayPal, debit cards, credit cards, or electronic bank transfers to pay for leisure, business, or family vacations.”

Participant 4 reported, “We have a seamless process of collecting credit card payments from our customers. We also accept payment plans after our clients make initial deposits.” Participant 3 also commented on use of electronic payment systems:

Our clients can call us to make payments; they don't have to come into our office. If you have credit card information, you can just go ahead and make a payment online. They don't have to mail a check. All of that is done within 5 minutes online. Our agency also gives clients the option of making payment arrangements for cruises or vacations. So, accepting different payment methods, has a positive effect on our travel agency. (Participant 3)

Summary. Productivity growth increases five times higher for organizations that adopt e-commerce processes into business models than for companies who does not adopt e-commerce (Abebe, 2014; Khan et al., 2014). E-commerce adoption processes may lead to improved business performance, increased sales growth, and enhanced management decision-making skills (Khan et al., 2014). In the current study, a majority of travel agencies adopted e-commerce processes by creating websites and mobile applications that are engaging and appealing to attract customers (see Table 6). All the participants accept debit and credit card payments, PayPal, and bank transfers as methods of payment (see Table 6). Adapting to meet customers' needs and incorporating technologies into agencies are principal factors of growing a successful travel business.

Table 6

Summary of Participants' Responses by Categories in Theme 4 (E-Commerce Processes Used in Travel Agencies)

Participant	B2C e-commerce	Electronic payment systems	Mobile apps	Websites	Accepts alternative payments
1	X	X	X	X	X
2	X	X			X
3	X	X		X	X
4	X	X		X	X
5	X	X	X	X	X
6	X	X	X		X
7	X	X	X	X	X
8	X	X	X		X

Summary of the Findings

The results of the study highlight Rogers's (1995) diffusion of innovations theory because it provided a framework for helping travel agency leaders and consultants make decisions to develop new ideas, differentiate products and services, and adopt e-commerce processes into agencies' business models. DIT is a reputable theoretical model that provides individuals and corporations with innovative processes to adopt IT over time (Prasad & Miranda, 2014).

The DIT model helps business leaders evaluate innovative technology processes in an organization (Prasad & Miranda, 2014). In this qualitative case study, the innovations or new ideas were branding in new markets, using social media platforms, and adopting e-commerce processes. The participants adopted those innovations in order to reach new and valued customers and to compete with OTAs.

Many organizational leaders are learning about new opportunities, restructuring business processes, and developing new strategies to reach customers, which include the adoption of e-commerce platforms. Leaders of travel agencies have decided to adopt e-commerce processes in business models to gain competitive advantages in the industry (Elhaj & Barakeh, 2015). The participants in the current study realized that using the Internet to sell products and adopting e-commerce technology and processes into organizations is necessary to reach customers (Llach, Mariomon, & Alonso-Almeida, 2013). Brick-and-mortar travel agencies should consider migrating to an effective e-business infrastructure instead of using the traditional information systems to

sustain a competitive advantage in the travel industry (Zare & Chukwunonso, 2015).

Data analysis included reviewing interview transcripts, travel documents, reflective diaries, and visiting travel agency websites. Data analysis highlighted strategies that travel leaders may implement to keep existing customers and reach potential customers; therefore, to increase sales and maximize profits. Findings revealed ways that travel consultants and managers could adapt in a changing market, develop innovative marketing strategies, integrate e-commerce processes, differentiate products and services, and generate additional revenues by incorporating IT into business models.

Applications to Professional Practice

The objective of this study was to explore the strategies traditional brick-and-mortar travel agency managers can use to adopt and integrate e-commerce processes into business models. The findings in this study indicated that leaders in traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies are still finding it difficult to strategize based on old ideas that are obsolete in the 2018 business world. To achieve great results and become profitable, business owners and managers must think outside the box and re-evaluate business models to reach new markets in the travel industry. The findings in this study also showed that business leaders should (a) realize the impact of e-commerce on travel agents' performance, (b) find ways to compete with online travel agencies, (c) implement marketing strategies to attract and retain customers, and (d) develop and adopt innovative e-commerce processes to remain competitive and relevant in the travel industry.

Implications for Social Change

Many traditional travel agencies in brick-and-mortar locations have slow performance rates because they have not adopted innovative technology (Abou-Shouk, Lim, & Megicks, 2013). Positive social change can result from the adoption of e-commerce processes by travel agency owners and managers. Adopting e-commerce systems and processes in brick-and-mortar travel agencies can lead to higher revenues, increased sales and productivity, quick processing time, and efficient recordkeeping management. The findings may contribute to better employment opportunities, higher living standards, loyal customers, employee job satisfaction, and a stronger economy. The findings could benefit individuals, families, organizations, the national government, and local communities by creating economic empowerment and wealth opportunities.

The implications for social change that this study offer travel managers are strategies to help them adopt e-commerce processes that may lead to business growth, global expansion, and cost savings for organizations. The findings can help travel agency leaders improve business performance and implement best practices. The strategies may help leaders sustain businesses by helping them compete better with online travel agencies.

Recommendations for Action

Company leaders have re-engineered business models, processes, and strategies and have developed innovative ways to market products and services, due to the emergence of the Internet (Clemes et al., 2014). Advanced technologies, increased

smartphones usage, and decreased computer costs have resulted in e-commerce growth (Deng & Zhang, 2014). When launching an e-commerce business, leaders should be ready to adapt and make changes to remain competitive. When technology changes, employees should receive training and learn modern technology to stay relevant.

Based on the study's findings, my first recommendation is for leaders and consultants in traditional travel agencies to enroll in marketing, technology, and other business training classes at colleges or travel agency institutions. Training may help travel personnel increase online presence in e-commerce markets, engage with potential customers, and improve business practices. Travel agency leaders should understand the impact of the Internet on the e-commerce business.

My second recommendation is that travel owners and managers use McCarthy's four marketing mix model: product, price, promotion, and place (see Appendix C) to achieve competitive advantages over OTAs. Travel agency leaders should identify target markets for products or services and develop a marketing mix to enhance sales (McCarthy, 1960). When using McCarthy's four marketing mix model, traditional brick-and-mortar agencies can ensure profitability and sustainability and could compete effectively with OTAs (Azadi & Rahimzadeh, 2012). Using McCarthy's four marketing mix model can help leaders understand the competitiveness of business environment.

My third recommendation is that travel agents should use social media networks and design websites that are user-friendly, graphic, and informative. Travel managers and consultants need to use social media platforms to promote businesses and target

customers in new segment markets, such as Millennials, seniors, or adventurers. Web 2.0 and social media have emerged as the best online platforms for making travel decisions, improving travel information, and promoting businesses (Ayeh et al., 2013).

I will disseminate the results of this study to leaders in the travel industry through electronic mail. The findings included assisting travel agency leaders in developing e-commerce strategies to grow businesses. My goal is to communicate the findings of this study at travel agency conferences and professional corporate workshops. I plan to publish the findings in scholarly journals, the ProQuest database, and industry publications.

Recommendations for Further Research

I used a qualitative, case study design to explore strategies that business owners and managers need to adopt and integrate e-commerce processes into traditional brick-and-mortar travel agencies. A recommendation for further research is to use a quantitative methodology to investigate relationships that may exist among variables and themes. Future studies may include survey instruments and the use of descriptive and statistical analyses.

Recommendations for future research include interviewing managers and agents in medium-to-large traditional travel agencies located in other geographical regions. Similar studies should be conducted to evaluate the impact of e-commerce adoption on large traditional brick-and-mortar agencies. Future research may help leaders in multiple

industries gain valuable information to promote e-commerce, adopt processes, and implement strategies that could lead to sustainability and profitability in businesses.

Reflections

Walden University Doctor of Business Administration program has been challenging, exciting, and rewarding. The decision to pursue a doctoral degree was to fulfill personal and professional goals. Before enrolling in the program, I had some preconceived ideas that I could not perform research and collect data from employees and managers in genuine companies. I also became skeptical about finding credible material for this research study. After interviewing participants, analyzing data, and conducting research, my perceptions changed over time. All my fears about conducting doctoral-level research quickly dissolved. Being apprehensive could have affected the study and delayed results. When I completed the doctoral study, I learned that accomplishing this goal was possible. I also learned that I persevered and developed confidence, gained wisdom of conducting research, and obtained a stronger faith to endure this journey. I was able to use qualitative software to analyze data and identify themes, present the findings, and recommend strategies that travel leaders could use to adopt e-commerce processes and compete with OTAs.

Conclusion

Travel consultants employed in brick-and-mortar travel agencies play a vital role in the travel and tourism industry. Direct interaction and quality customer service are two main elements that travel agents should provide to new and existing clients to retain lost

customers and compete with OTAs. Interacting with clients and providing them high quality service helps consultants build trust and foster long-term relationships. Leaders and consultants in traditional brick-and-mortar agencies are changing the way that travel agencies operate. For strategic purposes, travel agency leaders have revamped businesses, adopted e-commerce processes, and learned the latest trends in technology to compete with online travel agencies. Traditional travel agencies in brick-and-mortar locations will continue to evolve in the competitive markets and maintain presence, both locally and online.

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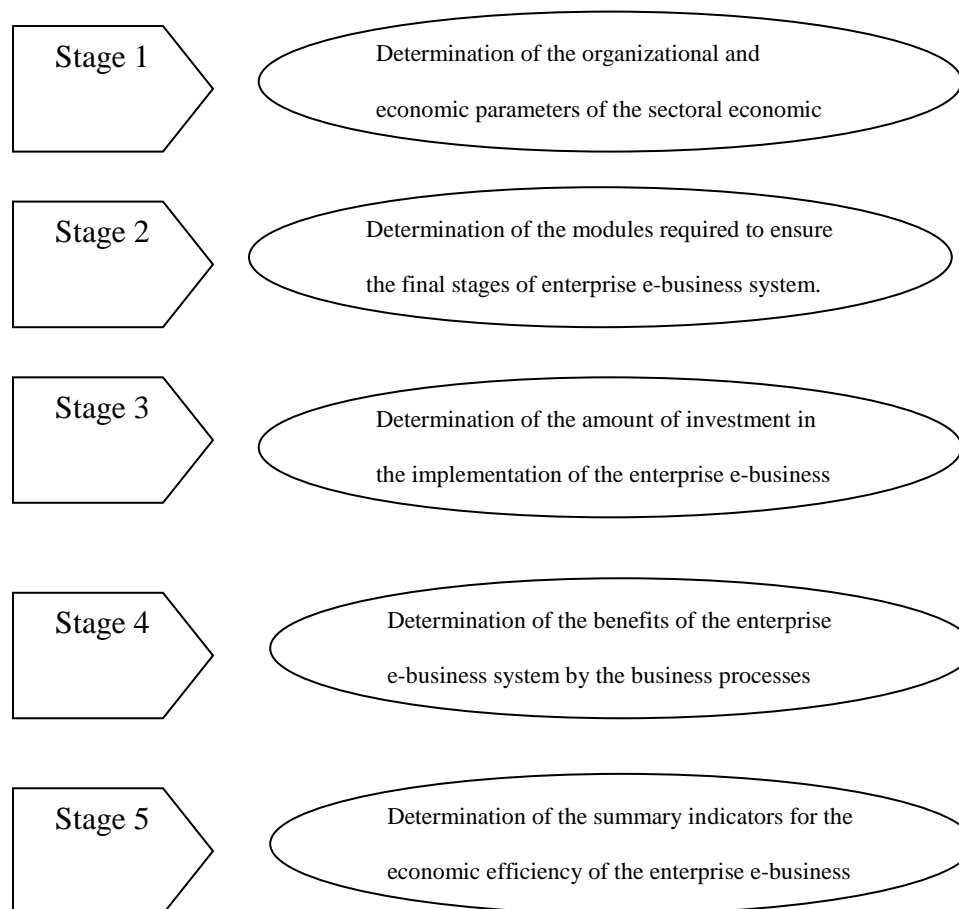
Zhao, Z. (2013). Analysis on the status quo and countermeasures of the newly emerging E-commerce website. *Applied Mechanics and Materials*, 411-414, 2212–2218.

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<https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.2.254-262>

Appendix A: Main Stages of the Implemented Methodology for Assessing the Effectiveness of an Enterprise E-Business System



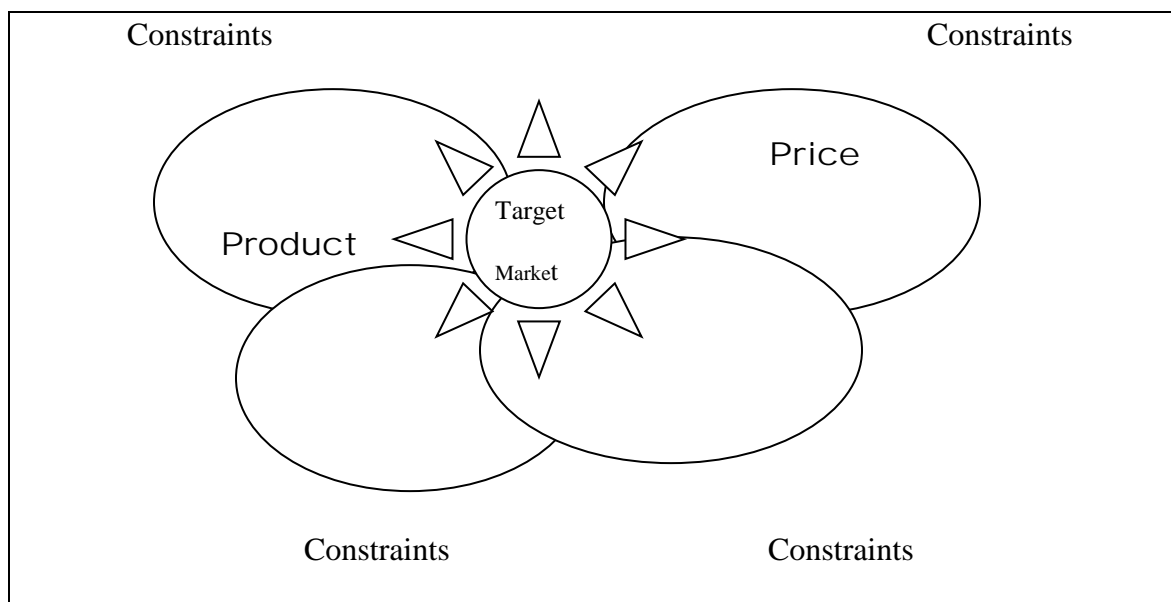
Adapted from “A Methodology for Managing the Effectiveness of Enterprise E-Business Systems,” by G. Milchev, 2012, *Journal of the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy*, 47(2), p.219. Copyright 2012 by UCTM.

Appendix B: Perceived Benefits of E-Commerce for Travel Agents

Benefits	Categories	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	Mean difference
Sales, revenue, and profits growth	Adopters	135	3.60	
	Non-adopters	152	2.68	0.92
Easiness of carrying out transactions	Adopters	135	3.04	
	Non-adopters	152	2.45	0.59
Increase competitive advantages	Adopters	135	3.78	
	Non-adopters	152	2.62	1.16
Improve customer satisfaction	Adopters	135	3.00	
	Non-adopters	152	2.66	0.34
Improve distribution channels	Adopters	135	3.63	
	Non-adopters	152	2.72	0.91
Effective partnerships with supplier/partners	Adopters	135	3.24	
	Non-adopters	152	2.51	0.74
Customizing services to customer needs	Adopters	135	3.29	
	Non-adopters	152	2.52	0.77
Establish reputation in global markets	Adopters	135	3.53	
	Non-adopters	152	2.70	0.83
Enhance staff satisfaction	Adopters	135	3.36	
	Non-adopters	152	2.49	0.86

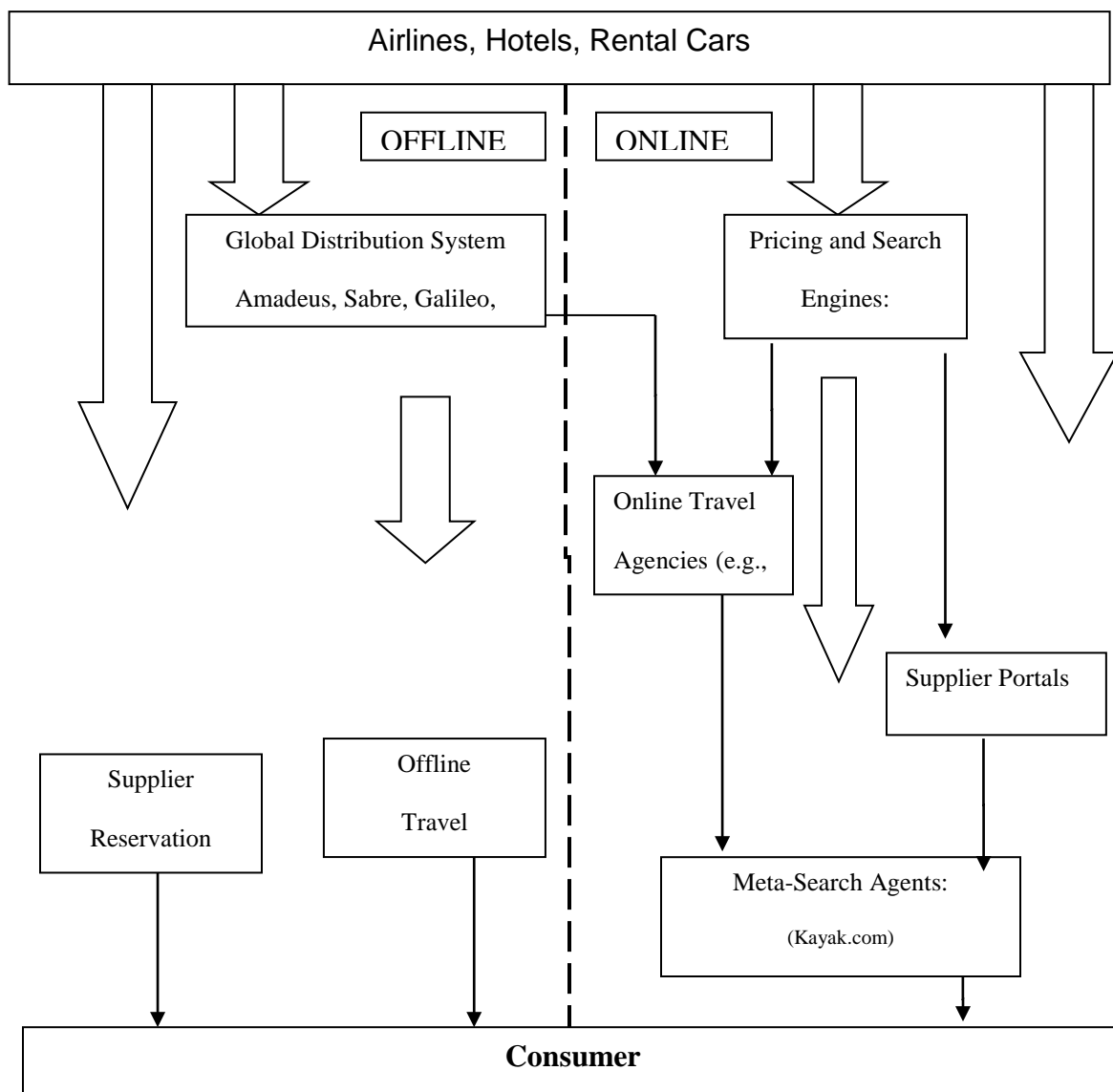
Adapted from “Perceived benefits and E-Commerce Adoption by SME Travel Agents in Developing Countries: Evidence from Egypt,” by M. Abou-Shouk, W. Lim, and P. Megicks, 2013, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 37(4), p. 490. Copyright 2013 by International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education.

Appendix C: The Marketing Mix



Adapted from "The Marketing Mix," by Internet Center for Management and Business Administration, n.d. (<http://www.netmba.com/site/about/>). Copyright 2002-2010 by NetMBA.com

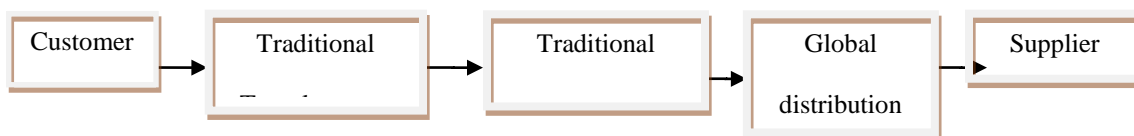
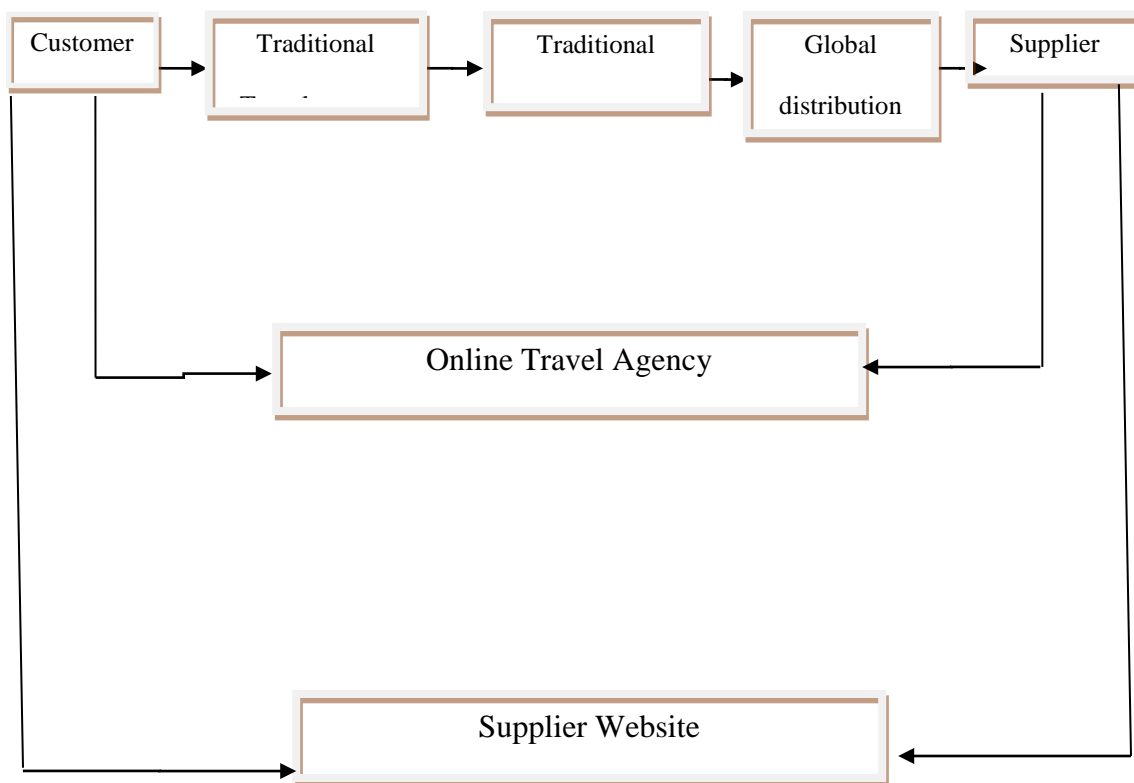
Appendix D: U.S. Travel Distribution Information Value Chain



This figure represents the U.S. travel distribution supply chain, with the online channel at the right of the dotted line.

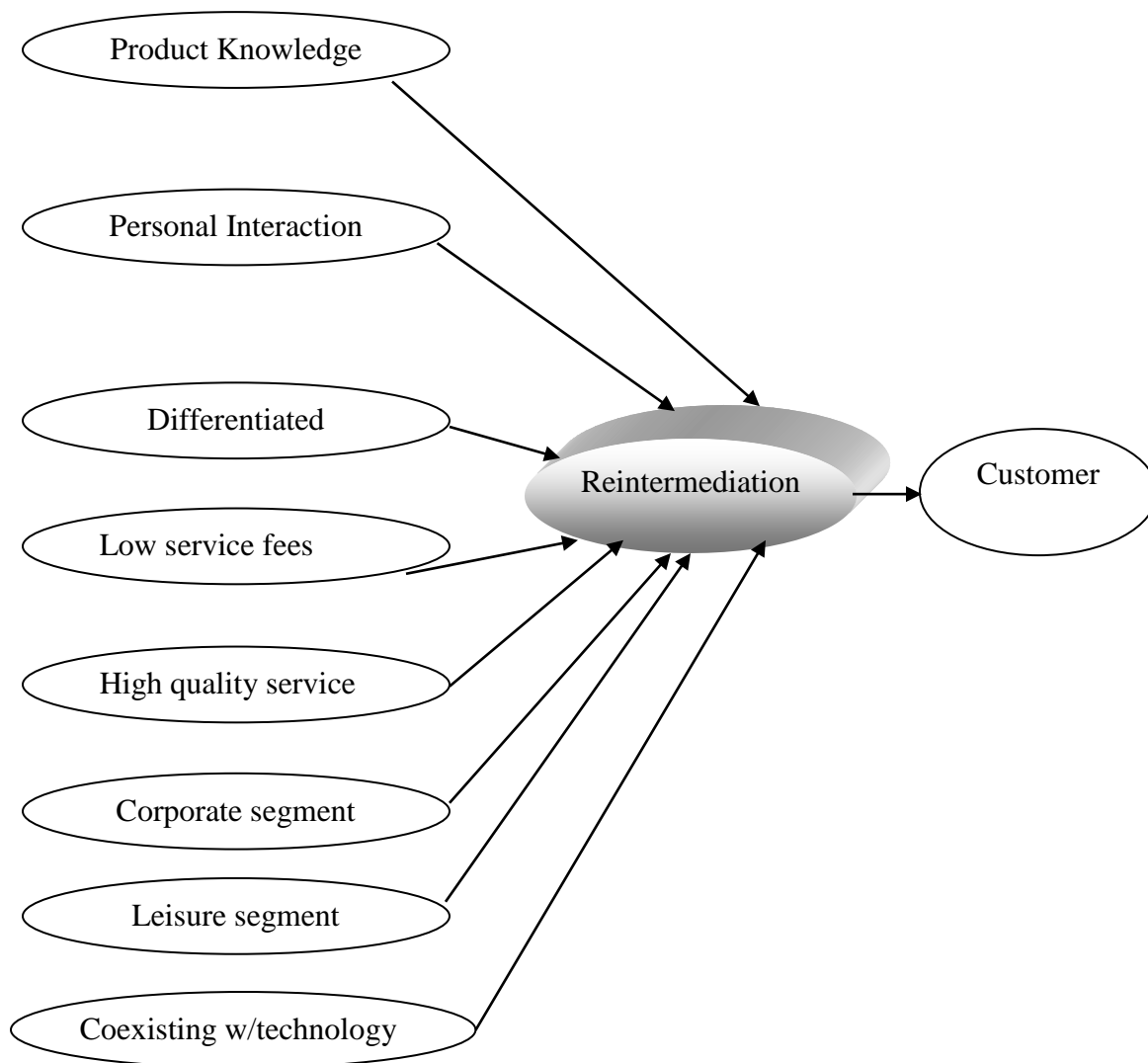
Adapted from "How has electronic travel distribution been transformed? A test of the theory of newly vulnerable markets," by N. Granados, R. Kauffman, and B. King, 2008, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 25(2), p. 73. Copyright 2008 by IEEE.

Appendix E: Evolution from Intermediation to Disintermediation

INTERMEDIATION**DISINTERMEDIATION**

Adapted from “Reintermediation Strategies for Disintermediated Travel Agencies: A Strategic Marketing Perspective,” by K. Viljoen, M. Roberts-Lombard, and C. Jooste, 2015, *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, 14(3), p. 561. Copyright 2015 by CC-BY, The Clute Institute.

Appendix F: Reintermediation



Adapted from “Reintermediation Strategies for Disintermediated Travel Agencies: A Strategic Marketing Perspective,” by K. Viljoen, M. Roberts-Lombard, and C. Jooste, 2015, *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, 14(3), p. 561. Copyright 2015 by CC-BY, The Clute Institute.

Appendix G: Interview Protocol

- Introduce myself as a Walden doctoral student and greet participants.
- Give a brief overview about the purpose of the study.
- Pass out the participant consent form and receive appropriate signatures.
- Inform each participant that the interview session will last 30-45 minutes.
- Briefly inform participant that I will record the interview sessions.
- Ask participant to talk about education and career background.
- Make sure that the participants are comfortable during the interview.
- Conduct the interview using the following questions:
 - How are the roles of travel agents impacted because of e-commerce technology?
 - How do you address competition from online travel agencies?
 - What strategies do you implement to attract, retain, and satisfy your customers?
 - What effect does incorporating e-commerce technology into the business model have on your business?
 - What are the benefits of e-commerce for you and your customers?
 - How can e-commerce create additional revenue for you?
 - How do you incorporate e-commerce technology into your business model?
 - What innovative ways in adopting e-commerce can help grow your business?
 - What else would you like to add regarding e-commerce?
- Ask follow-up questions, if needed.
- Thank the interviewees for participating in the study.
- Provide interviewee with my contact information, for questions or concerns.