

## REVIEWING THE WEB FEATURES OF TRAVEL AGENTS IN SINGAPORE

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Assessing websites is one of many ways to benchmark travel agents' websites against their competitors and to provide directions for improvements. Furthermore, it helps to identify their operational weaknesses and also consider effective website features for the benefit of customers. This study aims to investigate how Singapore travel agencies use websites in the e-commerce context. Some of the more common website content includes agency information, contact details, and information on travel packages. Websites were classified against a four-stage model of e-commerce adoption. The majority of websites are ranked as adopting low practices of e-commerce (first and second stages) while the minority were found to be adopting an advanced e-commerce practices (third and fourth stages).

Key words: Travel agents; Website evaluation; e-Commerce; Singapore

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### Introduction

Due to the increasing popularity of online reservations, travel service providers are becoming more motivated to offer their services online (Albuquerque & Belchior, 2002; Lu & Deng, 2007). The Internet has become one of the most important mediums to market, sell, and recommend holidays; about 40% of reservations are made online in Europe, with experts predicting further growth of online business transactions (eMarketer, 2013). Firms with a web presence would therefore not only provide communication and transactional platforms for customers (Van der Merwe & Bekker, 2003), but lend vital support to business success by serving a larger segment of the market (Jeong, Oh, & Gregoire, 2003; Law, Qi, & Buhalis, 2010; Lee & Kozar, 2006).

Firms who do not have a web presence or have web presence, but do not support e-commerce functions, lose some of their potential sales. This is particularly true for travel agencies (Ellion & Equinus, 2007). As travel agencies face the threat of disintermediation from the global travel and tourism industry (Heung, 2003; Standing, Borbely, & Vasudavan, 1999), their strategies have shifted to developing their marketing and promotional activities via websites in order to improve their brand image and sell packages online. They are using e-commerce and focusing on service quality to continue competing globally, in the belief that cost reduction and effectiveness can be derived from automation and integrating the Internet to their traditional activities. Using such technologies could be the answer to the survival of travel agents (Heung, 2003; C.-W. Kim, 2005; Siebenaler & Groves, 2002).