THE ADOPTION OF e-COMMERCE IN THE LESOTHO TOURISM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT
Over the years, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been revolutionising global markets. In developed nations, for example, there has been a push for developing countries to adopt ICT as leverage towards improving their economic development. However, in the current era, ICT adoption has not been as widespread as anticipated in some parts of the world, with its use in developing countries especially, lagging behind. This is particularly so amongst the small, medium, micro-enterprise (SMME) sector, important drivers of the economy in the developing world. SMMEs in developing countries have been hindered in the uptake of ICTs, largely due to underlying issues such as the high cost of ICT, inadequate and unreliable infrastructure, as well as lack of policy necessary to promote competition and growth within the ICT sectors.

Amongst varying applications of ICTs, e-commerce is one area in particular which SMMEs have been relatively reluctant to adopt. Presently, many African countries have already taken firm steps to address infrastructure and ICT access issues. However, improved access on its own will not result in economic growth. It is important, therefore, to also understand aspects of ICT adoption in developing countries. The purpose of this research was to investigate the factors affecting e-commerce adoption in a typical developing country. Lesotho presented itself as an ideal case to investigate e-commerce adoption amongst SMMEs, specifically within the Lesotho tourism industry. This study, then, provides a detailed explanation of the factors influencing e-commerce uptake in the Lesotho tourism sector. In the extant literature, several studies and a number of generic models and frameworks on technology adoption offer a generalised understanding of technology adoption. None of these, however, provide a contextualised perspective prevalent to businesses in the typical developing country environment. Evidence for the study was collected using interviews with businesses. Data collected via interviews was used to examine the actual adoption issues amongst tourism SMMEs in Lesotho. In addition, where applicable, each organisation's online activities or websites was assessed. The study was premised on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model as its framework. The findings revealed that dimensions of the UTAUT model provided a sensible explanation regarding behavioural intention to adopt and use e-commerce amongst tourism SMMEs within the Lesotho tourism sector. In addition, a new dimension in respect of adoption was identified, viz. national culture. In this regard, masculinity, type of business ownership, and orientation to online purchasing were found to be mitigating factors against e-commerce adoption amongst SMMEs in the Lesotho tourism industry. Finally, an adapted UTAUT model is proposed for further study of e-commerce adoption in a developing country context.

KEYWORDS: e-commerce, adoption, Internet, ICT, SMMEs, UTAUT, developing country

1.   INTRODUCTION
Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become the most effective tool to assist companies in gaining a competitive advantage by attracting customers. According to Norzaidi et al. (2007), the emergence of ICT has contributed to the substantial growth of the

electronic marketplace. Furthermore, Internet access allows e-commerce to be diffused rapidly at a low cost globally. However, Gibbs and Kraemer (2004) point out that many organisations have not realised the potential value brought by e-commerce.

E-commerce offers great opportunities and benefits to businesses in developing countries (Richard et al., 2010) While large organisations have reaped the benefits of the widespread growth of e-commerce, small medium micro-enterprises (SMMEs) have remained at a relatively low adoption level, particularly in developing countries (MacGregor & Kartiwi, 2010). SMMEs in developing countries in particular, being hindered in the uptake of ICTs, have also not realised the full benefits of e-commerce. This is largely due to underlying issues such as the high cost of ICT, inadequate and unreliable infrastructure, as well as lack of policy necessary to encourage and promote competition and growth of the ICT sectors. Currently, many African countries have already initiated steps to address infrastructure and ICT access issues. However, improved access on its own will not result in economic growth. It is, therefore, imperative to more clearly understand issues of ICT adoption in developing countries.

The introduction of e-commerce has been accelerated through the Internet and the World Wide Web, impacting both the tourism industry and the consumer. Through information systems, the tourism industry has expanded, reaching out to both domestic and international travellers with greater cost reductions and enhanced productivity (Buhalis, 2011). According to Mamaghaini (2009), consumers increasingly rely on the Internet to gather travel-related information. In addition to this, technology-enhanced gadgets such as smartphones and GPS have been purchased by consumers to improve their travel and tourism experiences. Furthermore, e-commerce has had a marked effect on the tourism industry, particularly in the automation and distribution channels, including the provision of information regarding travel destinations, location accessibility, hotels, attractions and maps (ibid).

As per the International Communications Union (2013), the rapid growth in the use of the Internet, with billions of people online, is critical to the tourism industry as it is undeniably an effective tool to promote industry opportunities through e-commerce. In addition, the rising usage of the Internet assists the industry in gaining business through e-commerce. In adopting e-commerce, industries are reaching a global population to enhance their businesses (Mamaghaini, 2009). According to Buhalis (2011), however, there are numerous challenges facing smaller tourism businesses in steering their businesses towards the technological benefits inherent in e-commerce.

The tourism sector, from amongst various business sectors, has exhibited growth due to the benefits of e-commerce. According to Salwani et al. (2009:167), e-commerce could determine business performance for many different sectors, including the tourism industry. E-commerce can assist the tourism industry enhance its services precisely because is a service-based sector. Research has shown that large tourism operators have adopted the Internet, using the medium to distribute their products through their websites, improve communication and create alternative distribution channels. Karanasios and Burgess (2008:169) describe the Internet as 'empowering' even for small tourism organisations. It must be noted that in most countries, the tourism sector is often comprised of a large number of smaller operators (Gartner, 2004; Purcell et al., 2002). However, smaller tourism operators traditionally delay in adapting with the technology as compared to their larger counterparts (Karanasios & Burgess, 2008:169). In Africa, especially, studies have shown that few African tourism businesses are embracing e-commerce (Maswera et al., 2008).

Current statistics indicate that there is far less adoption and use of ICT in developing countries as compared to the rest of the world. There are legitimate concerns regarding the adoption of ICT, including that of e-commerce, particularly amongst small businesses, even

though they play a major economic role in developing countries. A number of factors have been linked with Internet adoption amongst both large and small tourism businesses. Small tourism businesses in developing countries have been delayed by several underlying limitations embodied within these countries.

As discussed, the small business sectors in developing countries experiences various challenges in respect of Internet and e-commerce adoption. Therefore, the research context of the study reported herein concerns the adoption of the Internet and the attainment of e-commerce objectives amongst small business, specifically in the Lesotho tourism industry.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1   E-commerce
E-commerce involves undertaking personal and commercial activities by computer and telecommunications networks in both intra-organisational electronic messaging and information management. The wide variety of activities include information exchange and data exchanges between two or more parties conducting business transactions over the Internet in the form of products and services, as well as payments (Kao & Decou, 2003; Quayle, 2002; Cloete, 2002; Chester & Kaura, 1999; Kinuthia & Akinnusi, 2014).

The relationship between customers and suppliers has already been redefined by e-commerce (Karanasios & Burgess, 2008). Furthermore, Boateng and Hinson (2007) stated that e-commerce has brought new opportunities as well as threats for business organisations. Many companies take advantage of opportunities emerging from e-commerce to explore new ways of conducting business effectively within an ever-increasing competitive environment. There has been an extensive review of literature on e-commerce. E-commerce, as explained by Payne (2002:2), encompasses any business use over the Internet (this is also known as *e-business*). For this study, Payne's (2002) definition of e-commerce has been adopted. E-commerce *adoption* as defined by Shen et al. (2004:3) in Al-Fawaeer (2014:145) is "*the average level of utilization of e-commerce solutions or applications in merchandising sourcing, logistics, general resources, management, and decision support areas*". April (2007:31) stated that e-commerce can be viewed as a system that enables organisations to capture, process and present information, to support customers, and to enhance decision making in business. Furthermore, organisations are able to market their products and services through e-commerce and offer services that customers can perform themselves (Lee *et al*., 2003).

Lee et al. (2003) pointed out that e-commerce transforms business operations and relationships between an organisation and its customers. E-commerce not only impacts marketing, but also offers customer retention online within three to five minutes, while the Internet can enhance the brand relationships and corporate reputations (April, 2007:31). Van Iwaarden et al. (2003) added that e-commerce offers advantages such as easy online customer retention, more difficult with traditional online activities, and that the Internet enhances brand relationships and corporate reputations.

2.1.1   Benefits of E-commerce
Many studies have reported that Internet usage for commercial purposes and firms participating in e-commerce activities gained some kind of motivation (Poon & Jevons, 1997). Onojaefe and Bytheway (2005) added that the business and socio-economic development is becoming important due to e-commerce. This underscores the perceived benefits of e-commerce that motivates SMMEs to adopt this technology (Poon & Swatman, 1999), benefits described by Poon and Swatman as long-term or short-term (indirect or direct).

The perceived benefits of e-commerce by most SMMEs such as market access and lower trade costs are only some of apparent reasons for e-commerce adoption (Inusa, 2006). In addition Inusa (2006) suggests that other important benefits considered for small business development include improvement in customer services and improved fluidity of information exchange with customers, staff and business partners.

In summary, the key benefits of e-commerce relevant to small businesses are as follows:

- The primary use of e-commerce is the Internet as a communication medium between customers and suppliers.
- E-commerce increases revenue for organisations.
- Easy access to potential customers is one of the most important benefits of e-commerce.

2.1.2   Factors Influencing E-commerce Adoption

The low usage of e-commerce among SMMEs may be the result of the numerous factors touched on in the preceding section. The relevance of e-commerce and its growth opportunity is explored by understanding factors that affect e-commerce adoption. Factors positively influencing the adoption of e-commerce, as identified by Kurnia (2007:5), are summarised in Figure 1, with a visual demonstration of how each factor influences the other factors.

Figure 1: Factors Affecting E-commerce Adoption (Source: Kurnia, 2007)
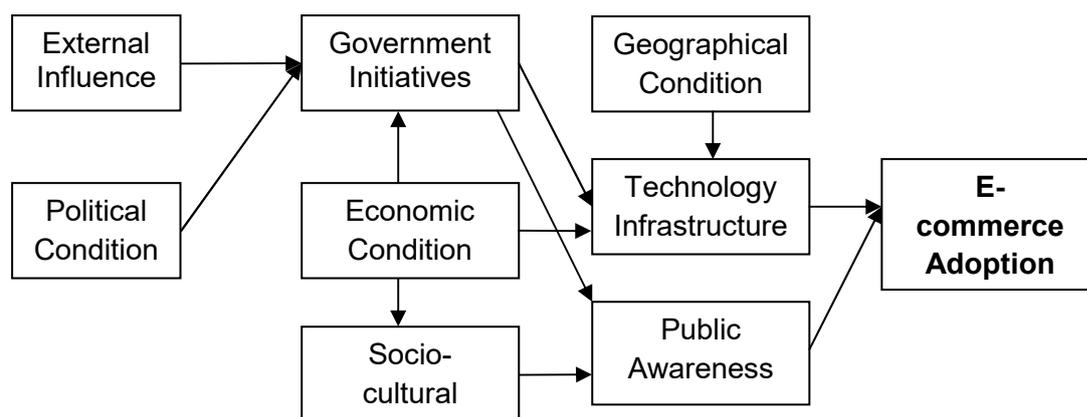
Kurnia (2007: 4) argued that government initiatives are vital in e-commerce adoption and in ICT in general. These initiatives are affected by factors such as a country's political condition, its economic condition and external influences from other countries. Unstable political conditions in a country is another key factor for e-commerce growth, as in this situation, it is even less likely for a government to pay attention to e-commerce development (Dedrick et al., 1995; Kurnia, 2007:4). A country's economic condition also plays a major role in e-commerce adoption, with common indicators of the economic condition of a country being GDP and income per capita. For many developing countries, e-commerce relies heavily on relatively expensive infrastructure (Kurnia, 2007:4).

2.1.3 E-commerce in Developing Countries

What is consistently clear is that the adoption of e-commerce by SMEs, especially in developing countries, still lags detrimentally far behind the adoption of e-commerce by large companies (Rahayu & Day, 2015). Several studies in the extant literature have focused on developing countries on the African continent, examining a fairly wide range of e-commerce adoption issues from both facilitating and inhibiting perspectives.

In Saudi Arabia, a wide range of issues were found to have an impact on e-commerce adoption. AlGhamdi et al. (2011) found that impediments to e-commerce adoption included cultural, business and technical issues, whilst government promotion and support was a key driver. Other impediments to e-commerce adoption in Saudi Arabia included security, fraud and hacking, trust, cyber-law, awareness and perceived usefulness, government e-readiness, and resistance to change (Alqahtani et al., 2012). Security featured prominently in other studies relating to developing countries. Halaweh (2011), for example, argued that in Jordan the operational, organisational, and human aspects related to e-commerce security imposed a consistent barrier to adoption.

Garg and Choeu (2015), assessing adoption in the Pretoria region (South Africa), found that relative advantage, competitive pressure, and information technology knowledge were statistically significant factors influencing the adoption of e-commerce amongst the SME sector. From amongst these, *relative advantage* emerged as the most important factor. They described this as *"the extent to which adopting an innovation is perceived as providing greater organisational benefits than maintaining the status quo"* (Garg & Choeu, 2015:8). The perceived benefits by owners of businesses have also been identified as been important in other studies. In Indonesia, for example, a study amongst the SME sector identified perceived benefits, technology readiness, owners' innovativeness, owners' IT ability and owners' information technology experience as determinant factors influencing e-commerce adoption (Rahayu & Day, 2015).

In Tanzania, Kabanda and Brown (2015) suggested that availability of business resources via foreign ICT companies, the support of top management and the strategic use of mobile phones to avoid ICT infrastructure challenges all promoted a more conducive environment for e-commerce adoption.

The question of the influence of national culture on technology adoption is one that has also received attention in the literature from a technology adoption perspective. Cardon and Marshall (2008) argued that scholars frequently cite national culture as influential given that it is a construct which is difficult to isolate and measure. A multi-country study which included India and Brazil found that national cultural indicators are indeed important in explaining the variability in IT adoption (Bagchi et al., 2003) Other studies have focused on the effect of culture on online purchasing. Sohaib and Kang (2014), examining the influence of culture on online purchasing behaviour in Pakistan and Australia, found that those B2C websites which reflect the cultural environment of online buyers have an influence on purchasing decisions.

2.1.4   *Challenges of E-commerce in Developing Countries*

Several studies have investigated hindrances faced by developing countries in respect of Internet adoption. The adoption of Internet technology and growth of e-commerce can, for example, be hindered by trust and security. In an online environment such as e-commerce, steeped in perceptions of high risk and insecurity, trust is a vital component in building economic relationships (Chiemeke & Evwiekpaefe, 2011:1722). Security may also hamper e-commerce growth due to greater threat of security lapses where information, if stolen by hackers, can result in financial loss to technology adopters and users. Love et al. (2001) added that smaller businesses are less likely to invest in networks and issues related to security concerns.

In addition to these challenges, more reasons why adoption of e-commerce in developing countries is hindered are summarised by Lawrence and Tar (2010:25) as follows: enabling infrastructure factors such as technology, network availability of ICT skills; cost of ICT equipment and networks; security and trust factors; poor distribution associated with online purchases. Moreover, the researchers explained that e-commerce adoption varies

among countries. Figure 2 below shows a framework of barriers hindering e-commerce adoption in developing countries, as depicted by Lawrence and Tar (2010:25).

Figure 2: Framework of Barriers Hindering E-commerce Adoption in Developing Countries (Lawrence & Tar, 2010)
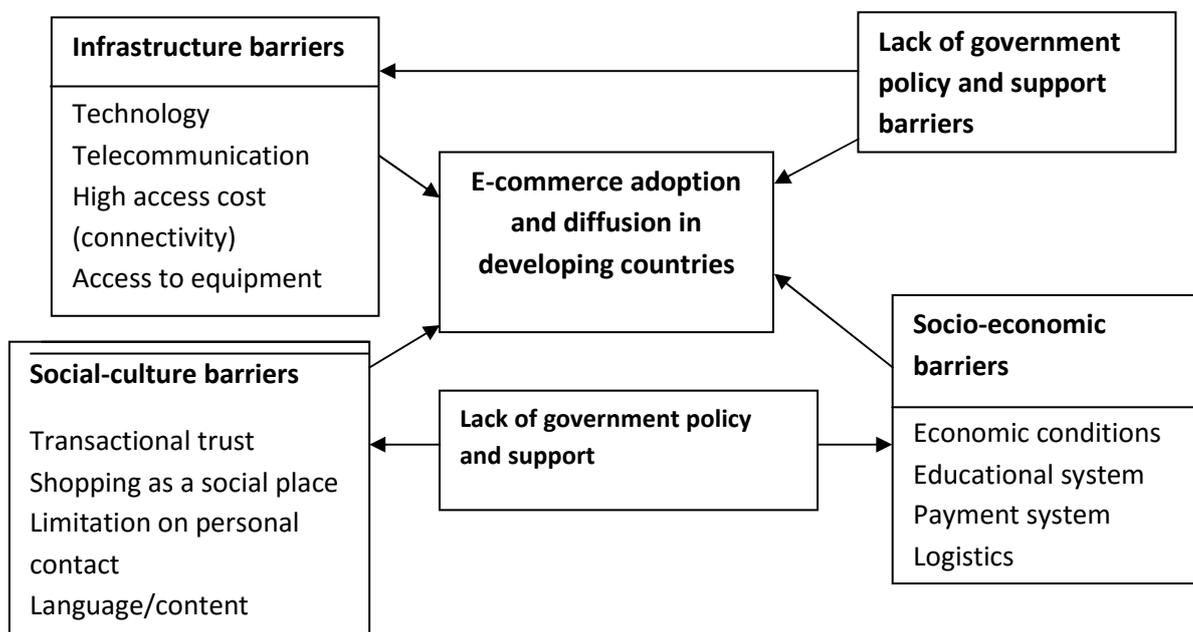
According to Salman (2004:156), for developing countries to establish a basic platform from which to embrace e-commerce, they need to do much more than developed countries. Developing countries must address problems such as lack of e-commerce integration, lack of basic automation, poor management skills as well as somewhat archaic business models from the traditional industrial age. It is not only crucial to address problems at both the macro and micro levels simultaneously, but it is, in fact, ultimately necessary for survival (Salman, 2004:156).

2.1.5   E-commerce Adoption Amongst SMMEs

GholiZadeh et al. (2013) posited that e-commerce usage in businesses differs regardless of the size of the business. These researchers pointed out that even though there is little research on effective e-commerce implementation in SMMEs, there are also potential benefits of e-commerce to small businesses. Jeffcoate et al. (2002) also added that SMMEs fail to make use of e-commerce due to the limited guidance given regarding certain characteristics and circumstances.

Subba Rao and Metts (2003) reported that, globally, SMMEs are making use of e-commerce but are failing to use e-commerce to its fullest potential because of certain barriers. These researchers proposed a stage model for e-commerce development which addresses barriers and facilitators for SMMEs at different stages of development. *Facilitators,* they explained, are anything that promotes positive impact on a certain stage of development; while to the contrary, *barriers* are anything that promotes negative impact. A summary of the facilitators and barriers for e-commerce stage model is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of Facilitators and Barriers for Subba Rao and Metts (2003) E-commerce Stage Model

Facilitators	Barriers
Presence Stage	
Commitment by management, content, price flexibility, access cost for consumers	Financial investment, managers' growth acceptance, technological resistance within the enterprise, telecommunication infrastructure development
Portal Stage	
Changes within the organisation, investment and usability	Development of B2B interfaces, cultural and or language issues
Transaction Stage	
Ability to extend IT technology within company, ability to gain internal IT competencies, B2B partnerships and third party opportunities e-commerce community development	Financial systems, government tax and trade policies, security and privacy, governmental contractual and legal environments, intellectual property treatment
Enterprises Integration	
Competencies of internal staff, business process integration and control	Technology availability, regional and global technology diffusion, international standards for trade and transaction processing, development of e-markets and network complexity

2.2   Technology Adoption

A study about e-commerce adoption revealed that previous research which focused on technology-adoption in general is an important consideration. Technology adoption is synonymous with the use of computers and the Internet and is a vital vehicle for allowing businesses and people to participate in this rapid changing world to gain competitive advantage (Van Donk, 2008). With the infiltration of the Internet into today's business environment, many organisations are aiming to be competitive through the implementation of information technology (Chong et al., 2014:121) In addition Chong et al. (2014:121) pointed out that the adoption of technology can benefit businesses through distribution of information and knowledge, advancements in communications, speedy response, and reduction in costs such as for travelling.

Technology adoption involves the choices an individual makes to either accept or reject a particular innovation (Straub, 2009:626). An individual's decision to adopt a particular technology, while involving an extensive series of multiple considerations, impacts business as well as everyday life (Barron *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, it is vital for the individual to understand the repercussions of choosing to (or not to) adopt and to be aware of influences within the social context for the process of adopting (Straub, 2009:625). In previous years, social learning had much influence in the decision to adopt technology, but the growth of the Internet, major usage of television and radio, and the influx of cellular phones have all expanded technological possibilities worldwide. Adoption of technology is influenced by individuals observing others adopting a particular innovation. Thus, an individual's experience of using technology may influence others, whether successful or not (Bandura, 2001, in Straub, 2009). Technology adoption has several models and theories, with some commonalities across diffusion, which are discussed individually in the subsequent section.

2.3   The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model

Following the consideration of a number of theoretical frameworks, the UTAUT model (Venkatesh et al.*,* 2003) was identified as the most appropriate framework for this particular study. UTAUT is an integration of various technology acceptance models which focus on different technology adoption issues. Venkatesh et al. (2003:446) argued that out of the eight models, UTAUT is the predominate model for explaining user intention of Information System (IS) and also for determining the acceptance of new technologies.

The UTAUT model was identified as a useful underpinning framework for this study as the objective of the study was to understand adoption of e-commerce amongst SMMEs in the Lesotho tourism industry. The unit of observation for the study was the owner-manager of small tourism businesses. The suitability of the model was also premised on the fact that it could be amended or adjusted to suit the context of the study (Dasguta & Gupta, 2010:4; Chiemeke & Evwiekpaefe, 2011:1719).

In this study specifically, the research relies on the model's ability to understand behavioural intention. Furthermore, the UTAUT model, unlike other technology models, focuses more on characteristics within an organisation to shed light on the external factors relating to the organisation. The UTAUT model also focuses on individuals' technology behaviours and system usage in the working environment (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Carter, 2000:305).

In relation to the aim of the study, and based on the extant literature, this model was assessed as highly likely to provide a fuller understanding of technology adoption. Moreover, the independent constructs of the UTAUT model relate to the individual characteristics, and an organisation's size and structure. Therefore, UTAUT's comprehensiveness, its reliability and its validity were the bases on which the study was conducted to investigate e-commerce adoption amongst SMMEs in the Lesotho tourism sector.

2.4   Lesotho Overview

Lesotho is a landlocked, mountainous country situated within the geo-political borders of South Africa, with a population of 1.9 million, a low gross national Income (GNI), low gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and a high level of poverty (IST Africa, 2014). The country's economy, based on subsistence agriculture, is dependent on South Africa for jobs, particularly in the mining sector as well as goods and services. The country also depends on the manufacturing of farm products such as milling, leather and canning to provide the main source of income. Science and Technology (S&T) infrastructure for industry and commerce is relatively poor, especially outside the capital city, Maseru, and other urban centres (IST Africa, 2014).

2.4.1   SMMEs in the Lesotho Tourism Industry

Tourism SMMEs in Lesotho are the particular unit of analysis under investigation in this research. Small businesses in the Lesotho tourism industry consist of many companies with various activities ranging from tour operators, cafés to curio shops. The majority of tourism enterprises in Lesotho are categorised as small micro-enterprises (with fewer than five employees). Tourism businesses, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2012:12), currently comprise between two and four percent of Lesotho's economy. SMMEs have been identified as major contributors to the work force with their diverse activities, and, interestingly, they are often women-run businesses (Small Business Project, 2008:64). The majority of Lesotho's tourism SMMEs are located in Maseru, as this is the capital city and the only business hub within this small country.

2.4.2 Overview of ICT and E-commerce in Lesotho

Lesotho ICT infrastructure is currently low, with approximately 3% of the total access to telecommunications services of the country's population for fixed telephone lines and just 20% for mobile phones (Maphephe et al., 2014: 30). Personal computers are primarily confined to urban areas and estimated to be fewer than 30,000 in 2000. The pace at which Basotho[1] absorb technology and systems literacy will determine how quickly they apply and benefit from rapidly emerging technologies. ICT development has to be accorded top priority in order to catch up with national and international trading partners, with urgent financial and infrastructural implications for schools, training and research institutions as well as for businesses and government (Thabane, 2005).

In 2005, the Lesotho government, through the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology, formulated an Information Communication Technology (ICT) policy entitled 'ICT Policy for Lesotho' to provide vision and strategy for Basotho to become a fully integrated information society. The policy's role in information technology is to unite the government, civil society and the general public (Thabane, 2005). Key areas highlighted in the policy include e-commerce, e-government, health, education and human resources development, tourism and the environment, as well as gender and youth (Thabane, 2005:10).

As stated in the Lesotho ICT policy (Thabane, 2005), e-commerce is acknowledged by the Lesotho government as having the ability to do the following: increase business opportunities, decrease transaction costs, proliferate the quality of life for the Basotho nation and assist SMMEs to exploit new opportunities in our new global economy. The government has developed the ICT policy to enable Lesotho to achieve its development goals in using ICT to stimulate new opportunities, improve service delivery and assuage poverty in the Basotho nation.

According to the Lesotho ICT policy, e-commerce poses tremendous growth opportunities for businesses in Lesotho. Most importantly, it enables local businesses to have access to potential markets globally while reducing the barriers to entry for small and medium sized enterprises (SMMEs) and lowering overhead and marketing costs. The policy further stipulates that for e-commerce to be effective, private sector and government should work together:

- endorsing laws that address computer crime prevention, protection of privacy, intellectual property rights, copyright and security measures for online transactions;
- encouraging businesses to implement electronic solutions; and
- working with both businesses and consumers to develop a consumer protection framework for e-commerce.

E-commerce usage in Lesotho is still in its infancy stage, with plenty of room to grow. Therefore, this study will explore the factors that might hinder or prohibit the adoption of electronic commerce applications among SMMEs in the Lesotho tourism sector.

3.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Given the dearth of empirical studies on e-commerce in Lesotho, an interpretive approach was employed in this study. The study was limited to Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, as most tourism businesses are based in this city, the country's business hub, as well as to reduce travelling costs and save time. Random sampling was employed in the selection of respondents. Random sampling, according to Babbie and Mouton (2008:189), is defined as a random selection from a larger population. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted around specific themes based on the UTAUT model, with tourism stakeholders, entrepreneurs and individuals from the Maseru district, to obtain data in respect of e-

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[1] Basotho is the term used to refer to the citizens of Lesotho.

commerce adoption within small micro medium enterprises. The interviews, recorded with a digital voice recorder, took place in participants' offices. Interviews lasted from 10 to 45 minutes and were carried out in English and Sesotho. Table 2 provides an overview of the demographics of the interviewees.

Table 2: Demographics of Interviewees

Interviewee position in business	Gender	Approximate age (years)	Experience (years in business)	Industry sector	Using e-commerce
Manager	Male	40s	10	Accommodation	NO
Owner	Female	20s	8	Accommodation	YES
Supervisor	Female	40s	25	Accommodation	NO
Travel consultant	Male	30s	7	Travel Agency	YES
Manager	Female	40s	22	Travel Agency	YES
Travel consultant	Male	30s	12	Travel Agency	YES
Tourism Officer	Female	50s	35	Travel Agency	NO
Manager	Female	60s	40	Handicraft shop	NO
Employee	Female	20s	6	Transport services	NO
Travel consultant	Male	20s	9	Travel Agency	NO
Manager	Female	60s	30	Accommodation	NO
Owner	Male	50s	28	Travel Agency	YES
Supervisor	Female	40s	32	Travel Agency	YES
Front Desk Manager	Female	30s	12	Accommodation	NO
Receptionist	Male	30s	10	Accommodation	YES

An interview schedule, used as a guideline for the discussions, consisted of a series of questions to guide the interviews, the objective of which was to obtain a better understanding of the various factors having a bearing on adoption of e-commerce amongst SMMEs in the Lesotho tourism industry. The interview protocol was designed as follows:

- Section A comprised questions to gather contextual information in respect of the business and the interviewee.
- Section B comprised the heart of the interview. Open-ended questions were aligned to each key component of the UTAUT model.
- Section C was comprised of a single question so as to allow respondents to discuss any other e-commerce adoption issues which they deemed pertinent.

The interview was semi-structured and interviewees were allowed to wander outside the boundaries of the questions to illustrate significant points they felt were important. Furthermore, the researcher did not impose on the participants' views, but intervened only where necessary to prompt the interviewees if their responses were unforthcoming or vague.

As part of the data collection strategy, records of observations and field notes were used in conjunction with a reflective diary during the research process. In addition, secondary data was gathered from business documents, where available, as these documents often provided a fuller understanding of the context of each interview transcript.

The interview transcripts were subjected to qualitative content analysis, facilitated by Qualitative Content Analyser (QCA) software. The process began with reading the interview transcripts. As per the QCA functionality, a sentence or group of sentences were assigned meanings in the first instance. These were labelled as first order constructs in QCA. Each of the latter was then grouped into categories which aligned to the UTAUT model. Thus, first order constructs populated each of the categories. The frequency of categories were reassessed and linked according to similarities and relevance. More than twenty categories emerged from the data, which we then grouped into ten higher order categories (Table 3). These categories were structured as themes which are discussed in the next section.

Table 3: Linking of Categories to Themes

| Higher Order Categories	Grouped concepts	Themes				
		Performance Expectancy	Effort Expectancy	Social Influence	Facilitating Conditions	National Culture
Performance Expectancy	e-commerce useful, enables quick job performance, safes time, less travel to clients	✓	✓			
Interaction with e-commerce	Interaction, easy to use, skillful, clear to understand, effective	✓	✓			
Social Influence	Management support, successful competitors, beliefs, attitude, behavior, customer influence			✓		✓
Techno-logical Resources	Technical support, software and hardware, e-commerce knowledge, limited resources, skills, education, inadequate internet, IT specialist, internet cost, technology				✓	
Behavioral Intention to use	Future use, adopt		✓			
Use Behavior	Marketing use, communication use, e-mail, technology importance, information search, information access	✓	✓			✓
Lack of technology	Limited education, awareness, limited resources, technology use, management lack of knowledge, use of e-commerce, technology use awareness		✓		✓	
E-commerce Trust/ Security	e-commerce safety, lack of internet security, lack of internet trust		✓		✓	
Tele-communication Infra-structure	Poor internet connection, cost of implementing, internet cost, less access to computers, lack of technology equipment,				✓	
Cost of technology	Cost of technology equipment, internet cost				✓	
Government Initiatives	Government policies and legislations		✓			

4.   RESEARCH FINDINGS

The UTAUT model served as a framework for the empirical investigation and with the results at hand, the initial framework was revisited and adapted to align with the outcomes of the data analysis.

Several factors that affected adoption of e-commerce technologies within Lesotho tourism businesses were identified through the data analysis, factors which included the following: performance expectancy and the impact this would have on their businesses; the availability of government policies and telecommunications infrastructure to support organisations' e-commerce uptake; and national culture's impact on managerial practices. These factors are presented in Figure 3 and their relevance to e-commerce adoption was derived through the analysis of the empirical data. The adoption factors depended on a variety of both internal and external factors which were found to be more influential as per the UTAUT model. The following factors were found to be influential in respect of e-commerce adoption within SMME tourism enterprises:

- Performance Expectancy
- Effort Expectancy
- Social Influence
- Facilitating Conditions
- National Culture

Figure 3: Factors Affecting E-commerce Adoption in Lesotho
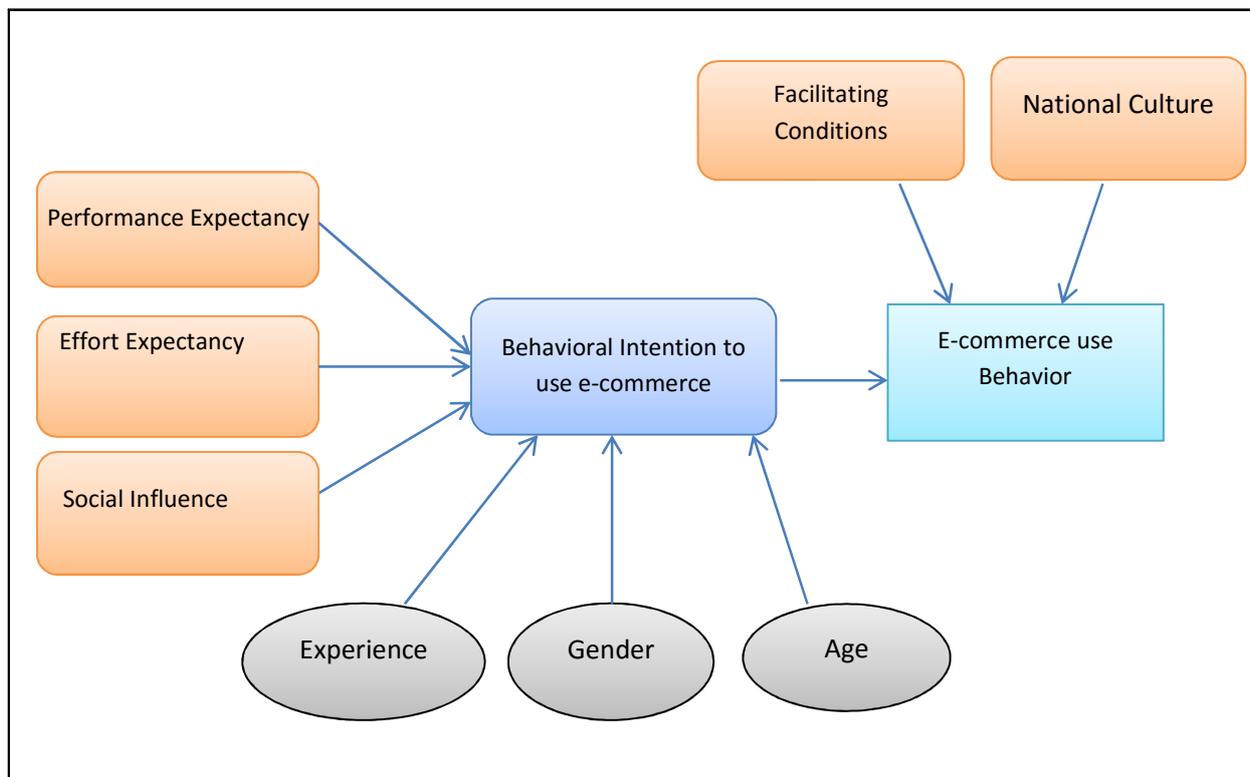
The resultant framework is designed to depict the key relationships between determining technology adoption factors. The framework portrays determining factors relevant specifically to e-commerce adoption amongst SMMEs in the Lesotho tourism sector.

4.1   Moderating Factors

A moderating factor modifies the influence of an independent variable on a dependent variable. For this research, the moderating factors in the acceptance of technology theories as per the UTAUT model are based on gender, age and experience (Venkatesh et al., 2003). These were considered important when interpreting the interview results.

Gender: Gender relates to the sexual orientation of informants, either male or female. It was found that older women tend to struggle more with new technologies because they felt they were difficult to learn and use. Evidence was depicted from younger interviewees in their twenties that technology would be easy to use, as they were generally more knowledgeable and skilled in technology.

Age: Age refers to how old the informant is, represented by number of years. The evidence showed that age influenced all of the four constructs of the model: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions. For this study, ages ranged between 20 to 60 years.

Experience: Experience was associated with the number of years the businesses made use of ICT for conducting business.

4.2   UTAUT Constructs and Other Factors

Key constructs of the UTAUT model were used as a frame for probing the data. In addition to this, other factors which were deemed as not in alignment with the typical UTAUT constructs were also identified.

4.2.1   Performance Expectancy

Performance expectancy refers to the extent to which a technology user attains better job performance from using new technologies, as indicated by Venkatesh et al. (2003) in the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). In terms of the findings of this research, this UTAUT dimension can be confirmed as one of the key determinants in the model as well as the empirical research conducted. This dimension was found to be less important by the majority of businesses. However, it showed that there was appreciation of e-commerce usage. Businesses accepted that their businesses should adopt new technologies such as e-commerce, primarily as there are evolving markets for the tourism industry. It was noted that performance expectancy offers quicker job performance, greater productivity and time savings. For example, one of the interviewees was quite candid in his response:

> *"To be honest, working with e-commerce is one of the best things in my job. It enables me to do my job fast and it is useful in our kind of business because our business is dependent on it".*

According to the analysis, performance expectancy is based on how e-commerce helps technology users perform their jobs, how they approach tasks, and most importantly, on benefits that businesses acquire by engaging with e-commerce. In the e-commerce environment, businesses identified communications and market expansion as factors mostly relied upon with on online services. The following excerpts from the interview transcripts depict this:

> *"It is easy for customers to find products and to select products. There is no need for customer to visit a store for service, they can do it themselves".*

> *"E-commerce can provide faster buying/selling way and it is easy to find products. Customers can easily select products from different providers without moving around physically".*

Furthermore, it was indicative that businesses had a positive perspective on opportunities generated by e-commerce, with the majority of tourism businesses agreeing that they relied heavily on the Internet for daily business operations, although with fewer e-commerce activities in practice. Thus, performance expectancy was regarded as an e-commerce adoption enabler as it assisted in task accomplishment and in increasing job performance. The evidence supports the notion that the use of the Internet saves times and is financially beneficial as there was no need to travel to suppliers and clients. It was further pointed out that the Internet enabled easy access to information and research.

4.2.2   Effort Expectancy
Effort expectancy refers to the amount of effort that SMMEs expect to learn and operate e-commerce. Effort expectancy can also be described as perceived ease of use, according to (Venkatesh *et al.,* 2003). This factor plays an important key role in supporting e-commerce use. How technology users perceive and interact with e-commerce is vital. Several businesses referred to e-commerce as being easy to use and clear to understand. Even though the evidence shows that e-commerce is easy to use, some of the businesses in the travel and accommodation sector admitted that it requires training for proper utilisation. Thus, the more training on a system, the greater the benefit derived from it. The following interview extract elucidates the interaction of e-commerce by businesses:

> *"It is easy to use because I have a proper training to use this system I just showed you. However I think when you were to use because you don't have any training in this, it is going to be difficult for you to use as you do not know what it is all about".*

In addition, it was found that e-commerce influenced tourism businesses on the intention to adopt e-commerce. Therefore, effort expectancy was considered an important factor in the planning and implementation of e-commerce.

4.2.3   Social Influence
Social influence also has an impact on an individual's behaviour. In this study, businesses' behaviour towards e-commerce utilisation rather than individual intention was the focus. Therefore, the focus of this study was on the response of tourism enterprises to social influence as well as their adoption of new technologies. Issues related to attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of the informants in the tourism e-commerce environment comprised the main aspects of social influence. Thus, customer expectations were found to influence the decision of whether or not a business adopted e-commerce. Within the realm of customer influence, low levels of customer trust was found to be a major concern to the tourism businesses participating in this research. Customer awareness was also found to be an important factor: the businesses acknowledged it as vital for customers to be aware of e-commerce services in the industry. Related to social influence, competitiveness in the travel and tourism industry also influenced adoption uptake. Thus, a firm's technological competency and its ICT infrastructure reflected its ability to compete in the market. For a business to thrive in the market, it seeks a competitive advantage through products and services. In addition, influences from industry leaders, competition from other businesses and target market size were also exerting influences, impacting a business's decision to innovate.

SMMEs revealed that there was still a lack of awareness, and insufficient education and skills regarding the effective harnessing of Internet technologies for business benefit. Most businesses showed awareness of how to overcome challenges arising from using the Internet and understanding its importance. The following interview quotes confirmed the above findings:

> *"I personally think there is a need for e-commerce education. The only people who use it and are well off and are the highly educated . . . but I think the coming generation will be much more aware of it".*

> *"E-commerce awareness in developed countries forces traders to provide online services. Retailers in those countries are well equipped with technology. For example (in Lesotho) how many businesses offer this? Very few... the reason is that businesses go where the customers are and believe me, the tourist here is unaware of e-commerce".*

It was indicated that through proper training and education, SMMEs can overcome the challenges associated with using the Internet. Then, SMMEs would have necessary skills to make optimal use of technology. An organisation's IT deployment requires skills and technical staff. This encourages higher technology acceptance and improves performance. For businesses to utilise e-commerce information systems, skilled staff with technical capabilities and relevant qualifications were needed. This study discovered that travel and tourism businesses in Lesotho acknowledge that human resources and ICT competency were important to the success of e-commerce adoption. Both human resources and ICT resources were highlighted as important for the decision of e-commerce adoption facilitation, with internal factors including related technology resources, and managerial as well as organisational factors. Inadequate availability of technology and human resources in businesses pose problems in executing e-commerce in Lesotho. Qualified and skilled staff is needed by businesses to develop, handle and maintain e-commerce systems.

4.2.4   *Facilitating Conditions*
Findings were indicative that e-commerce success was dependent on technological resources. The findings have indicated that most SMMEs realised and have become keenly aware of the barriers hindering e-commerce adoption. Furthermore, lack of education and skills impacted on the businesses internal factors to practice e-commerce. Additionally, high costs of technological equipment were a concern for implementing e-commerce. Further reasons surrounding low adoption of e-commerce by SMMEs in Lesotho related to external factors such as government initiatives, telecommunications infrastructure and geographic location. A major concern pertaining to the influence to use e-commerce in the tourism industry was the lack of government initiatives. There was evidence that government has yet to get involved and support the SMMEs in adopting e-commerce applications. The government of Lesotho should stipulate legislation to govern transactions. Moreover, there is still a lack of explicit law to regulate e-commerce, necessary because users have trust issues regarding online transactions and are unaware of who accepts the responsibility in the event of disputes arising against loss. For instance, the following comments were offered by some of the businesses:

> *"I think government authorities should get involved a lot...let me talk about legislation making laws and policies that govern the management of e-commerce and the industry...This is just repetition of what I said earlier that*

government initiative such as implementing policies for e-commerce is important but we still do not have a lot of support from government".

"...I also think internet security is a barrier and our government should implement or have strategies regarding this…".

"There are no government policies concerning e-commerce, such as internet security projects or programs that have been implemented".

This was followed by lack of financial and telecommunication infrastructures, which managers deemed as inadequate to motivate the adoption of e-commerce. To support the claim above the following examples illustrate that:

".....Infrastructure also contributes to this because sometimes you find that internet connectivity is very poor because you will find that during peak time we experience a low or slow connectivity or even have no internet connection at all".

4.2.5   National Culture
There were some concepts which emerged from the evidence which did not link into the broadly defined categories aligned to the UTAUT model. Through introspection of these issues, and reflection on the literature (e.g. Bagchi et al., 2003; Cardon & Marshall, 2008; Sohaib & Kang, 2014) and the other findings in this study, this group of concepts was categorised as "National Culture". Thus this finding posits that *national culture* has an influence on e-commerce adoption decision making.

According to Leidner & Kayworth (2006) national culture refers to shared patterns of behaviour between people or a country. In Lesotho tourism is not just influenced by the government. It is also influenced by other international businesses such as the World Bank, the United Nations and international tourism organisations. Notwithstanding, it is important to recognize that e-commerce adoption is also grounded by traditional Basotho socio-economic business practices such as agriculture, livestock, manufacturing and mining. A rich explanation of Lesotho cultural values that affected decision-making in respect of the adoption of technologies such as e-commerce within tourism enterprises was depicted from the interviews. Though the study sought to explore factors of the UTAUT model and its alignment with e-commerce adoption amongst tourism SMMEs, national experience, the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of the informants were depicted from the evidence. Effects of national culture were found from the informants' opinions, indirect reactions and direct quotes towards technology. The evidence indicated that decisions of adopting e-commerce were influenced by various cultural factors related to masculinity, type of business ownership, and the sense of marketing strategies.

4.2.5.1 Influence of Masculinity
Masculinity according to Hofstede (1980, 2001) refers to a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct. Hofstede (2001) posits that men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.

The majority of small tourism businesses in Lesotho were owned by women. Women in countries where masculinity is embedded in the cultural orientation may thus not be as assertive as their male counterparts. This underscores an important issue in business management style. Although Basotho women are increasingly being empowered to join the

labour force they still do not hold senior positions in the labour force. In addition, although tourism SMMEs in Lesotho are women owned, it was found that men influence and have power on the decision to adopt and use new technology in the work place. Nevertheless, Basotho women are beginning to be noticed in business regarding the contribution they bring in the country's economic growth through their involvement in business.

4.2.5.2 Business Ownership: Nepotism
Nepotism relates to showing favouritism in business and politics to relatives or friends particularly by giving them jobs (Huseyin & Mustafa, 2008). Most small tourism businesses tend to be family oriented businesses in which performance criteria are linked to family succession. The challenge thus is that family run businesses may inadvertently have a reduced focus on competitiveness and competency as indicated in the following interview extract:

> *"Most tourism businesses especially travel agencies are family businesses, and are quite backward in their use of websites for promoting services. Usually the owner is the founder and fully controls the business. Sometimes relatives are employed and may not be able to make the right decisions to develop the businesses."*

Because most tourism businesses are family owned, it was found that nepotism within Lesotho businesses was a negative influence. This showed that staffing strategies lead to a lack of effective management which hinders the ability to make right decisions on issues like e-commerce adoption, as indicated in the following excerpt from the interview evidence:

> *"Employees and managers are not nominated for positions because of their qualifications, experience and capability. It is in rare cases that qualifications and experience are considered. But relationships play an important role here. Significantly the owner and managers' decisions do not maximise potential benefits for their firms and that includes technology".*

Furthermore, it was found that family-owned and operated businesses had a 'risk-averse' business management approach. Consequently, there is a preference to keep business approaches inward looking. The influences of the broader business sector, especially where modern technology is concerned, were not a consideration in seeking to either expand or complement practice with the adoption of modern technologies. One explanation of this is that where families are business-oriented, they are, in the main, influenced by traditional Basotho socio-economic practices in areas such as agriculture and livestock, which historically is not associated with the emerging technological influences of the Internet era.

4.2.5.3 Marketing Strategies
The buying behaviour of Basotho was also another factor that influences marketing strategies and the associated decision to use e-commerce. Basotho prefer scrutinising a product or, in the case of services, to discuss the product sale with the business owner before purchasing. They prefer face-to-face interactions when conducting business transactions. When making a purchase, a final decision is influenced by the opportunity to discuss their tourism purchases. This was due to level of trust that they can gain from the business owner and the resultant perception of the quality of the product as indicated in the following interview excerpt:

> *"Basotho prefer to see what they are buying, not just hear about a product. Consumers go to the agents to meet the agent, talk about their plans, build a trusting relationship and negotiate prices"*

The following interview extract illustrates the influence of national culture and customer demand on e-commerce:

> *"From my experience, selling and marketing is all about word of mouth. Most of our customers like to discuss their preferences at length, asking many questions and getting reasonable answers about their concerns. Actually, offering e- commerce would help but still we need to make face to face contact with our customers because of the personal touch and that's the way we like it".*

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that Lesotho cultural values affect decision-making in the adoption of e-commerce amongst tourism enterprises. These cultural attitudes and norms influence e-commerce adoption in tandem with factors such as trust, awareness and educational background amongst business stakeholders.

The finding concerning national culture is considered important in this research because of the issues affecting adoption such as norms, gender, tradition and beliefs. It is clearly evident that national culture plays a role in decision-making, in user behaviour and in business practices. In fact, the cultural factors identified in this study explain the lagging use of e-commerce in Lesotho.

It is possible that over time this will gradually change. As indicated in the interviews, some of the informants mentioned that higher levels of e-commerce awareness will be realised through the maturation of the younger generation of Basotho. This new generation, with the associated increasing levels of technology literacy, would constitute an improved enabler of the diffusion of e-commerce.

4.3   Inhibiting Factors Relating to E-commerce Adoption

With regards to factors which may be hindering e-commerce adoption, the following issues emerged regarding the level of acceptance to practice e-commerce:

- **Education and awareness:** Awareness seemed to be at low levels because e-commerce is still relatively new. The implication from this is that people still need to be educated on exactly what e-commerce is, and the benefits thereof. Education, then, was observed to affect factors relevant to SMMEs behavioural intention to use e-commerce.
- **Cost**: It was observed that SMMEs were in agreement that the cost of computer equipment and Internet connection was too high, thereby making cost an inhibiting factor for businesses to adopt e-commerce.
- **Accessibility**: SMMEs indicated that their business operations relied highly on Internet facilities. In addition, it was found that telecommunication infrastructures were inadequate and unreliable, although some SMMEs tended to disagree. However, access to telecommunications infrastructure is an inhibiting factor for the majority.
- **Government role:** The government of Lesotho has not done enough to support the use of the Internet by tourism businesses. The inference from this is that businesses in general anticipate government to facilitate policies and infrastructure perspectives to promote Internet access and uptake.

- **Organisation size:** The size of an organisation played a distinct role in influencing e-commerce adoption. Larger enterprises were likely to use technology as they may also have a larger trading capacity, contrary to their smaller counter parts.
- **National culture:** Culture could impede or motivate the adoption of new technologies. Issues relating to business recruitment processes, purchasing behaviour as well as beliefs also contributed to influencing decisions on e-commerce uptake.
- **Perception of benefits:** SMMEs have realised the importance of e-commerce and have agreed that they can benefit from it. This implies that businesses had a positive perspective about potential benefits derived by e-commerce.
- **External factors:** It was also observed that factors such as financial infrastructure, trust, government initiatives, and telecommunication infrastructure affected SMMEs ability to adopt Internet and e-commerce. These were the external pressures affecting e-commerce uptake.

5.   CONCLUSION

The study found that because of the low dispersion of e-commerce throughout the Lesotho tourism businesses, there was lack of awareness on various Internet activities that businesses could apply in their e-commerce practices. Moreover, the study indicated that even those tourism SMMEs in Lesotho that were partially using e-commerce technologies did not attain the fully anticipated benefits. This research, by employing qualitative research methods to investigate e-commerce adoption in the Lesotho tourism industry, applied the UTAUT model as a foundation to more fully understand the acceptance and use (or lack) of e-commerce in the Lesotho tourism sector. The findings of the study suggested that some constructs of the model were able to provide a judicious explanation regarding behavioural intention to adopt and use e-commerce.

The focus of the study was to identify factors affecting the adoption of e-commerce and to understand why adoption was limited in the tourism industry in Lesotho. It was revealed in the study that the majority of tourism businesses in the Lesotho tourism industry were unaware of potential benefits to be gained by e-commerce. However, e-commerce was regarded as a possibility in the future, even if currently not applied by businesses and the tourism industry. Findings suggested that government initiatives and telecommunications infrastructure were prohibiting businesses from adopting e-commerce. Some other barriers hindering e-commerce adoption included internal factors such as limited human resources, technological resources and an organisation's size. Also, the delay on e-commerce adoption within tourism enterprises is dependent on the owner/manager, as they are the business decision makers. But a lack of awareness amongst the participants was revealed. This shows that education and training should be provided for e-commerce to be more widely implemented. For e-commerce implementation to occur in the Lesotho tourism industry, several issues need to be addressed, including the fact that trust and security for e-commerce activities should be supported by the government, with specific policies reassuring consumers of online transaction safety. Other factors that were relevant to the delay of e-commerce uptake by the Lesotho tourism SMMEs included the national culture and facilitating conditions. It was further suggested that factors such as masculinity, nepotism, technological resources, business size and high costs were found to be major hindrances to businesses e-commerce adoption. Thus, a further study on these dimensions, based on the adoption framework (Figure 3) is warranted to understand in more detail their direct impact.

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INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date:
Name of interviewee:
Position:
Company:

PRELIMINARIES
Introduce key terms to the interviewees:
- **E-comme**rce is selling of goods and services over the Internet. It is also the use of Internet in any way that improves a businesses' relationship with its customers and suppliers.
- **Examples of use of e-commerce in a tourism business:** Booking a hotel room, an airline ticket or bus ticket using computers (Internet).
- **Examples of e-commerce applications used by businesses in the Tourism industry are:** Booking systems (booking cars, hotels, air-tickets) which interact with major supplier systems, travel itinerary management systems, e-mail, and direct marketing systems.

A. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE FIRM AND THE RESPONDENT

1. Provide a brief background to this business (e.g., owner, when founded, employee number, decision-making process, annual turnover, etc.).

2. What is your business experience: In general, and then in this particular business

B. UTAUT MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Performance Expectancy
- Can you describe how the use of e-commerce helps you in your job?
- NON USERS: How would you expect the use of e-commerce to help in your job?

2. Effort Expectancy
- When using e-commerce in your job, can you please describe your interaction with e-commerce? How easy is it to use e-commerce?
- NON USERS: If you had to use e-Commerce in this business, how easy do you think it will be?

3. Facilitating conditions
- Please describe the support offered by your business to use e-commerce?
- What support do you think is needed, but isn't in place?
- NON USERS: What support would you expect to be in place in the business for you to be able to use e-commerce?

4. Social Influence
- When looking at other businesses offering the same services as yours, is it important to you whether they use e-commerce in their business?
- Who would you consider to be a successful tourism business? Do you think they are using e-commerce?

5. Behavioral Intention
- How do you intend to use e-commerce in the future? Explain.
- NON USERS: Given your understanding about e-commerce, would you intend to adopt and use e-Commerce. Explain why.

6. Attitude Towards Use
- Do you think the growth of e-commerce is important to this business? Why?
- Please describe the pros (advantages) and cons (disadvantages) of using e-commerce?

C. OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING THE ADOPTION OF E-COMMERCE

- What barriers are there which in your view have made it difficult to implement e-commerce?

End.