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A research on innovation in small and medium-sized enterprises in tourism industry: case of travel agencies operating in Antalya

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Abstract

There has been a growing focus on innovation in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in tourism industry. Innovation has been playing an increasing role in hospitality industry, and is especially important for the SMEs as well as travel agencies. However, innovation research has been applied to SMEs in hospitality industry on a limited extent. This paper discusses various definitions of innovation and innovation approaches in the context of SMEs in tourism industry. The objective of the paper is to reveal innovation activities of the travel agencies as one of the SMEs in tourism industry. In addition, the paper aims to reveal the relationship between innovation and the operating age of travel agency, and total personnel number of travel agency. To this end, a questionnaire was prepared. Questionnaires were employed to travel agencies operating in Antalya Province which has been known as the capital city of tourism in Turkey. Results have shown that improvements in the production process are so important in the survival of travel agencies. There is a significant relationship between ‘service innovation’ and ‘operating age’. There is also a significant relationship between ‘organizational innovation’ and ‘number of personnel’.

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1. Introduction

Over the past twenty-five years, management scholars have paid significant attention to innovation and product development. During this period, several powerful explanations of innovation have emerged.

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Many scholars have concluded that traditional, product-focused theories of innovation are applicable to services (Guile et al, 1988a). While academicians have kept their interests in innovation, much of their focus has been on manufacturing industry (Anderson and Tushman, 1990; Benner and Tushman, 2003; Christensen, 1997; Henderson and Clark, 1990; Utterback, 1994; Tushman and Anderson, 1986; Tushman and Murmann, 1998) with dramatic researches for the theoretical and conceptual advancement of innovation in hospitality and tourism. Tourism industry structure is generally composed of SMEs, and there is not enough research about how SMEs in the tourism industry innovate. Although several theorists and scholars have studied the management of hospitality and services (Sasser et al, 1991) and the role of technology and innovation in the hospitality and service industry (Quinn, 1992; Quinn & Paquette, 1990), few have catered the issue of innovation in the hospitality, tourism and especially SMEs in the tourism industry (Barras, 1990; Sundbo, 1997; Tether, 2003). To a significant extent, innovation studies in hospitality and tourism industry still rely upon quantitative and qualitative researches where impact of innovation is clarified and explained from manifold views and where rigid descriptions are less prevalent (Hjalager, 2010). The issue of innovation in travel agencies as SMEs in the tourism industry remains relatively immature with a divergence of opinions.

Innovation has an important role on the changing of market conditions and competitive tools, and achievement of competitive strategies. According to Higgins (1995) the secret of competitive advantage is innovation. As it is seen, innovation in SMEs is important for industries; however empirical studies on the issue of innovation in SMEs in tourism industry are relatively insufficient. The aim of the research, therefore, is to examine innovation activities of travel agencies as one of the SMEs in tourism industry. In addition, the paper aims to examine the relationship between innovation and the operating age of travel agency, and total personnel number of travel agency. In conclusion part, some advices and future implications are given.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Innovation in SMEs: A Brief Review of Researches About SMEs Innovation

Many researchers (Rotwell, 1991; Joyce et al., 1994; Moore, 1993) suggested that innovation activities of SMEs are important determinant of these SMEs' successes. However, according to Storey (1994) SMEs in all industries do not innovate. Act and Audretsch (1998) examined the innovation in SMEs in the United States. They suggested that Research and Development (R&D) is positively correlated with innovation. According to Tether (1998), the impact of innovation on sales is an important measure of innovativeness. For SMEs, impact of innovation on sales is lower than large companies (Tether, 1998). Similarly, Harris et al. (2003) found that large companies are more innovative than SMEs. Also, according to Mole et al. (2001) large companies are more adoptive to new technologies than SMEs in the manufacturing industry. Some researchers (Pratten, 1991; Vaux et al, 1996; Goh and Ridgway, 1994) found that product/service innovation activities of SMEs are more important than process innovation. .

2.2. Models of Innovation: A Brief Review of the Models

Scholars (Drucker, 1998; Kamien and Schwartz, 1982; Porter, 1990; Hjalager, 2002; Becker and Whisler, 1967) define innovation in various ways. Schumpeter is the first researcher who developed the theory of innovation. According to Schumpeter, innovation is "new ways of doing things, or unique

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