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Abstract

Globalization and Internet-based electronic commerce (e-commerce) pose new challenges and provide new opportunities to established companies. This thesis reviewed the current literature on the e-commerce and Internet adoption from the perspective of traditional companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A quantitative research was conducted to study the e-commerce adoption in SMEs. The e-commerce refers in this thesis to using the Internet as an additional communication, selling and marketing channel that may not result in a transaction. The e-commerce is likely to be adopted in a set of evolutionary stages moving towards a greater sophistication with respect to the management and use of the Internet-technology (for example, from using static home pages to exclusively digital enablement of transactions). In addition, the e-commerce adoption is influenced by organizational, environmental and technological characteristics that were considered and synthesized to a research model.

The SMEs represent a large share of the business sector economy and generate most of the business turnover. Despite the importance of the SMEs in the national economy, very little research is done of how such companies have adopted this new technology. The objective of the empiric part of the present thesis was, firstly, to study perceived benefits of the Internet and then to identify the stage of the e-commerce development in the case companies. The last objective was to study the factors that influence on the adoption of the e-commerce.

The present research, which was carried out by means of a mail questionnaire, studied 65 SMEs located in Southwestern Finland. The majority of the companies were small enterprises, employing less than 20 people. The companies represented car retailers and real estate agencies, but also business of other service industries. The present research found out that most of the studied companies were at the early stage of their e-commerce development. The Internet was still used mainly for information purposes. In addition, this research shows that the SMEs were poorly supported. However, this research also indicated that the studied companies were highly motivated to use the Internet, and they recognized the importance of this new technology in their business.

The present study gives a modest contribution to the SMEs research field, as it provides some additional information on how and why the small companies adopt the Internet activities. A further research should be emphasized on exploring the items describing each stage of e-commerce adoption in the SMEs.

Key words	Adoption; the Internet; e-commerce; e-business; SMEs
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