
Article

Cross-National Field Research in Developing Countries

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Abstract

Cross-national field research performed in developing countries presents researchers with a number of obstacles. Challenges include creating equivalent samples, countering biases, and managing linguistic and cultural issues. In this article the author reviews the conduct of a cross-national study focusing on small tourism operators and the adoption of information communication technologies. He presents the research process, the issues encountered and how they were addressed are discussed, and a number of lessons. This article adds to our understanding of cross-national field research in developing countries and presents a number of implications for social science researchers.

Keywords: research methodology, organizational research, ICT, digital divide

Background

Tourism is an important income earner and plays a crucial role in poverty alleviation in many developing countries. The vast majority of tourism enterprises around the world can be classified as small and medium sized, especially those in regional and rural areas. For some time, tourism has been recognized as an information-based and information-intensive industry, well suited to information and communication technologies (ICT). The numbers of people worldwide who use the Internet to research, plan, and even purchase tourism products are on the rise. In fact, one of the choices that have become unavoidable for small businesses in the tourism sector is the use of ICT because they bear so heavily on the prospect of remaining competitive.

The challenges faced by small enterprises in appropriating and using ICT have received sufficient attention. The inadequate and unreliable infrastructure, the lack of capacity, the cost involved, the lack of policies geared toward ICT diffusion, and a lack of skilled human capital in these countries are all recurrent practical obstacles identified in the literature (Cloete, Courtney, & Fintz, 2002; Jennex & Amoroso, 2002; Moodley & Morris 2004; Murelli & Okot-Uma, 2002; Rizk, 2006). The issues of how small enterprises actually mitigate these challenges and their readiness to adopt new technology have received much less inquiry. Therefore, it is important to understand the readiness of small tourism operators to adopt new technologies and how they overcome the practical challenges they face.

The overarching aim of the study was to investigate small tourism enterprises' "e-readiness" and ICT use in developing countries. As a result of the study, an e-readiness framework was developed to assist small tourism enterprises in developing countries to make decisions concerning ICT adoption. The study was carried out across three phases:

1. The study commenced with a thorough review of the literature and the development of a tentative framework.
2. An online expert panel discussion was conducted to refine the framework and further inform the study
3. A final framework was developed based on field research carried out in Malaysia and Ecuador with owners of small tourism operators.

It is this last phase that forms the focus of this paper. In particular, in this paper I will review the conduct of the field research and discuss the issues encountered and will present a number of interesting and useful lessons for social researchers.

Introduction

In accordance with trends worldwide, social science research is increasingly focusing on issues through a global lens. Cross-national research in particular offers insight into a phenomenon across more than one environment, allowing researchers to cross-examine data and identify salient themes. However, a number of complex issues can affect the conduct of cross-national field research. Doran (2002) has written, "Research design in multiple cultures, particularly where little previous research exists, is a minefield of potential problems" (p. 828). This is especially true in developing countries. Developing equivalent samples, countering bias, and managing linguistic and cultural issues are all recurrent practical challenges that penetrate throughout the literature. Although there is a body of literature from the schools of anthropology and sociology that provides guidance concerning the issues that one may encounter in the field,

there is little literature that focuses on cross-national research field work in developing countries, especially when narrowing the sphere of research to small business and ICT and where ICT are used as a research medium. Instructive resources exist that inform our understanding of strategic and planning issues involved in cross-national research and research carried out in a development context. Harkness, van der Vijver, and Mohler (2003) have described how to recognize and deal with the major obstacles at each stage of cross-cultural research. Desai and Potter (2006) focused specifically on theoretical approaches, planning, and fieldwork in the development research context, whereas the established text by Bulmer and Warwick (2001b) concentrates on issues associated with carrying out social surveys in developing countries. In this article I build on this body of literature by reviewing the conduct of a qualitative inquiry that took place in two distinctly different countries, describing some of the pitfalls encountered, and offer a number of practical lessons. This article is particularly useful to social science researchers and especially to doctoral students considering field research in one or more developing country.

This article is organized into four parts. First, some discourse on field research and cross-national studies is provided. Following this, the method used to guide the study is described. The subsequent section describes the selection of the countries, preparation, selection and sourcing of participants, language, and ethical issues. Following this, a discussion on the conduct of the study, the study findings, and a review of the research is presented. Finally, I conclude the article by presenting some implications for researchers and lessons learned.

Cross-national studies

All research, in a sense, is comparative. However, cross-national research is a deliberate attempt to contrast, build, and analyze data from more than one country on a particular theme. It often involves crossing many research disciplines and raises certain epistemological issues. In particular, research on the ground requires entering the fields of social and cultural anthropology and ethnography. Anthropology by definition is a discipline of infinite curiosity about human beings (Ember & Ember, 2003). Ethnographic research arrived from the discipline of social and cultural anthropology. What is at the core of ethnography is examining social life in natural settings and interpreting the behavior of social actors (Neuman, 1997). Techniques for exploring a phenomenon include firsthand observation, in-depth and informal interviews, and case studies. Multiple case studies in particular are recommended for studying poorly understood phenomena in a real-world setting (Yin, 1994). Such approaches are used by social scientists to study human behaviors, cultures, and interventions in local settings.

Although cross-national studies are a potential source of extremely rich data, to date such studies focusing on small businesses and ICT are rare, especially in the context of the developing world. Nevertheless, there is an embryonic body of research focusing on similar and disparate countries. For instance, Montealegre (1998) conducted a study of ICT adoption in Peru, Chile, Cost Rica, and Ecuador. Although these countries share location, culture, and a significant level of support from the Organization of American States (OAS), each country is distinct because each has traveled a different path to ICT adoption. Similarly, Hawk (2004) studied the different e-commerce selling methods used by enterprises in Russia, India, Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil. Although these five countries did not represent every conceivable type of developing country, they were selected because they represented a range of conditions. Hawk argued that the findings from the Latin American aspect of the study could be applied to more developed nations such as Chile, and those from Russia could be applied to ex-Soviet states such as Ukraine and Belarus.

Method

The overarching aim of the study in developing the framework was to answer three main research questions: (a) What are the main e-readiness factors for small businesses in developing countries? (b) How are small businesses using ICT? and (c) How are they overcoming the challenges they face to appropriating ICT?

Because of the exploratory nature of the research and in-depth understanding required, a qualitative approach was employed. A multiple-case study design was adopted to frame the field research phase of the research. Interviews were chosen as the principal method for data collection as they allowed for the development of better understanding of a phenomenon at the grassroots level.

There are several similarities with ethnography as the field research involved interacting with small business owners in their social contexts. This form of immersion was selected because it yields important dividends (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), enabling a researcher to observe and study businesses as the complex social, cultural, and political systems that they are (Charmaz, 2006; Harvey & Myers, 2002). In some cases I spent days with participants in their tourism business and surrounding areas and was able to gain in-depth insight into their environments and the perspective of various stakeholders.

The investigation also involved examining the online presences and activities of small tourism operators; this is referred to as virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000). This provided insight into the social worlds of the small businesses. In addition to these forms of data gathering, secondary data (government reports, ICT statistics, etc.) were used heavily to inform and verify the findings. However, as will be described in this article, achieving equivalence in the data available among the two countries was not always possible.

Selection of the two countries

In cross-national research one of the first tasks is selecting the scope of countries where research is to be carried out. This is one of the greatest challenges for researchers because the mix of countries selected will affect the quality of comparability (Hantrais & Mangen, 1996). To begin, one faces many daunting questions. How many countries should be selected? Which countries? Which continents? What type of country? What stage of development? Can parallelism be achieved? In this study the number of countries selected was limited to two and was guided by a number of factors. It was important that a country that was experiencing growth and was a leader in the ICT sector and another that could be described as lagging behind be selected to allow for useful comparisons.

Country e-readiness rankings, which are assessments of the state of the ICT environment in countries (Dutta & Lopez-Claros, 2005; Economic Intelligence Unit, 2007), were used as one of the principal selection criteria. These were used to select a country that had a strong enabling environment and policies that promoted ICT (a country with a high e-readiness ranking) and another country where these elements were lacking (or a country with a low e-readiness ranking). Acknowledging that using e-readiness indices has limitations, I also used other ICT and economic indicators, such as teledensity and gross national income (GNI). As the intention was to explore two diverse countries beyond ICT statistics, other distinguishing characteristics such as culture, religion, geographic location, and government type were also considered. Adopting a broad range of criteria allowed for the perspectives of small tourism enterprises to be captured across

countries experiencing various stages of development. The selection of two smaller countries (in terms of surface size) was also important for funding and logistical reasons.

Preparation

Before undertaking cross-national field research, as a rule, a researcher needs as much knowledge as possible about the local setting. As underscored by Doran (2002), where possible, it is important to begin by developing an equal basis of knowledge of the cultures being studied. This includes informing oneself about the geography, history, politics, and culture of the people or subjects to be studied. However, in the context of developing countries, there are many research topics where little factual information is available or where it is out of date or misleading (Peil, 2001). In this study there was much more relevant information available in the case of Malaysia than in Ecuador, making it difficult to achieve information parallelism. At the same time, the intention was to select one country that was more developed than the other, and as a natural consequence of this information, equivalence was not always possible. Doran encountered a similar problem when examining consumer behavior in China and North America. Nevertheless, this is something of a vicious cycle: The crux of the matter is that research is needed because little is known. However, often there is so little information that it can hinder the planning and conduct of the investigation (Peil, 2001). In these circumstances, in the absence of viable alternatives, the most one can do is fully describe each of the two cultures and the differences between them.

Selecting, sourcing, and engaging study participants

Similar to many qualitative studies, recruiting and gaining access to participants in a cross-national setting posed problems. In the context of developing countries, sampling according to standard principles can be problematic because census data, business listings, and so forth are often inadequate and unreliable (Bulmer, 2001; Peil, 2001). For instance, Findlay (2006) suggested that some African and Asian countries collected no census data between 1994 and 2003, causing a problem even for contemporary research. Circumstances have improved in recent years. However, because of the huge investment involved, there remains a lag in the process of collection to publication, reducing the value of the data to researchers and policymakers (Findlay, 2006).

Among small businesses locating accurate numbers and contact details is especially problematic because many operate in the informal sector and are unknown to authorities. Therefore, multiple sources were used to obtain the details of potential participants. This involved obtaining business details and e-mail addresses from official and commercial tourism Web sites and traditional media such as travel guidebooks. In Malaysia a useful starting point was the official tourism Web sites of Malaysia. However, unlike Malaysia, Ecuador did not have a comprehensive official tourism Web site that could be used to build a sample of small tourism businesses. To overcome this complication, other commercial tourism portal sites were used.

One key consideration in this study was the mode used to contact potential participants to invite participation. Communication channels such as the telephone might be possible only where a country enjoys high teledensity, and postal invitations are practical only where the literacy rate is very high and where the logistical infrastructure is in place. In most developing countries these conditions are not met (Bulmer & Warwick, 2001a). As I was interested in online small tourism enterprises, I chose e-mail as the primary means of communication. After selecting suitable participants, e-mail was used to invite them to participate in the study. The use of e-mail proved

to offer valuable insight into the situation on the ground. For instance, here an extract from the e-mail signature of one of the participants sheds light on the telecommunications challenges with which small tourism operators contended

Please note that if we didn't reply your message within 3 days time,
please forward your e-mail to xxxxxx_tours@hotmail.com or give us a call.
Sometimes, the server could be down. Sorry for the inconvenience!'

Other e-mail responses provided a rich source of data and anecdotal evidence of the ICT environment in these countries:

Now please be aware that our company might be ready for having full access to internet in any way but the legislation of our country in order to prevent fraud has many stupid rules to say the less. The cost of the service here is 3 or 4 times more expensive than in your country like if Ecuadorians have all the money in the world and worst, here we do not know yet DSL connections. Most of the population still use dial up modems and extremely slow connection. It will be an interesting research what you are doing. It will be like a voyage in time.

Unfortunately our telephone lines have been down for over a week, but we still have the internet because we had installed a satellite connection about 2 months ago. Let us know how you want to proceed . . . it is unclear as to when the phone company will be able to fix the village phone system.

The mix of study sites

One limitation of many cross-national studies is that they often consider only one site and do not represent entire towns or the country. This approach does not take into consideration that each town or city is distinct in terms of its history, socioeconomic profile, ethnicity, and so forth (Peil, 2001). Following this line of advice, I selected a mixture of remote, rural, and metropolitan areas. However, a unique problem encountered in this study was difficulty in classifying participants as exclusively remote, rural, or metropolitan. For example, two participants ran lodges in a remote area but performed most of the business operations from a home office in the capital, Quito. In one case the home office was simply a computer connected to the Internet. Similarly, one enterprise ran most of the tour/lodge operations from a home office in a semirural area, even though the lodge was located in a rural area. Customers rarely visited the home offices of these businesses, and in one case the owner spent a considerable amount of time at the actual business. In another instance, a participant ran a tour business out of a shop front in Quito, although its main source of Internet access was from home in a semirural area. Classifying businesses like these is a particular conundrum in a study such as this one, where the area of interest is ICT, which allows businesses to be managed remotely. Such issues are also typical when researching flexible and dynamic entities such as small businesses because they are managed in a personalized manner (Kuwayama, 2001) and are not always amenable to clear categorization.

Arriving in the field

Once I had arrived in the field, participants were contacted again via e-mail, by telephone, or by visiting to confirm availability. This proved to be frustrating in many cases because most participants had since altered their schedules. In some instances the dates that were initially set for the interview turned out just to be an introduction because personal introductions are an

integral part of culture in many developing countries. In some cultures a researcher might need to spend a day in informal discussion before achieving the rapport needed for a short interview (Neuman, 1997). Researchers face losing access to interviewees and observations if these important connections are not built in (Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, establishing amicable relations with participants is especially important because it will affect the setting for the research (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). Because of a lack of time, this resulted in the interview schedule for the project being turned on its head, and much reshuffling of times and dates was required. This also resulted in a small number of interviews being conducted over the telephone. Furthermore, roughly 1 out of 3 small businesses that initially expressed interest in participating was not available for a number of reasons. Some business owners were away or busy, others turned out to be unsuitable for the study, and in one case it appeared as though the business had ceased to exist. In one case in a remote village an interview that was set up could not be performed because the owner had left the village to go into town (an hour's flight away). The interview could not be conducted over the telephone at a later date because there was only one telephone for the entire village. I also encountered issues similar to those faced by Konstadakopulos (2005), such as locating remote businesses and finding businesses in unfamiliar street systems, which can also affect the scheduling of interviews. Local language knowledge can be advantageous in these situations. These examples serve as a learning point for researchers and suggest thorough preparation and that a larger pool of participants is required to compensate for the range of conditions that might be encountered.

The interviews

The interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to up to 5 hours. I performed all the interviews. The interview protocol was semistructured and was informed through the expert panel discussion in phase 2 of the study. This allowed for a consistent yet flexible approach that suited the dynamics of the research settings and the participants involved in the study. The interviews focused on several main themes surrounding the adoption and use of ICT.

By its nature most field research is obtrusive; therefore, although the location of the data collection will affect the data gathered (Willis, 2006), as a rule the participant was to be allowed given the choice over where discussions took place (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). Interviews were usually conducted face-to-face over a cup of tea or coffee in the office or lounge of the tourism operator. In a remote village one interview was conducted partly in a jeep ride while the business owner performed the task of dropping off supplies to nearby residents. To limit the negative consequences of performing an interview in this inappropriate setting, I restricted the discussion to background on the business and the study, and detailed discussions were reserved for a more suitable setting. This is a potential obstacle in research conducted with small family-run operators, where participants are juggling multiple tasks; on the other hand, these situations also provide valuable insight into the situation on the ground.

Bias and power balances

An issue linked to field research in developing countries concerns issues of bias and power balances. Field research in a developing country environment can be affected by the personal characteristics of the researcher, referred to as power gradients (Momsen, 2006). For instance, the social position, marital status, sex, age, and religion of the researcher might influence the research if these characteristics are considered important to the interviewees (Momsen, 2006; Peil, 2001). Differences in power between researchers and participants can result in bias. A common form of

bias that researchers warn against is a type of social desirability bias, known as courtesy bias (Neuman, 1997). It occurs when strong cultural norms cause respondents to hide anything unpleasant or give answers that the respondent thinks the interviewer wants or might not be necessarily true. For instance, Wuelker (2001) has suggested that Asians are far too polite to tell a foreigner anything he or she might not want to hear. Johnson and van der Vijver (2003) suggested that it is a personal characteristic with an influence on what a respondent wants to transpire in a survey and is more likely to manifest itself when dealing with more sensitive issues and less anonymous modes of data collection. Where more sensitive issues are being researched, researchers should be aware of issues such as participants' being skeptical of the politics and motives embedded in the research. The most important weapon to combat bias is awareness that it exists and reflexivity. Reflexivity is key because it helps the researcher to understand and acknowledge that their personality and presence indirectly and directly influences the research (Neuman, 1997; Nightingale, 1999). At the same time, in this study the potential for bias and power balances were limited because of the nature of small tourism businesses. In fact, owners were amenable to this type of research as many were foreigners and most businesses dealt with international customers from a wide range of backgrounds.

Language issues

Researchers have argued that language and translation continue to present one of the biggest obstacles in cross-national research (Apentiik & Parpart, 2006). As part of the background research, attention needs to be given to the type of people that the researcher will engage and the language spoken by this group. Even within monolingual societies there can be differences in the meaning and use of words between cities, provinces, and villages (Peil, 2001). Therefore, consideration must be given to the issue of linguistic equivalence when researching in more than one country. Although language is often cited as a challenge in cross-national research, it presented only a minor impediment in this study. There are two major reasons for this. First, in the initial invitation, businesses were informed that all interviews would be carried out in English. One Ecuadorian tourism operator replied to the initial e-mail invitation and explained that they would like to participate but that English language was a barrier.

Thanks for contac us but we can offer to give a interview because my english is not very good. But if we can help you in another way, please let me know.

Second, by focusing on the tourism industry, I was involved with participants who were familiar with English-speaking visitors and were either of European/North American background or had studied in an English-speaking country. Notwithstanding this, knowledge of the local language proved to be very useful in the fieldwork, especially among key informants, employees of the tourism enterprises, and generally for the smooth conduct of the research. This was especially true in Ecuador, where there are limited numbers of English speakers.

Some ethical considerations

Any investigation involving humans is bound to raise ethical concerns. This can be said to be particularly true in cross-national and cultural field research, where there are differences in cultures, rendering ethical research practice more complex. Development authors and ethnographers alike suggest that as part of a plan to conduct research in a village in a developing country, it may be necessary to seek approval from leader, such as chiefs, village headmen, elders, and so forth (Binns, 2006; Hershfield, Rohling, Kerr, & Hursh-Cesar, 2001). The reason for this is that villagers in many parts of the developing world frequently do not trust outsiders. In

this study a local researcher suggested that on arrival in a remote village it would be courteous to seek out the village head and inform him of the research that was to take place. On arriving in the village, I was introduced to the village head and outlined the research. The village head simply said, "OK, welcome," and continued walking, an interesting insight into village politics!

One particular ethical conundrum encountered in this study was that of participants asking for advice on further developing a Web presence and using ICT. For instance, I was asked, "How do I attract more customers?" and "Should I make a Web site?" The research dealt with this issue by pointing participants toward online sources or providing them with examples of the different ways this could be achieved. This, however, resulted in a form of unintentional action research. The issue with giving advice is that it usually needs to be ongoing, and even simple advice such as "You should or shouldn't develop a Web site" can affect the business adversely and requires an investment of time from both sides. Other ethical issues such as confidentiality were addressed by informing participants that all answers would be confidential and that reporting would be carried out using pseudonyms.

Interviews were not recorded. There are arguments for and against recording interviews (Bryman, 2004). Flick (2006) has argued, "Any hope of making a naturalistic recording will be fulfilled above all if the presence of the recording equipment is restricted" (p. 167). In this study I felt that a recording device would cause unease (O'Leary, 2004) and might inhibit responses (Willis, 2006). This decision was based on previous interactions with small businesses in developing countries. In the case of Malaysia I considered that recording interviews might have resulted in fewer interviews being conducted. It might also have led to some form of courtesy bias, where interviewees give the answer that they believe the interviewer or people who might gain access to the recording would like to hear. Malaysia has rather strict censorship laws in place, and recording details on how businesses use ICT might have caused some anxiety among participants. In fact, one participant made some comments concerning government Internet censorship. Another indicated before the interview that he preferred that the interview not be recorded.

In the case of Ecuador, a number of participants made some extremely negative comments about the government. This might not have been the case had a recording device been present. To overcome some of the disadvantages associated with not recording the interviews, I took thorough field notes, paraphrased often to confirm responses and understanding of the question, and documented the discussion as soon as possible after the interview (Flick, 2006). Significantly, participants were contacted to clarify data gathered and verify research findings.

Discussion and lessons learned

Social research in a cross-national and/or development setting is a specialized discipline that presents a number of potential obstacles. In this article I reviewed the conduct of a qualitative study and identified a number of stumbling blocks and lessons for cross-national field research in a developing country context. Focusing the study on Malaysia and Ecuador provided a broad range of perspectives and an instructive case for analysis. Detailed discussion and analysis of the findings can be found in Karanasios and Burgess (2008).

A critical aspect of this research was that the methods chosen needed to reflect a balance between the goals of the research, the data to be gathered and, an important consideration, the context of the study and the participants (Peil, 2001). In this article I provided some instructive examples of the circumstances that researchers can expect to encounter. Matters concerning gaining approval from appropriate sources and building a rapport are particularly important. Building a rapport

involves engaging the participant before, during, and even after the discussion. Developing a good rapport is intimately connected with the conduct of the interview and will assist the researcher in combating the various forms of bias that they may encounter. Simple issues such as losing and rescheduling interviews can be avoided by beginning with a larger set of participants and being aware that time is needed for preparation and establishing contact and amicable relations.

In this article I have demonstrated that spending time in the field is valuable. As underscored by Glaser and Strauss (1967), it allows a researcher who has been sufficiently immersed to understand the complex nature of the study area while maintaining a critical distance to think theoretically about what has been learned. In addition to the interviews, one can expect to be introduced to other stakeholders and experience firsthand the environments in which the participants live and operate. For instance, in this study I spent some time living with a small home-stay tourism business that was struggling to incorporate ICT into the business. This immersion involved daily interactions with the owner to overcome challenges such as language, poor telecommunications connectivity, limited finances, and lack of capacity, allowing me to observe day-to-day operation of the business. In this case I even had to reply to e-mails to potential customers on behalf of the owners.

In another case I walked from one remote village to another and encountered a small lodge owner, who explained that there were no telecommunications at the village. However, the owner had an e-mail address that was checked frequently by someone in a nearby village where there was Internet access. Whenever a customer booking or inquiry was received via e-mail, the message would be relayed in person to the remote lodge owner, an instructive insight into intervillage communication that would not have been possible if I had not had direct contact with people living in the environment. These situations provide further firsthand insight into the ambiguous and idiosyncratic situation that a researcher would otherwise not have privilege to and lend support to the value of field research.

Although I contend in this article that to a large extent small tourism enterprises are amenable to research, one unexpected challenge in one of the countries was becoming engaged in politically charged conversations concerning matters of government support to small business and the political landscape generally. The particular country has experienced a decade of political turbulence and it seemed that participants had some concerns regarding the government's *laissez faire* approach to ICT diffusion. For instance, on the topic of government support for small tourism enterprises one participant articulated,

They [the government] do little to help the people or business or tourism and in fact they are more interested in selling oil and filling their pockets while they are in power . . . government infrastructure is poor, medical, welfare, everything!

Although these challenging situations can in some cases hinder the conduct of the field work, they are also a rich form of heterogeneous data and as such are useful to inform the research (Gottlieb, 2006).

A unique feature of this study was the use of the Internet to source and engage small businesses. Like any social spaces, the use of the Internet brings with it a range of drawbacks as well as advantages. The Internet is by no means a neutral technology, and it introduces all sorts of biases. The biases are in the content, the language, and the capabilities required to use the technology. Therefore, using the Internet to engage small businesses lends itself to the possibility of researching the perspective of "Internet enthusiasts." However, when we are using the Internet, it is almost impossible to avoid the perspectives of this group emerging irrespective of the selection

method applied (Menou, 1999). At the same time, this is where the strength and utility of the findings materialized. By my targeting of online enterprises, a number of concrete strategies emerged from the qualitative data that served as an example for other small tourism enterprises (Karanasios & Burgess, 2008). Furthermore, using the Internet to gain insight into the social world of small tourism businesses and engaging with participants provided an additional avenue for data. A number of instructive examples have been given.

Concluding Remarks

In this article I discussed research design and field research in a cross-national context. I have provided a comprehensive introduction and practical guide to undertaking field research, describing salient issues concerning the preparation for field research, and identified major obstacles at each stage of this multifaceted research. Although research in such a setting can be precarious at times, being prepared and aware of the most salient considerations allows for research to be conducted effectively. Notwithstanding this, any deviation from the planned set of circumstances can also be viewed as an opportunity. This article lends support to the use of cross-national field research as a means of better understanding the phenomenon of small business ICT adoption and use. The research approach adopted provided insight into the reality of ICT adoption and offered a number of practical implications for small tourism operators and researchers interested in ICT and development. Furthermore, a number of transferable lessons emerged from the qualitative data that could be applied to other small tourism enterprises.

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