

Business-to-business adoption of eCommerce in China

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Abstract

There is an absence of research on business-to-business eCommerce in developing countries which covers wide-ranging issues beyond contextual imperatives. This paper analyzes eCommerce adoption by businesses in China from internal, external and contextual perspectives.

The contributions of this paper are to extend and adapt the Perceived eReadiness Model [A. Molla, P.S. Licker, eCommerce adoption in developing countries: a model and instrument, *Information & Management* (42) 2005, pp. 877–899; A. Molla, P.S. Licker, Perceived E-Readiness factors in e-Commerce adoption: an empirical investigation in a developing country, *International Journal of Electronic Commerce* 10(1), 2005, pp. 83–110] to eCommerce in China in an empirical study of 134 Chinese SME's. This study validates the Perceived eReadiness Model [53,54]. It further analyzes the contextual and organizational factors that affect business-to-business eCommerce adoption in China. Findings show that the important inhibiting factors in China are restricted access to computers, lack of internal trust, lack of enterprise-wide information sharing, intolerance towards failure, and incapability of dealing with rapid change. These variables are analysed in the context of Chinese culture.

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1. Introduction

Although it has been acknowledged widely that the adoption and diffusion of eCommerce by businesses in developing countries is an important economic indicator of growth [53,54], there are few empirical studies [19,23,45,57,75] and only one comprehensive model [53,54]. This model was tested once, in development.

The contributions of this paper are to adapt, extend and empirically test the pioneering Molla and Licker Model [53,54] in the context of China. The objective is

to provide a validated predictor of business-to-business eCommerce adoption in China. This may then be applied to wider contexts.

China has a land mass of 9.6 million km² [26], population of 1.29 billion in 2003 [26], and an annual growth rate of 9% [5]. It is an important country for analysis of eCommerce development in business markets, emerging markets and transitional economies. As in many developing countries, data are difficult to collect and interpret.

This paper is structured as follows. First, we introduce the study, which is followed by a review of eCommerce in developing countries. We then present the theoretical background of the models of eCommerce adoption, followed by an analysis of the context in China, and methodology. Finally, we discuss our results,

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analyze them in the context of China, and draw out managerial implications. Limitations of our research and indications for further research conclude the paper.

2. eCommerce in developing countries

The adoption of business-to-business eCommerce in developing countries differs greatly from developed countries. Developing countries often lack the necessary financial, legal, and physical infrastructures for the development of eCommerce. In addition, developing countries often have different cultures and business philosophies, which limit the applicability and transferability of the eCommerce models designed by Western countries [25,35,53,54].

3. Theoretical background

It is important for businesses moving to the business-to-business eCommerce sector to evaluate all aspects of their organization and performance. The business needs to identify factors which will determine successful transformation, and then direct strategy and resources towards those factors [53,54].

The literature on eCommerce adoption by businesses suggests that most research is based on four frameworks:

- (1) The diffusion of innovation [7,52,66,91].
- (2) The Technology-Organization-Environment Model (TOE) [49,74,84,89,91].
- (3) Institutional theory [12,67].
- (4) Resource-based theory [6,91].

Models based on these theories have different *foci*, and are designed to examine different aspects of business eCommerce adoption. Some models examine only the external environment of firms [25,35,48], while some are focused on technological aspects [15].

Models drawing upon the Technology-Organization-Environment Model framework [49,84,91] attempt to examine the organizational context of eCommerce adoption. In these models, only factors such as firm size and scope are included. Other, more important, managerial and internal organizational aspects [53,54] are left unevaluated, such as the centralization, formalization, and complexity of managerial structure, the quality of human resources, and the amount of slack resources available internally [84].

However, the main deficiency underlying all these models, from the perspective of developing countries, is that they are designed for developed countries. Issues which might seem trivial in developed countries may play an important role in business-to-business eCommerce adoption in developing countries, such as tolerance of failure.

Molla and Licker’s [53,54] Perceived eReadiness Model identifies many of the relevant contextual and organizational factors that might affect eCommerce adoption in developing countries [53,54]. The model includes two major constructs which measure both endogenous and exogenous factors: Perceived Organizational eReadiness and Perceived External eReadiness [53,54].

Perceived Organizational eReadiness is defined as managers’ perception and evaluation of the degree to which they believe that their organization has the awareness, resources, commitment, and governance to adopt eCommerce [53,54]. The Perceived Environmental eReadiness is the degree to which managers believe that market forces, government, and other supporting industries are ready to aid in their organizations’ eCommerce implementation [53,54] (see Fig. 1).

The theoretical root of this model is interactionism, which allows for a multi-perspective audit of the managerial, internal organizational, and external con-

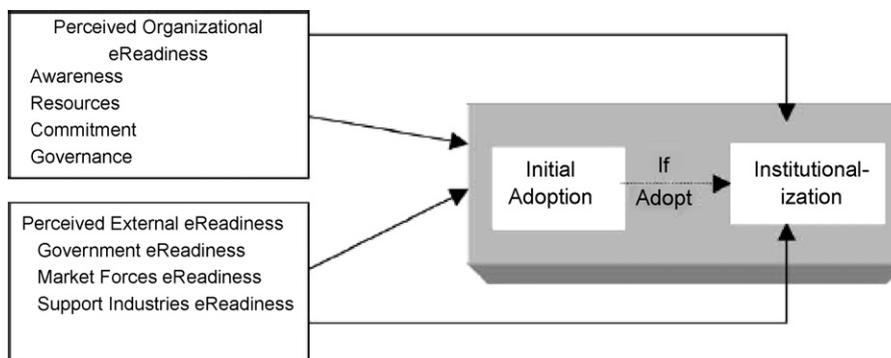


Fig. 1. Perceived eReadiness Model framework [53].

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