



An empirical investigation of the management practices and the development of electronic commerce in Mauritius

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Abstract

Electronic Commerce (EC) is expected to change dramatically the way that organisations operate. Businesses invest in Information Technology and prepare their infrastructure so that they can support EC applications. The potential of EC however, is not confined to individual companies but extends to whole nations. Governments are considered as a key stakeholder in the successful development of EC and their commitment and support must be ensured. This paper reports on a survey of 33 IS and business managers in Mauritius and discusses the management practices, applications, problems and technological situation with respect to EC development in this country. This Indian Ocean island state aims at developing and maintaining its competitive advantage through EC, thus becoming a centre in its region. The findings of this paper are useful for both researchers and practitioners as they provide an insight to critical EC management issues, which concern both individual organisations and policy makers. Furthermore the results of this study can be used as a vehicle for EC development evaluation at an organisational as well as at a national level. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

The need for Electronic Commerce (EC) stems from the demand within businesses and governments to develop and use Information Technology (IT) in order to achieve better customer satisfaction, and more effective intra- and inter-organisational co-ordination (Cockburn & Wilson, 1996; Dutta, Kwan, & Segev, 1997; Kalakota & Whinston, 1996; Vadapalli & Ramamurthy, 1997–1998; Webster, 1994; El-Sawy, 2001). The advances in IT, in particular the development and expansion of Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) systems and the advent of

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the World Wide Web have already created a number of opportunities for developing and improving the EC infrastructure and applications at both the organisational (Cockburn & Wilson, 1996; Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1996–1997; Vadapalli & Ramamurthy, 1997–1998; Kardaras & Papathanassiou, 2000) and national economies level (OECD, 1999; Palvia, 1997; Sisodia, 1992; Tan, 1999; Teo & Buk, 1997–1998; Kamel & Hussein, 2000). This paper investigates the current situation, the strategies and the management practices (Teo & Pavri, 1997), for the development of the EC infrastructure in the Republic of Mauritius an island state in the Indian Ocean. One of the first priorities for the Republic of Mauritius is to develop the necessary national IT infrastructure in order to become an EC services hub in the wider region.

The increasing attention organisations and governments pay to EC can be easily justified by the importance and magnitude of its anticipated impact on both the economic and social environment (Cooper, Duncan, & Whetstone, 1996; OECD, 1999). EC abolishes geographical barriers or differences due to time zones thus improving the connectivity and openness of the economies at a national and international level (Tapscott, 1996). EC changes the way businesses are conducted, thus transforming conventional markets to newer forms (Wang, 1997; Deitel, Deitel, & Steinbuhler, 2001), which require new skills and practices for new products and services, business links and regulations. The importance of EC is reflected by the size and growth rate of the electronic markets world-wide (Shaw, Gardner, & Thomas, 1997). The size of the EC market is growing rapidly. In Europe the market from its current value of \$6 billion is expected to reach \$230 billion by the year 2005, while, over the same period it is estimated to reach \$ 291 billion in the USA (from a current level of \$31 billion) and to \$630 billion world-wide (from its current level of \$40 billion). While USA is the world leader in EC development, UK, the Nordic countries, Australia and Canada are also keen adopters of EC.

EC definitions differ, depending on the analysis perspective (Kalakota & Whinston, 1996). From a communications perspective EC is the delivery of information products and services, via telephone lines, computer networks or other communications means. From an IT perspective, EC is the IT applications which are developed to support and improve business transactions and workflow. From a business perspective, EC is a tool designed to enable businesses, their partners, and their customers to improve issues such as the service quality, costs, speed of delivery, etc. Finally, from a service perspective, EC is the necessary infrastructure, which supports the capability of buying and selling of products and services on the Internet or other online services.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) (URL: <http://www.nist.org>) in the USA argues that the EC infrastructure should comprise the following:

- Interconnected communication networks.
- Advanced computer hardware and software tools and services.
- Established business transactions, data exchange and interoperability standards.
- Accepted security and privacy provisions.
- Appropriate managerial and cultural practices.

There are three distinct types of EC according to (Kalakota & Whinston, 1996):

- The inter-organisational type, which facilitates the business-to-business transactions between organisations.

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