

Acceptance and Leadership—Hegemonies of E-Commerce Policy Perspectives

BRIAN J. CORBITT & THEERASAK THANASANKIT

ABSTRACT *This paper presents an analysis of the e-Commerce policies developed and implemented in the USA, Canada, Australia, Victoria, Finland, Norway, the UK, Ireland, the EU (by the OECD), Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region). The paper shows that e-Commerce policy adopted is generally trying to achieve two fundamental aims:*

1. *to minimize regulatory environments for e-Commerce; and*
2. *to ease logistical problems in doing e-Commerce—i.e. in paying electronically, in delivery of goods and in customs, tariffs and duties.*

These strategies are designed to create an environment where e-Commerce is adopted by business and government in these countries to achieve 'best practice', to become 'modern', to gain 'efficiencies', because 'it is the way to go', because 'we must have it, because everybody has it', and because they 'perceive the benefits of it'. In essence it is being used to gain hegemony in the economic competitiveness of the geopolitical environment created by the Internet. This paper argues that differentiating types of policy is related to ideology and hegemony in the various countries.

Keywords: e-Commerce policy, policy analysis, hegemony, policy typology.

Introduction

Government adoption and development of e-Commerce policy throughout the world appears to reflect two quite different approaches, which in essence are supporting similar policies. The major policy adopted by the strong, developed countries and the EU reflects initiatives which support a private sector-led adoption of e-Commerce, with varying degrees of government support. The other approach reflects a similar ideology but it is one where the government is adopting more explicit stimulatory policies and a strategy to intervene to get the e-Commerce adoption process started. This 'jump start' policy is reflected in the policies of small

nations (<5 million population or which can be classified as developing countries). Both types of policy have produced significant results. However, there is clear evidence that outside of the USA, those countries whose policies are more interventionist and stimulatory are having substantially more success in the adoption of e-Commerce.

Why this differentiation happens is in itself intriguing. Previous research¹ showed that there was a clear differentiation of the ideologies driving the nature of Electronic Commerce policy in a comparative study of Singapore and Thailand. Part of that differentiation was the role of political hegemony. It was argued that the centralized nature of planning and decision-making in both of those countries was evidence of a clear hegemony in the development of Electronic Commerce policy. Hegemony² is defined as a phenomenon whereby

Dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups.

For example, Sparta in the fourth century BC exercised considerable influence over the domestic and foreign decisions of the Greek independent states: it exercised, then, hegemonic control over these states. Hegemony is described in the Fontana *Dictionary of Modern Thought* as:

Political and economic control exercised by a dominant class, and its success in projecting its own way of seeing the world, human and social relationships as 'common sense' and part of the natural order by those who are, in fact, subordinated to it.

Hegemony reflects the role of a dominant government in policy and differentiates societies where the dominance is accepted as necessary for the social good from societies where the hegemony is less dominant but reflected in an accepted discourse of democratic decision-making. Hegemony reflects the relationships between the stakeholders³ and frames the way political influences affect policy development.⁴ In this study the theoretical framework will inform an analysis of the e-Commerce policies adopted in a variety of countries across the world. The search will be within the text of policy to examine how the hegemony is expressed and how it is reflected in the policy developed.

Policy Analysis Framework

Policy development and implementation is essentially political and non-rational.⁵ It is influenced by pluralistic inequality associated with sectional interests, power and factions.⁶ The meanings implicit in the economic system extend into social relations and constructs, and into personal consciousness.⁷ Politicians are very often concerned with sectional or constituent interest for their own preservation, and thus often are unwilling to embrace the notions of whole society goals, or needs, or the broad view required for perfect rationality in the policy process.⁸ This makes policy messy. The realities of self-preservation, influence, political dogma, sectional interests, conflicts, compromises, factionalism, fanaticism, resistance to

change, pragmatism, financial constraints, errors and misinterpretations all create a complexity in the policy process that denies simplification and generalization.

Concepts derived from an understanding of the social, political and economic context of policy can assist the researcher gain understanding about how reality is socially constructed in society and how it is politically sustained. Hofferbert's analysis of policy evaluation,⁹ for instance, indicates the key influence that political behaviour has on human behaviour in general. A study of policy development and implementation, we would argue, should examine the variables and actions that affect, and make up, human behaviour. Rein suggests that policy 'implementation is interpreted as an expression of accommodation to institutional realities'.¹⁰ We would maintain, however, that the policy process involves both accommodation and resistance simultaneously. It is both influenced by, and influences, human behaviour. Individuals can subvert and/or avoid attempts at regulation. Wallace, for example, argues that unintended, unanticipated or unacknowledged consequences often result from human behaviour within policy.¹¹ These can affect subsequent action, decisions and/or the level of tension between different interest groups involved in the policy process. Such consequences should make us aware of the importance of non-rational and subjective elements in the policy process and heighten the impact of human behaviour as it modifies decision-making within policy processes.

One extension of this view that diverse participants profoundly affect policy is that policy comes about by an intent of some group to change the behaviour of their own group, another group, or society as a whole.¹² Policy development and implementation, in this view, involves values imposition and the realization of an ideology in the form of a programme. This policy programme will be designed to motivate, reproduce or attempt to create change in social behaviour, or it may be used to present a picture of change that represents only tokenism. The implementation of such programmes, we would suggest, is iterative as different participants seek to impose ideologies and values on others. In e-Commerce policy, such iteration reflects the dominant discourse and provides the hegemony of acceptance and leadership at the national level.

Policy is therefore implemented in an environment influenced by ideologies which spawn values and beliefs, some of which are known, recognized and obvious to the actors involved, whilst other influences are not recognized, nor obvious. Yet, as Giddens puts it, 'all social actors know a great deal about what they are doing in processes of interaction; and yet at the same time there is a deal which they do not know about the conditions and consequences of their activities, but which nonetheless influence their course'.¹³ The interaction of both known and unknown influences, which affect the behaviour and actions of those involved in policy implementation, occurs in various, often interacting, arenas.¹⁴ In what Ball calls the arenas of influence, or the broad policy context, decisions are mapped out and made by influential coalitions,¹⁵ or by individuals. In arenas of practice, or micro-contexts, policy is interpreted, recontextualized and implemented.

In order to conduct such analysis, policy dynamics must be connected with questions of power. Power may be exercised in a number of ways including through misinformation, decision-making, agenda setting and in the shaping of felt needs. The communication of ideologies and arguments can be distorted in the policy process by the use of ambiguity, deceit, insincerity, misinterpretation, confusion, unresponsiveness, withholding information, manipulation, lack of accountability, mystification and complexity, and misrepresentation of the policy.¹⁶

Forester argues that power derives its effectiveness from differential levels of knowledge existing in society.¹⁷ Foucault argues that power is inseparable from knowledge and that, since knowledge requires records and a system of communication, it in itself is a form of power.¹⁸ He argues that power is established and maintained not by overt legalistic control but, rather, by subtle forms of discipline. Disciplinary instruments of hierarchical observation, normalizing and examinations are used. These serve to identify deviation from the norm or are overtly used for individuals 'to become part of the "web of control" of the state bureaucracy'.¹⁹ It has also been suggested that 'struggles over policy take place on a terrain already structured by power and above all by the power of the state'.²⁰ Hatcher and Troyna criticize Foucault for underplaying the coercive dimension of power of the state. They suggest that the state often uses force in policy implementation. In this sense the state can drive and impact on the hegemony in the society.

Policy acceptance and leadership are driven by power and by interests of both capital and the state. In understanding e-Commerce policy development and implementation, it is essential that the driving forces are recognized and that any existing hegemony is reflected in the policy action to ensure effective outcome. In this study we have used such conceptualization to argue that e-Commerce policy effectiveness is driven by existing hegemony in the society in which it is intended and this hegemony is informed and constrained by the power relations and ideologies that underpin agency within that society. Policy is too often interpreted as linear and rational.²¹ Success and failure are generally explained in terms of the extent to which rationally determined policy objectives are met using similarly determined policy instruments. We would argue that the policy process reflects underlying ideologies and values²² that direct and dictate the thrust of the decisions themselves. Concepts such as power, control, legitimacy, privilege, justice and equity affect the perceptions and ideological judgements underpinning the policy, and the perceptions of its meanings of those to whom the policy is directed. In this context, the policy process cannot be divorced from the economic and political ideologies, conflicts and interests which are an integral part of it.

Methodology

Ball differentiated between *policy as text* and *policy as discourse*.²³ The former refers to policy as being contested and changing, and being reinterpreted, and infused with power relations. Policy in this sense is interpreted as a process in which actors generate meaning, are influential, contest issues, construct responses, deal with contradictions and attempt various representations. The latter, policy as discourse, refers to limitations on the way individuals are able to interpret and understand policy. Discourse limits the possibilities and probabilities of interpretation and enactment of policy.²⁴ In this study we use text to highlight the discourse which exists in the hegemonies that are created with the development of Electronic Commerce policy.

The textual analysis used an interactive search for themes present in the text following Thanasankit.²⁵ This iterative search allows the researcher to seek like statements and clarify an interpretation. As with any interpretive research methodology, this method of textual analysis reflects as much a view of the researchers as it does of the policy authors. Seeking to find repetition of themes within policy text was the criteria used to validate substantiation of the meanings attributed to the policy.

The analysis which forms this study was undertaken on the Electronic Commerce policies of the United States, Canada, Australia, the European Union, Ireland, the UK, Finland, Norway, Slovenia, Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, Japan, Thailand, and Malaysia. Each document is taken as representing the true and intended direction within the social context in which it was framed. As such then it represents any hegemonies that may or may not be intended. From this analysis two distinct types of Electronic Commerce policy and hegemonies can be argued to have emerged.

Type 1 E-Commerce Policy

The lead in e-Commerce policy was by the USA²⁶ and many other policies since adopted have either adopted that policy, adopted a modified version of it or leveraged off these essential principles and issues which the USA policy addresses. This forms the types of e-Commerce policies adopted in very large economies with substantial GDP, significant growth and measurable levels of extensive economic development.

This policy established five essential principles for e-Commerce in the USA which reflects its economic ideology and parallels existing Commerce and Business policy in the USA.²⁷ These principles are:

- the private sector should lead;
- government should avoid undue restrictions on e-Commerce;
- where governmental involvement is needed, its aim should be to support and enforce a predictable, minimalist, consistent and simple legal environment for commerce;
- governments should recognize the unique qualities of the Internet; and
- e-Commerce should be facilitated on a global scale.

The Australian policy²⁸ supports the USA model suggesting too it must be private-sector-led, with a 'light touch' by government, but government will play a key role by pursuing excellence through online delivery of government service and dealings with business, i.e. the government is to be a leading edge user of e-Commerce.

In Japan the private sector will lead, but the government will encourage effective self-regulation through codes of conduct, model contracts, guidelines and enforcement mechanisms developed by the private sector. There is also clear support for an international approach and recognition of the key role that cost plays in e-Commerce adoption. In Japan there are no customs duties on electronic components.

The Canadian approach²⁹ was to facilitate e-Commerce by concentrating on the major issue, security and dealing with the encryption policy, whilst maintaining a balance between commercial, privacy and the lawful access needs of Canadian society. One essential underlying principle espoused clearly was that consumer confidence must be maintained. The business objectives for e-Commerce in Canada are:

- to provide a competitive environment for e-Commerce;
- to ensure the business environment is secure and safe and thus to protect its citizens from criminal and illegitimate activities; and

- to demonstrate that Canada had the resources to facilitate cost effective e-Commerce.

The Canadian Prime Minister announced the Canadian e-Commerce policy in September 1998.³⁰ This policy includes:

- privacy legislation which balances the needs of business and customers;
- an industry friendly cryptography policy;
- a public key infrastructure which allows government to conduct its business on line;
- voluntary consumer protection guidelines in partnership with the private sector;
- legislation that gives electronic signatures a basis in law; and
- standards for a global digital marketplace.

In Norway, and the EU generally, the focus has been to stimulate SMEs.³¹ In Norway 97% of enterprises have less than 20 employees and only 1% of enterprises have more than 100 employees. Their aim is to 'foster confidence in the electronic marketplace based on the development and expansion of existing self-regulation by commerce and by fostering communities of knowledge clusters such as exist in their version of Silicon Valley, Oulu. In Finland there is a policy which fosters a strong partnership approach between public administration and industry in its approach to developing the Information Society. Finland aspires to be the first in the world to introduce a new-generation broadband telecommunications network. It also aspires to the development and commercialization of a user-friendly, reliable and safe electronic service. The Finnish Government believes that the public sector must create the conditions for building the Information Society. In addition there are commitments to fund research and development, to create an environment conducive to the development of the Information Society, and that the public sector will lead by example in its use of ICTs.

In the UK the aim is to modernize business and create confident people and confident business.³² To provide best practice examples for business, the leading edge practice will come from the government itself. The role of the government as an enabler of e-Commerce in the UK is aimed to provide an environment where markets are modernized, to create confident people and business and to lead by providing leading edge government. To facilitate this the Government has appointed an e-Minister and an e-Envoy who report monthly to the UK Prime Minister directly.

Type 2 E-Commerce Policy

However, there are a number of country policies where government intervention has been much more direct and designed to both stimulate the use of e-Commerce and to drive levels of economic activity, economic growth and/or economic development. The politics of the countries range from the strict policy regime in Singapore and Malaysia to the stimulatory policy introduced by more liberal, sometimes conservative governments, e.g. Ireland and the state of Victoria in Australia.

Singapore has just released its second e-Commerce policy (2000) building on the first set of strategies, which addressed the foundation issues.³³ The Singapore

Government has consistently focused on promoting informatization and information industry development as a key thrust in the economic development strategy of the island economy.³⁴ Among developing countries, Singapore has achieved one of the highest rates of diffusion of information technology. Singapore has also been regularly rated as maintaining among the best telecommunications infrastructure in the world.³⁵

The 'electric commercialisation' of Singapore started in 1996 with the National Computer Board (NCB) at the forefront with the Electronic Commerce Hotbed Program (ECH) to jumpstart the pervasive use of electronic commerce and position Singapore as a hub for electronic commerce. An Electronic Commerce Committee was formed, consisting of 15 agencies, with the NCB providing Secretariat support, to ensure that the legal and policy environment was most conducive for the development of Electronic Commerce. The six main guiding principles that the committee arrived at consisted of:

- the private sector taking the lead;
- the government should put in place a framework providing certainty and reliability;
- the government should provide a secure and safe environment;
- joint venture pilots and experiments between government and private sector to expedite electronic commerce growth and development;
- innovative, transparent and liberal policies pursued by government pro-actively; and
- consistency with international regimes, international cooperation and interoperability are necessary for electronic commerce to thrive.³⁶

The second strategy³⁷ will 'drive the pervasive use for e-Commerce in Singapore, and to strengthen Singapore's position as an international e-Commerce hub'. The target is to have S\$4 billion worth of products and services transacted electronically through Singapore, and 50% of business to use some form of e-Commerce by 2003. This new plan continues the government interventionist approach of the Singaporean Government and has eight main thrusts:

1. to develop an internationally linked e-Commerce infrastructure ... to strengthen Singapore's position as an e-Commerce hub. To achieve this logistics structures and efficient settlement pattern for Internet transactions between business, covering international trade payments and multi-currency payment, will be deployed over the next 2 years;
2. to jump-start Singapore as an e-Commerce hub by focusing on the sectors in which Singapore has an inherent advantage as a hub, especially business to business services. Incentive schemes and other support programmes will be used to attract international and local companies to base their EC hub activities in Singapore. An international publicity plan is in preparation (the only other country to establish a strategy of this form is Canada);
3. to encourage business to use e-Commerce strategically. Under this thrust, education and other support programmes will be put in place to help business exploit e-Commerce to enhance their productivity and competitiveness. Business will be encouraged to invest in retraining of staff through incentive programmes;

4. to promote usage of e-Commerce by the public and business. The government itself will be setting the pace to proliferate the use of e-Commerce through its electronic Public Services initiatives. All key public services will be delivered electronically by 2001. E-Commerce will be taught in business and professional courses (MBA, and Information Systems) in the universities and polytechnics;
5. to harmonies cross-border e-Commerce laws and policies by establishing agreements with specific countries;
6. to have basic legal and technology infrastructure to support e-Commerce in place (completed 1998);
7. to have a critical base of e-Commerce services and a reliable infrastructure (to be met by end of 2000); and
8. to have a sizeable amount of e-Commerce transaction, an e-Commerce services sector and widespread adoption of e-Commerce by industry in 2003.

In an evaluation of Singapore's evolving information industry strategy, Wong argues that the Singaporean Government has enacted policy to facilitate development in ICT goods, in content, in network infrastructure and for informatization.³⁸ He clearly shows that all of the policy which has led to the significant growth in Singapore's information industries is driven explicitly by government, is centrally planned and implemented and reflects an acceptance by business in Singapore that it is essential to accept government leadership in this area. Wong suggests that 'Singapore's information industry development suggests a deliberate, staged process of learning or capability building . . .'.³⁹

In the Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region) the e-Commerce policy is focused primarily on building the IT infrastructure to support e-Commerce adoption by both business and government, on utilizing the best technology available and strengthening their skills base with increased funding for universities and schools and building up the 'human capital' to create their 'knowledge-based economy'.⁴⁰ The HK Government is to play a fundamental and key role as the stimulatory agent and to provide an example of best practice for business.⁴¹ The HK policy states that government will act as the primary promoter of e-Commerce, that government will provide policy encouragement, and that government will provide financial support. The HK Government has adopted a policy to make IT knowledge a fundamental part of the school curriculum. They intend to make HK a city for the world-class use of IT. Part of the HK policy is to make all government transactions with the public only available in electronic form. By the end of 1999, only 4% of government interactions with the public and with business were exempt from being done electronically.

In Ireland the e-Commerce policy was developed and implemented as a key economic focus for the republic as it 'offers the opportunity to overcome many of the trade, enterprise and employment challenges with which Ireland has been faced in the past, such as peripherally, small scale, regional differences in enterprise distribution, and on-going transition from agrarian economy'.⁴² This policy was framed in the EU conceptualization of e-Commerce policy as described above but with a deliberative interventionist approach by the Irish Government to quickly capture the impact of e-Commerce. This policy 'Technology Foresight in Ireland' has supported the Irish Government's commitment to allocation of resources, especially to developing the infrastructure to support e-Commerce and to the development of skills in the university sector (5,400 places for IT/IS degrees specifically, tied funded).

E-Commerce policy in Victoria, Australia is certainly meant as a stimulatory one. The Government is now into its second stated policy 'Global Victoria, 1999'⁴³ and used government structure to stimulate e-Commerce adoption across a range of areas including education and through the creating of a Department of Multimedia. Global Victoria is a strategy developed to identify 'the next steps in Victoria's successful policy to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the information economy'. Four strategies have been set in place:

1. to dramatically increase online usage by developing compelling reasons for participation at a community level;
2. to encourage rapid experimentation by industry to identify new innovative approaches in the online environment, to spread these lessons to the wider business community and to assist with the commercialization of this experience;
3. to deliver benefits to all Victorians by using information technology and communication to improve their experiences of the service they use from day to day, and by the best practice use of technology by government; and
4. to build on Victoria's active stance in the development of an appropriate national policy and regulatory framework for the information economy, and in the promotion of a competitive telecommunications market. This strategy encourages leadership by government through strong advocacy, and more effective public access arrangements.

Their policy objective about the role of the 'state' is clearly espoused in the Victorian policy where direct intervention and stimulatory policy was the driving principle:

Government has a pivotal role to play in securing early adopter benefits for Victoria by driving the growth of a critical mass of users and producers. Without government action, the critical mass would be achieved more slowly and the benefits would likely go to other economies. A forward looking government can help to ensure that demand for online services keeps pace with the supply of these services. The information economy and the technical product and market environment in which it operates are rapidly evolving. Government action must keep pace if Victoria is to capture the benefits. Driving the early emergence of critical mass involves the directions listed above. The Victorian Government espouses a view that it has a critical, key role to play in each area to ensure adoption of e-Commerce.⁴⁴

In a different application of Type 2 e-Commerce policy, Malaysia has been aware of the strategic importance of e-Commerce for its future especially if the goals of Vision 2020 are to be realized. Over the past 5 years, the Malaysian Government has embarked upon initiatives to cultivate the development of e-Commerce at both the national and international arena. The highlight of these initiatives is the establishment of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) (www.mdc.com.my). Briefly, 'the MSC is an integrated environment with all the unique elements and attributes necessary to create the perfect global multimedia climate and spans 15 kilometers wide and 50 kilometers long ...'.⁴⁵ The role of MSC in Malaysia's e-commerce strategy is:

- to facilitate in terms of infrastructure and infostructure for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to innovate and experiment with new technology and services; and
- to enable fast and effective communication over networks such as the Internet via fibre-optic cabling for the MSC compound.⁴⁶

Some of the current initiatives (1999–2000) with regards to e-Commerce in Malaysia are:

- the establishment of an electronic procurement system as part of the electronic government flagship;⁴⁷
- the establishment of a multipurpose card which uses the smart chip technology and has the prospects of becoming an electronic purse/wallet;⁴⁸
- the development of an electronic catalogue such as Malaysia Online Mall;
- the provision of entertainment on-demand such as pay per view;⁴⁹ and
- the implementation of education on-demand that delivers course content across the Internet including video streaming.⁵⁰

Malaysia has championed the development and deployment of cyberlaws in the global e-Commerce arena. Under the MSC project, Malaysia intends to become the '... platform for International Cybercourt of Justice' by the end of Phase III where it is expected by then its society would have successfully ventured into the Information Age.

On the international front, Australia and Malaysia have entered into an agreement to enhance the cooperation between both countries on issues regarding e-Commerce such as bandwidth and a joint study on the effects of e-Commerce on the economy.⁵¹ As part of the APEC community, Malaysia has embraced the UNCITRAL Model Law in its formulation of e-Commerce-related legislation.⁵²

The progress made by the Malaysian Government and private sector has been quite significant, especially in the ASEAN region. It has remained aggressive in its pursuit to be the hub for multimedia and information technology advancement within the Asia-Pacific region. Its initiatives have already begun to bear fruits with the advancement of local B2B e-Commerce websites (a reference list can be retrieved from <http://www.e.com.ec/asia/livesites.html>). Richard Jacobson, the senior analyst of International Data Corp. (IDC) Asia Pacific forecasted the e-Commerce market in Malaysia alone would reach US\$1 billion by 2001 and in 2002, B2B e-Commerce will account for a 75% share of the e-Commerce pie.

The adoption of the Digital Signatures Act 1997 was a strategic move to recognize the importance of authentication between parties in an e-Commerce transaction. It was passed to facilitate e-Commerce within Malaysian borders. The Digital Signatures Act 1997 also adopted the Secure Electronic Transaction (SET) protocol as its preferred Electronic Payment System. Despite an unsuccessful trial run of SET, Malaysia persevered with its legislation by implementing a national SET payment gateway on 22 March 1999 (MEPS 1999). On 21 June 1999, all three major credit card companies, namely MasterCard, VISA and American Express, announced a cooperative effort to integrate their online credit card authorization model via Electronic Commerce Marketing Language (ECML).⁵³

In Thailand the government has developed a comprehensive policy to support e-Commerce across the public and private sectors and as is commonplace in the Thai policy domain, the operational complexities and strategies involved are the

responsibility of a government agency, in this case NECTEC (The National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre).⁵⁴ This agency is currently (2000) drafting and redrafting all relevant IT laws, drafting technical specifications and recommendations about resources allocation for business to initiate e-Commerce adoption. NECTEC also acts as an information centre and human resource development coordinator for all programmes on e-Commerce.

The two policy types described above reflect more than the rich fabric of factual data described. They reflect ideologies and social practice inherent in each country and within their societal norms. It is important to evaluate the role of government in each of these policies to understand the extent of the hegemonies created to facilitate the policies.

Acceptance and Leadership—The Role of Government in E-Commerce Policy Development and Implementation

In Type 1 e-Commerce policy initiatives, the role of government as a motivator and supporter reflects a hegemony that expresses a desire that Electronic Commerce be taken up by all organizations, but the choice is still there. The hegemony is an attempt at dominance but one where the dominance is only accepted by those who wish to take up the discourse. There is no real force applied in the development and adoption process. There is no discourse about the need to adopt for the social good. Rejection is accepted as a response equally with acceptance.

In the USA, government promotion of e-Commerce is the rhetorical responsibility of the President who makes all the key statements about e-Commerce from the White House. Operational responsibility lies with the Vice President. One excellent example is the Presidential intervention of 17 December 1999 'Use of Information Technology to Improve our Society'. This policy statement gave directives to 16 different US agencies and departments to facilitate greater use of, and access to, the Internet for skills development. In Canada, the government focus lies with the Prime Ministerial statements and with government efforts to promote Canada as a destination for e-Commerce and businesses wanting to do e-Commerce, via a well-developed and very well publicized web site.

In the UK, the government has established an authority, *the Information Society* and they together have:

- established over 100 advice ISI Centres;
- established the strategy 'Technology Means Business' to frame and implement all national standards for ICT;
- established programmes of awareness raising—ISI Marketing Campaign, e-Commerce Awards;
- created ISI publications;
- established the E-Commerce Resources Centre; and
- established a showcasing programme demonstrating excellent practice.⁵⁵

In the EU and its member countries (including Ireland where the following are available in addition to Irish-specific initiatives already reported), the aim is to encourage widespread adoption of e-Commerce through voluntary participation in incentive strategies and through access availability for SMEs to e-Commerce Information Centres where all types of assistance can be obtained. These are available in the Network of SME National Contact Points. The incentive

programmes are competitive grants designed to induce SMEs to get funding for innovations, for establishing existing business in an e-Commerce mode and for R&D. The incentive for business is purely financial.

The hegemony is one of acceptance that the leadership of government reflects a drive for economic development and stability. Business recognizes that the macro-driven, disciplined and regulated economic planning of the European Union fosters economic stability and provides direction and leadership at the micro level of the company within its economic and social context. Business accepts that following such a path is necessary but not mandatory. The hegemony is voluntary but accepting of a discourse which suggests that if macro economic policy and outcomes are stable or growing then that reflects well at the micro level and ensures better stability and business survival. The prevailing hegemony in business in Europe reflects acceptance of the need for EC solutions for business and accepts the US government-driven discourse of the world moving towards globalization.

In Type 2 e-Commerce policy countries the role of government is precisely interventionist as the EC policy is invariably seen as key strategy:

- to gain significant leverage for economic growth (Ireland, Singapore);
- for quickening the rate of economic development (Malaysia, Hong Kong, Thailand);
- to gain competitive advantage in trade (Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand);
- to internationalize and globalize indigenous products and services (all nations); and
- to foster efficiency and social equality across the nation (Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia).

Each of these countries has forced many industries to trade with government electronically. The hegemony is clear. Dominance is created by the government and there is an expectation that acceptance will be the norm. Questioning of such initiatives is not considered as acceptable. The outcomes of more advanced economic development and larger economic growth rates frame the mode of acceptance. The discourse of adoption for the social good is accepted and acceptable. Singapore, Ireland and Malaysia have enforced and fully funded additional training of human resources through their university systems. Each has framed a complete suite of laws to enable e-Commerce. Each has made e-Commerce a national priority. Singapore and Malaysia have established National Advisory Boards, reporting directly to the Prime Minister, composed of international and national experts, balanced between business and academics with appropriate expertise. Thailand has a body of national experts advising the Prime Minister. In all countries, announcements about e-Commerce policy and initiatives are made by the Prime Ministers. All operation programmes implementing policy through strategy are the responsibility of specific ministers who hold very high positions in Cabinet.

Each society accepts the leadership of government and accepts the need to follow the leadership given. This reflects not only a societal practice of hegemony with government but a societal acceptance that government action will enable further stability and growth for business enabling better growth and better financial rewards. The hegemony also reflects a discourse of society being the greater good as a collective success reflects on all levels and parts of society. This is often seen in stark

contrast to discourse prevalent in 'western' countries where individual rather than social achievement is praised higher and accepted more. In Type 2 e-Commerce countries the hegemony is an institutionalized norm in society and whilst it is often criticized and reflected upon, there is nonetheless an acceptance.

Conclusion

This analysis of the significant e-Commerce policies in place in countries throughout the world, where e-Commerce and IT are significant in their operational economy and which play a significant role in the achievement of economic growth or the promotion of economic development, has highlighted the differentiation of two distinct policy and strategy types.

Type 1 e-Commerce policy has been developed and implemented in large population, 'developed' countries with very large GDPs and vibrant stock markets supporting capitalization of listed DotCom companies and high tech industries, and where there is significant venture capital available to support new business ventures. This policy is very supportive of e-Commerce and operates in an environment where the private sector is expected to and is taking the lead, where the role of government is to provide the legal framework to enable e-Commerce by business, where the role of government is to operate as an exemplar for best practice, and where funding of e-Commerce initiatives is the responsibility of business and risk takers in the business community. In these countries IT industries receive no differential treatment relative to any other industry.

Type 2 e-Commerce policy has been developed and implemented in a variety of countries. They include countries with small populations (3–5 million) with high levels of development and substantial economic growth, supported by buoyant stock markets, significant venture capital and strong dependency on trade and human resources development through education. Other countries tend to have larger populations with less buoyant stock exchanges and substantially less levels of economic development, but where there is also significant investment in education and human resource development. In the first group the focus of e-Commerce policy is to gain leverage to support more growth and expand trade. For the latter group the focus is to gain leverage to improve trade and increase development and social advantage across the entire population. In both sets of countries the role of government in e-Commerce is substantially interventionist, providing not only the legal and logistics environments needed for e-Commerce adoption by business, but also providing substantial resources for industry, on infrastructure investment, for education and skills development in the population, in the government taking a proactive role in making business directly interact with government electronically and through government being the role model for best practice. In these countries IT industries and overseas expertise is encouraged by incentives and supported with the importation of international expertise to jump-start investment and educational programmes.

Whilst there are significant similarities within each e-Commerce policy type described in the report, there are significant national differences in intent. In each country, especially those in the Type 2 category, there is a great deal of concern about doing it 'their way'. This differentiation has been highlighted previously.⁵⁶

The hegemonies that differentiate the two types of Electronic Commerce policy reflect a deeper discourse in those societies they were constructed in. The Type 1 policies reflect a hegemony that suggests an individualistic sense of success where

dominance is created and forced by individuals who act and adopt Electronic Commerce. In Type 2 Electronic Commerce policy nations, the hegemony is clearly dominant. The social good of adoption is considered of far more significance than that of the individual and acceptance of the hegemony is obvious. These societies accept that the dominance of the government will result in the growth and development that will foster success for them and for those that they support economically and socially.

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