BOOK REVIEW

E-Strategies for Technological Diffusion and Adoption:
National ICT Approaches for Socioeconomic Development

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The importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in facilitating socioeconomic development is an established theme in academic and industrial literature. With the advent of modern information technologies, it is no wonder that ICTs have gathered substantial attention from policymakers, researchers and scholars alike. While the applications of ICTs are immense, they can be ultimately linked to socioeconomic development at the societal level of analysis. The authors of the 17 chapters in this book explored various current issues and concepts related to ICT diffusion and adoption in different contexts, with a focus on implica-

tions, challenges and opportunities involved in national ICT strategies. These chapters include in-depth discussions of experiences from Europe, Africa, and Asia, which provide theoretical and empirical flavours to the subject.

One of the strengths of the book is it includes several chapters that compare experiences across countries. This is immensely important as different countries have different socioeconomic contexts, and thus different lessons learnt in regards to ICT diffusion and adoption. At a more aggregated level of analysis, the authors in Chapter Four compared ICT strategies between developed versus developing countries. The exploratory study pointed out that while the importance of ICTs are commonly acknowledged, developing countries tend to have ambitious strategies that are limited by their socioeconomic contexts. As an extension of the finding, the authors in Chapter 13 studied the digital divide between developed and developing countries. They argued that security is a concept that could be included in digital divide

measurements. The concept of security, or the lack of ICT security in e-business and other ICT applications, can be seen as a socioeconomic facet of developing countries that inhibits the realisation of national ICT strategies.

Geographically, more than half of the chapters are focused on a national or continental level of analysis, with four chapters covering Egypt, three on Malaysia, and others covering different countries. The authors of Chapter Three studied the ICT initiatives in Slovenia and how the country compares to ICT policies formulated by the European Union. The study included an in-depth description of the Slovenian government's efforts and its industry context, particularly focusing on its small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The authors argued that SMEs are lagging behind in ICT adoption compared to large companies, thus laying the foundation for a policy focus to generate sustainable growth from ICTs. The conclusion echoes the characteristics of a digital divide at the international level, illustrating the complex, multi-faceted differences in ICT diffusion and adoption at different levels.

The socioeconomic implications ICTs go beyond the industry. One of the key applications of ICTs is education and two chapters in the book covered this theme in detail. The authors in Chapter Two studied Malaysia's Smart School Initiative against a backdrop of creating a viable human capital base in support of its vision for economic development. The authors' analysis of the Initiative's pilot phase showed that successful diffusion and leverage of ICTs for socioeconomic development go beyond the infrastructure. Similar to the discussion of ICT initiatives in many chapters, these initiatives include not only the technological and infrastructural component, but also the broader context in which ICTs exist and operate. This includes policies and strategies, business aspects, as well as human participation, which in the case of education, includes both administrators and teachers.

Electronic Government (e-government) is a key application of ICTs that is a common sub-theme in the ICT for socioeconomic develop-

ment literature. Not surprisingly, seven chapters in the book covered ICTs with a focus on the national government and its initiatives, albeit from different angles. The author in Chapter 12 empirically studied citizen readiness for e-government in developing countries, using Egypt as an example of developing countries. The findings pointed out the importance of trust, or perceived credibility, of e-government services among citizens as a factor that facilitates the use of e-government services. As an extension of the findings in Chapter 13, for ICTs to be successfully leveraged in developing countries, users' perceived security of ICTs is critical. Compared to developed countries, where ICT adoption is more widespread and often taken as part and parcel of everyday life, this factor appears to be an area of concern in developing countries' efforts to build and leverage ICTs for socioeconomic development. This has tremendous policy implications and could steer the direction of national ICT policies.

Overall, the chapters in the book covered a wide range of topics related to ICTs and their implications on socioeconomic development. There are many important findings, particularly those related to developing countries seeking to leapfrog into the knowledge economy. Given the extensiveness of the literature on this subject, several of the topics discussed have been looked into, albeit at different levels and contexts. One possible and interesting addition is to have research quantitatively exploring the impact of exogenous factors that influence the leverage of ICTs for socioeconomic development.

From the perspective of a reader, these chapters are not organised in any distinct order or categories. Perhaps a better way to structure the book would be to group related chapters together. For instance, they could be organised in terms of their geographic levels of analyses. Several chapters are positioned at the international level, comparing developing and developed countries, or study developing countries in general. These can be clustered together. Other chapters look at specific countries in different continents, including Asia, Europe, and Africa. These could be grouped and sub-

categorised for better organisation. In addition, coverage on South American countries would be a good addition to the compilation of chapters.

Another way to organise the chapters could be to cluster them thematically. Chapters focusing on e-government and national ICT strategies could be grouped under government and policy. The chapters that study the industry, including e-business, business models, small-

and medium-sized enterprises, and accounting information systems could be grouped together. Finally, the chapters focusing on education and human capital could be grouped together. This approach to categorisation would help target readers and researchers interested in specific areas of the broad and dynamic field.

Evaluation: 8/10