ICT and Business in the New Economy: Globalization and Attitudes Towards eCommerce

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ABSTRACT

Many authors argue that information and communications technology (ICT) in this New Economy is causing a globalized, unified society. Others take the opposite stand, viewing local factors such as national culture as very important to the success of information technology (IT). Research indicates that related factors such as gender may also play important roles in the use and acceptance of IT. This paper uniquely examines these perspectives by using electronic commerce as the common technology. Business students from the U.S., Greece and England expressed opinions on the important issues of national control, privacy cost, property rights and consumer preferences. The authors find evidence that concludes that there are statistically significant differences in attitude about e-commerce among cultural groups, but not with gender.

Keywords: culture; gender; e-commerce; globalization.

INTRODUCTION

In this age of information, researchers postulate that information technology (IT) is providing a new medium to finally unite society. According to the futurist Francis Fukuyama (1992), the end of the Cold War signals a shift towards a “normative integration of principles and institutions”. Todd (1986) states that technology provides ever-narrowing approaches to social problems, and these approaches are reducing social options. He notes that an “unnatural” selection process caused by technology results in a loss of diversity in human society. Voli (1992) discusses a “convergence theory” where opportunities and demands presented by modern technology promote the convergence of all societies towards a single set of social pat-
terns and individual behaviors, due in part to the requirements of technology for a common set of development and implementation steps, and for common organization constraints. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1995), in her classic World Class, predicts that internationalism will prevail over “nativism”. That is, for future corporate profitability, the boundaries of national identity must be subsumed to the need for quality products and global goodwill.

Greider (1997) writes of One World, Ready or Not, with mobile phones as the “universal artifact of the revolution”. He predicts that there will be four major competitive factors: labor, national governments, multinational corporations and financial investors. Hope and Hope (1997) discuss the “third wave” leading to more homogeneous global marketing patterns. Cairncross (1997) observes that time zones and language groups will soon define distance, rather than mileage. She further notes that the credit card is the certain symbol of a unified world currency. Kevin Kelly (1998), editor of Wired magazine, in his New Rules for the New Economy, writes that technology has “been able to infiltrate into our lives to the degree it has become more like us…Technology has become our culture” (p. 33).

On the other hand, however, some argue that a globalization of society has not, and perhaps will not occur. Ferkiss, in Technological Man (1969), claims that the existence of technology change presupposes cultural acceptance, and that a single culture, “embracing both the famine-stricken world and the well-fed nations is obviously impossible…cultural variation is likely to be the rule” (p. 171). Volti (1992) observes that technologies developed and implemented in one culture or society may fail when taken to a different setting. Nelson and Clark (1994) note that European firms commonly develop differing computer systems for different nations. Hamel and Prahalad (1994), in their classic Competing for the Future, warn firms to address and work with global differences; that global markets emerge at differing speeds; and that global differences will continue to be a challenge. Doremus et al. (1998) note that corporate governance is closely linked to national culture, and boldly claim that the global corporation is a myth. Fine (1998) cautions managers to be more sensitive to the effects of national business mores, values, standards, laws and cultures. Bowers (2000) claims that the most dominant characteristic of computers is their culturally mediating and transforming effect, but that computers are viewed as a destructive form of Western colonization. “Members of other cultures are aware that when they use computers, they must adapt themselves to radically different patterns of thought and deep culturally-bound ways of knowing” (p. 22).

Castells (2001) observes that “core economic, social, political and cultural activities throughout the planet are being structured by and around the Internet…(yet) its logic, its landscape and its constraints are not well understood beyond the realm of strictly technological matters” (p. 3). He further writes of a large digital divide within a globalized Internet between developed and developing nations; and of a resulting number of challenges, including ownership and control of data, and the exclusion of groups by virtue of education, technology, and national culture. Albrow (2000) discusses several facets of globalization, including values related to daily behavior of many groups (also called “globalism”), universally available information and commodities (“globality”), communications technologies used to maintain relationships (“timespace compression”), and worldwide institutional arrangements permitting personal
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