E-business adoption and evaluation in Thai tourism SMEs: process and context perspectives

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ABSTRACT
This thesis explores e-business adoption and evaluation in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Thailand. It seeks to deepen our understanding of IT evaluation practices in SMEs. This is of significance because failure to appreciate the returns on IT investment and difficulties in assessing IT projects could lead to rejection of IT or reluctance to adopt IT. Especially for SMEs which have limited resources, IT evaluation – the value proposition – tends to be relatively more important than it is for larger enterprises which have proportionally more resources. Nevertheless, despite its importance and benefits, IT evaluation, particularly ex post, is infrequently done and problematic both in theory and in practice. Most prior IT evaluation literature focused more on ex ante evaluation and was conducted in the context of large enterprises. There was a limited attempt to link the evaluation at various stages holistically. This research contributes to the literature gap, which calls for better understandings of evaluation carried out in an SME context, particularly how the processes of adoption and evaluation are linked through time.

The research presented in this thesis uses a case study strategy, with data collected primarily via interviews conducted in Thailand with five Thai tourism SMEs. Two processual theories, the Pettigrew’s context, content, and process theory and the Vickers’
appreciative system theory, are applied as an intellectual framework to explore the processes by which e-business adoption and evaluation activities unfolded. The research shows that a process perspective is helpful in investigating and understanding IT evaluation practices. Most importantly, the thesis argues that the concept of IT adoption 'project' used in the prior literature is too simplistic and leads to a view of the adoption project as a one-off event which has a clear beginning and end. Rather, this thesis reveals that in practice firms introduce streams of connected initiatives. In effect IT adoption is a trajectory of related initiatives. This reality undermines the notion of ex post evaluation since the original ex ante is overtaken by events (i.e. an introduction of other closely related initiatives) and hence changes the original intent and scope of the project. The ex post evaluation is therefore problematic because the referring point for comparison has been shifted. These findings are important as they both support some elements of existing theory and highlight some major disparities between established IT evaluation literature and actual IT evaluation practices in firms.