Citizenship, trust, and behavioural intentions to use public e-services: The case of Lebanon

Rania Fakhoury [a,*], Benoit Aubert [b]

[a] ICT Project Manager, United Nations Development Programme Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform, 5th Fl., Omar Daouk, Beirut, Lebanon
[b] Director of Development, Leonard de Vinci Pôle Universitaire, Business Lab, Courbevoie, France

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Active citizenship and trustworthiness may affect behavioural intentions to use e-government services. Such uses of information and communication technologies may improve public administration, yet adoption of e-government systems by end users has remained far below expectations, despite continued efforts in many countries. The low adoption and use of e-government services by end users thus remain major barriers to successful e-government implementation that might be addressed by greater trust in government, the Internet, and technology, as well as increased citizenship beliefs and actions. Active citizenship implies empowered, engaged, participatory citizens. The results of this quantitative study, conducted in the unique setting of Lebanon, show that by developing trustworthiness and active citizenship, citizens will increase their behavioural intention to use of e-government services. Thus, intentions to use public e-services grow stronger when the government foster trustworthiness and empowers average, passive citizens.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The number of initiatives and projects on e-government has multiplied since 1993 around the world. Nearly three trillion US dollars have been invested during the first decade of 2000[1]; $8 billion spent on e-government program in the United Stated in 2011 (Snead & Wright, 2014). Numerous studies and research projects were conducted. To illustrate this, in 2014, the e-government reference library in the US contains 6520 references review touching on the issue of electronic government and electronic governance[2]. Pioneer countries (United States, Canada, Great Britain and South Korea) have already introduced and revisited several strategies and programs of e-government. Despite these efforts, many e-government projects have 70% failure rate (Panda & Sahu, 2013, p. 1).

Such observations lead researchers to acknowledge that "*E-government research is in a poor state*" (Heeks & Bailur, 2007, p. 261)

or *weak* (Snead & Wright, 2014, p. 129). E-government is a relatively new concept that has become a "*world phenomenon*" (, p. 2) and the field of research is still nascent. Scholars recommend several steps to strengthen e-government research. Some recommendations offer to tie e-government research to public administration and political environment (Yildiz, 2007) or information systems, political science, and other social science theories (Heeks & Bailur, 2007). Other recommendations propose to use robust and "broad range" research method (Heeks & Bailur, 2007, p. 262) including "primary data, triangulation of findings, and concepts found rarely in the e-government literature" (, p. 660) to develop a rich e-government research.

Low adoption rates of e-government services steer many experts (Heeks & Bailur, 2007) to talk about the failure of e-government programs however, there is disparity in e-government usage. Specifically, in developing countries, around 41% of citizens interact with public authorities through the internet in Turkey while 2% of citizens are actually using e-services in Egypt (United Nations, 2014). Citizens are using informational e-services while sophisticated e-services are still lagging behind (United Nations, 2012; Venkatesh, Chan, & Thong, 2012). Informational stage is defined as "cataloguing, providing government information by creating government agency Web sites (Yildiz, 2007) while the sophisticated stage often involves the idea of transformation, horizontal integration and participation (Coursey & Norris, 2008). In

this study, the Lebanese government e-services are still at informational stage.

Low adoption and use of e-government services by end users for government to services (G2C) e-services are still major barriers to successful e-government implementation (Ahmad, Markkula, & Oivo, 2012; Heeks & Santos, 2009; Heeks, 2002; Hung, Chang, & Yu, 2006; Venkatesh, Chan, 2012).

Among the critical actions, increasing trust has been found an asset for e-government adoption. Trust has become a key area in e-government literature since it is a factor for the adoption of e-government. Citizens are reluctant to use e-government services mainly for security, privacy and transparency issues (Ebrahim & Irani, 2005; Hussein, Mohamed, Ahlan, Mahmud, & Aditiawarman, 2010; Jaeger, 2003).

These first observations are the starting points of this study which will investigate how active citizenship and trustworthiness have an impact on increasing citizens' adoption of e-government services. So far, there is no study that links citizenship and behavioural intention to use e-government services.

2. Background

This study investigates the impact of trustworthiness and active citizenship on people's behavioural intentions to use public e-government services in Lebanon. To investigate this question, we need a brief historical review of e-government in Lebanon, as well as definitions of active citizenship and trustworthiness and their links to e-government.

2.1. E-government in Lebanon

According to Grant and Chau (2006, p. 80), e-government is:

a broad-based transformation initiative, enabled by leveraging the capabilities of information and communication technology; (1) to develop and deliver high quality, seamless, and integrated public services; (2) to enable effective constituent relationship management and (3) to support the economic and social development goals of citizens, businesses, and civil society at a local state, national and international levels (Worrall, 2012, p. iii).

Through the process of transformation, "government can rapidly and efficiently adapt to changing citizen needs and emerging political and market priorities" (OASIS TGF Committee, 2014, p. 6) and engage end users.

In Lebanon, 15% of citizens express some intention to accept public e-services (Harfouche & Robbin, 2012, p. 22). The Lebanese economy depends largely on services and tourism (mainly from Arab countries and Lebanese expatriates), as well as the banking sector.

Lebanon undertook a series of initiatives between 1998 and 2012 to develop a vision, policy, and strategy for e-government through administrative reforms. For example, in 2002 and 2003, the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR), developed respectively an e-government vision and a National e-Strategy (Economic and Social Commission for Eastern Asia, 2009). In 2008, the e-government strategy underwent revision, in an effort to realize greater economic and social benefits, as well as quality-of-life improvements for Lebanese citizens. Then in 2013, a new portal (www.e-gov.gov.lb) became available and introduced the e-government initiative.

A key objective of any e-government initiative is the potential for decreased corruption. In 2014, Lebanon ranked 136 of 175 countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index[3]. The country is

---

3 〈http://www.transparency.org/country/#LBN〉.

Table 1
ACCI dimensions and definitions.

Dimension	Definition
Protest and social change	Unconventional forms of participation, or action-orientated participation, including protests, demonstrations, boycotts, and political strikes that are a necessary influence in modern democracies. Participation or volunteering in activities organized by civil society groups that work towards government accountability and positive social change
Community life	Participation in activities that support a community: religious, business, cultural, social, sport, and parent–teacher organizations
Representative democracy	Participation in politics limited to voting, political party-related activities, or contacting elected representatives and governmental officials
Democratic values	Combination of indicators of participation in democracy, human rights, and non-discrimination

Source: Hoskins and Mascherini (2008).

marked by the presence of *wasta*, defined as "force in interpersonal networks, every significant decision, and connections that pervade all aspects of business and social life" (Alawadhi & Morris, 2009, p. 589). According to (Harfouche & Robbin, 2012), Lebanese people rely on *wasta* and the resulting connections to facilitate trust-based transactions. Many citizens also bribe government employees and intermediaries to complete transactions with agencies or ministries. E-government transactions promise a means to limit both *wasta* (Alawadhi & Morris, 2009) and bribery.

2.2. Citizenship

Marshall (1950) defines citizenship by emphasizing the importance of three elements: civil, political, and social. According to him, "the civil element, comprising the rights required for individual freedom; the political element, 'the right to participate in the exercise of political power' through membership of a political body, or through electing them; the third element, the social, comprised 'the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society'" (, p. 11).

Definitions of citizenship have also evolved beyond these three elements to "focus on citizens' participation in political processes" (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2008, p. 461). In a study linking ICT in general to citizenship and e-government concepts, (, p. 217) defines citizenship according to the components of rights, duties, and participation. For each component, she cites a role for citizens. For example, the participation component correlates with the idea of citizen participation. In turn, citizens' roles can range from consumers of public services to passive agents to active agents to determinants of rules.

An active agent and active citizenship stem from education fields but also have been applied to European contexts, such that the definition of active citizenship is: "Participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterized by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy" (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2008, p. 462). Accordingly, participation encompasses active citizenship (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2008). In Europe, an active citizenship composite indicator (ACCI), which aims to measure active citizenship on the basis of four operational dimensions (protest and social change, community life, representative democracy, and democratic values) and offers a useful tool for monitoring the level of citizenship (see Table 1).