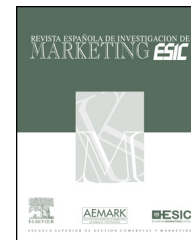




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## ARTICLE

# Rebuilding public trust in government administrations through e-government actions



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Attitude toward e-government;  
Public administration communication

**Abstract** Citizen trust in the public administration has been reduced worldwide due to recent events such as the current economic situation, corruption cases or disclosure of classified information. This work analyzes whether e-government related actions could be strategically employed to increase citizen trust in the public administration. This research confirms that perceived quality of public e-services has a positive effect on trust in the public administration. In turn, public administration communication (i.e., campaigns to promote the benefits and use of e-government) only influence trust in the public administration for citizens with a favorable attitude towards e-government. These results have interesting implications suggesting in which ways public administration should invest their limited resources in order to recover the levels of citizen trust.

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### PALABRAS CLAVE

Confianza en la administración pública;  
Servicios públicos electrónicos;  
Calidad del servicio electrónico;

**Creación de confianza en la administración pública a través de acciones de gobierno electrónico**

**Resumen** La confianza en la administración pública se está reduciendo mundialmente debido a sucesos como la actual crisis económica, casos de corrupción o filtraciones de información clasificada. Este trabajo analiza cómo aumentar la confianza ciudadana en la administración pública mediante acciones relacionadas con el gobierno electrónico. En concreto, los resultados muestran que la calidad de los servicios públicos electrónicos tiene un efecto positivo sobre

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Actitud hacia el gobierno electrónico; Comunicaciones de la administración pública

la confianza en la administración. En cambio, las comunicaciones de la administración pública (i.e., campañas para promocionar los beneficios y uso del gobierno electrónico) sólo influyen en la confianza en la administración para aquellos ciudadanos con una actitud favorable hacia el gobierno electrónico. Estos resultados sugieren interesantes implicaciones para la gestión pública acerca de cómo invertir sus limitados recursos para recuperar los niveles de confianza del ciudadano.

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## Introduction

Governments worldwide are facing several recent events – i.e. the current economic situation, corruption cases, the information published by websites such as WikiLeaks, the Snowden’s affair and so on – which are diminishing citizen trust in public administration to a great extent (Yildiz & Saylam, 2013). Recent reports suggest that trust in governments and public institutions are experiencing the greatest decline of the century, being this decrease especially large in European countries as Spain (Bannister & Connolly, 2011; Corporate Excellence, 2012). In sum, less than half of the population all over the world relies on public institutions (Corporate Excellence, 2012). However, governments need citizens’ trust and collaboration to guarantee the success of public initiatives (such as e-government projects, new public policies, etc.) and obtain their expected benefits for the whole society (Kolsaker & Lee-Kelley, 2008). In this respect, citizens’ trust in public administration is crucial to enhance the relationship between citizens and public administration in the long-term (Warkentin, Gefen, Pavlou, & Rose, 2002). Therefore, there is a managerial need to better understand in which actions public administration must invest their limited resources in order to recover the levels of trustworthiness among citizens.

In this way, one of the most important investments made by governments around the world in the last few years is the development of e-government (for example, providing citizens with online public services). In Spain, the public law 11/2007 (*Ley 11/2007, de 22 de junio, de acceso electrónico de los ciudadanos a los servicios públicos*) recognizes the citizens’ right to interact online with the Public Administration in order to, among others, obtain information, make questions or perform transactions. The launching and right management of e-government services represent an instrument benefiting both public administration and citizens (Chan, Hackney, Pan, & Chou, 2011), that highlight the government transformation and its interest to adapt its services to citizens’ needs.

In the last few years, most literature on e-government has primarily focused on citizen adoption of these initiatives (e.g. Carter and Bélanger, 2005; Bélanger & Carter, 2008). Focusing on earlier studies that have analyzed trust in the e-government context, most of these works mainly consider trust as an antecedent factor of e-government adoption (e.g. Bélanger & Carter, 2008; Warkentin et al., 2002), or just focus on trust in a specific public e-service

(e.g. Belanche, Casaló, & Guinalú, 2012; Wu & Chen, 2005). In contrast, there is still a scarcity of works analyzing what are the effects of e-government introduction and whether the development of these interactive initiatives can increase trust in public administration as a whole (e.g. Bannister & Connolly, 2011).

To shed some light in this gap found on this emerging body of literature, this work analyzes how government actions related to e-government initiatives might affect citizens’ trust in public administration. Specifically, the contribution of this research is twofold. First, we evaluate whether investing in e-service quality or in public administration communication serves to increase trust in the public administration as a whole. Second, we investigate to which citizens should be focused these public administration communication in order to maximize its effect on trust in the public administration. That is, we focus on two government instruments devoted to better serve citizens through e-government:

- First, we focus on public e-service quality, which may be considered as an observable “consumer” oriented signal (e.g. Schlosser, White, & Lloyd, 2006) that public administration can use to communicate its abilities and concerns about citizens’ needs and demands. That is, e-service quality represents an investment made by the public administration to better serve the society which implies skills and commitment in its relationship with citizens. E-service quality is the most relevant belief considered by the user to evaluate e-services, and it is usually decomposed into four dimensions: efficiency, privacy, fulfillment and system availability (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2005).
- Second, we focus on public administration communication – such as governmental campaigns, personalized mail, or spotless brick-and mortar locations – that can help communicate the strengths of public e-services (Carter, 2008). This citizen oriented communication focuses on increasing the citizens’ awareness of these services and inform about the benefits of e-government (Teerling & Pieterse, 2010). However, individuals’ resistance to be persuaded by commercial campaigns is a strongly accepted finding in previous research on consumer behavior (e.g. Ahluwalia, 2000; Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Eagly & Chaiken, 1995). In this way, the influence of messages on individuals might depend on their attitude toward the target so that messages are more persuasive when they are consistent with the individuals’ beliefs and evaluations, suggesting an

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