



Qualitative approach to determine user experience of e-government services



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ABSTRACT

E-government (E-Gov¹) services provide new opportunities to citizens by allowing them to use government services (paying electricity bill, e-filing, e-ticketing, get information about government policies & schemes etc.) anytime from anywhere irrespective of geographical location and releases citizens bound by government official hours. Experience plays an important role to change users' intention to adopt, that impacts their behavior and attitude too. The aim of this study was to investigate how citizens experience e-Gov services and how that experience influences their behavior. The study also investigates how users value e-Gov services. The study has used a qualitative approach involving 31 citizens of India, where e-Gov services are still at an early stage. The findings highlight the extent to which citizens are moving from traditional ways of using government services to using it electronically. The study also takes into account the effect of these technological innovations in government settings from a participant's perspective. The implications for researchers and practitioners are then discussed, with emphasis on government need to develop competent e-Gov services.

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1. Introduction

Government is shifting to a new concept of providing extensive access of government services electronically from devices like computer, laptop, smart-phones and other handheld devices, which are much more integrated into daily human life (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, Promoting e-Governance, 2008). In fact, while the traditional ways of accessing government services are limited to the office location, spatial dimensions and official hours, the e-government (e-Gov¹) services are not related to a specific location but distributed in terms of access anytime and anywhere within an area enriched with the internet and computer technologies. Hence, citizens can access governmental services from anywhere anytime.

Various researchers and institutions have tried to define e-Gov in different ways but all headed towards a single notion and encompasses a generic and unique mission - presenting government systems using information and communication technology (ICT) to serve citizens better (Evans & Yen, 2006; Muir & Oppenheim, 2002;

Norris, Fletcher, & Holden, 2001; Reddick, 2006; Shareef, Archer, Kumar, & Kumar, 2010). Technological innovations change the way citizens access and consume information and the way in which government reach citizens and deliver their services. Online banking, credit card services and other mode of online payments are emerging as a promising means of supporting and using e-Gov services. In the paradigm of public service contents (outcomes), e-Gov services are categorized into different types by different research and organizations (Fath-allah, Cheikhi, Al-qutaish, & Idri, 2014). Each type of service levels represents a different service pattern, stakeholder orientation, types of interaction, levels of technological sophistication, security requirements, and reengineering processes (Dorner, 2009; Holden, Norris, & Fletcher, 2003; Moon, 2002; Shareef, Kumar, Kumar, & Dwivedi, 2011). From the end users' perspectives, services at each stage have significant difference in terms of functionality and characteristics (Gottschalk, 2009).

Despite diffusion, substantial growth and development of e-Gov universally, it is not clear whether citizens are ready to embrace these services in developed and developing countries (Carter & Belanger, 2005). Diffusion, acceptance, and success of e-government initiatives are contingent upon citizens' willingness to adopt these services. Although e-Gov systems have significant impact on public administrations, organizations, individuals, and society, so

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¹ E-government: E-Gov.

far only a few thorough and systematic studies have been undertaken on the subject to comprehensively integrate overall factors leading to its successful implementation (Jaeger, 2003). E-Gov theories and concepts are still in a premature stage (Shareef et al., 2011). Researchers from different disciplines have addressed this from their respective speculations and conceptualized in a scattered fashion (Heeks & Bailur, 2007). E-Gov discipline is an interesting area for scholars and practitioners, still there is a gap in the literature concerning the new dynamics in citizen's behavior and their experiences. For instance, previous studies (Al-adawi, Yousafzai, & Pallister, 2005; Carter & Belanger, 2005; Gilbert, Balestrini, & Littleboy, 2004; Klievink & Janssen, 2009; Kumar, Mukerji, Butt, & Persaud, 2007; Riley, 2003; Tung & Rieck, 2005; Wang & Liao, 2008) largely focused on citizens' acceptance of e-Gov services, without taking into account the effect of e-Gov services on citizens' experience.

Limited research on e-Gov users' experience motivated us to look into other similar areas of research e.g. e-services and e-retailing. There are a range of research (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002; Dorner, 2009; Martin, Mortimer, & Andrews, 2015; Meyer & Schwager, 2007; Novak, Hoffman, & Yung, 2000; Pantano & Priporas, 2016; Rose, Clark, Samouel, & Hair, 2012; Rowley, 2006; Sorooshian, Salimi, Salehi, Nia, & Asfaranjan, 2013; Verhoef et al., 2009; Zhang & Prybutok, 2005) on e-service and e-retailing where customer experience is one of the key themes in these literature including the relationship between elements of the web experience and consumer behavior, customer satisfaction, intention to buy and loyalty. The findings of these studies suggest that there are changes in shopping behavior due to change in customer experience over time in this new e-service environment (Dennis, Alamanos, Papagiannidis, & Bourlakis, 2016; Novak et al., 2000; Verhoef et al., 2009). Hence, one can predict that similar to e-service and e-retailing, government service experience might change over time due to the implementation of e-Gov which can be accessed by citizens' from devices like computer and smart-phones connected to the internet. This change in experience may modify e-Gov service users' behavior in terms of search, communication, transaction and participation. However, users' behavior in terms of adopting a new technology-driven system is a very robust and complex subject. Extensive study and research is expected in this area to focus on the criteria necessary for citizens to adopt technology that will enable successful implementation of e-Gov.

The purpose of this research study is to investigate e-Gov users' motivation to change their behavior and develop understanding of this new users' experience and how it might create value for e-Gov users.

2. Literature review

Technology-based self-services (e-services) are changing the way in which service providers and consumers interact. This has raised a host of research and practice issues relating to the delivery of e-service (Rowley, 2006). Researchers have described e-service experience as self-service experience (Dabholkar, 2000; Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, & Bitner, 2000; Zhu, Wymer, & Chen, 2002). Online service delivery is different from conventional way of service delivery. Researchers have focused on explaining e-service experiences, and the relationship between e-service experience and consumer behavior, customer satisfaction, intention to use and loyalty (Rowley, 2006; Zhang & Prybutok, 2005). Lee and Lin (2005) and Yang, Peterson, and Huang (2001) have advocated that experience is an important element in the establishment of trust and relationship with consumers. According to Meuter et al. (2000), consumers are particularly satisfied with e-service when their needs are met, when the services are consistent with their

preference for control, when they are faster and more flexible than the alternative, and when they deliver as expected. Problems occurring in the e-service system can result in a failure of service (Zhang & Prybutok, 2005) and may lead to loss of valuable opportunities to build loyalty (Wachter, 2002). Apart from determining the success and failure of e-commerce, e-services are becoming increasingly important in providing consumers with a superior experience (Yang et al., 2001). Firms need to recognize that web experience presents an opportunity of strengthening its brand positioning to online consumers. On the other hand, it is also important for government and e-government service providers to recognize the important of e-government experience for the success of e-government projects (Kolesar & Galbraith, 2003; Rowley, 2004).

Similar to e-retailing, in e-government, the citizens' interaction or contact with the government is through technology, such as the websites. During an e-government service encounter, citizens have to rely entirely on sight and sound, whereas the traditional service experience can use all senses (Rowley, 2006). E-government is sometimes described as a relatively impoverished experience due to the absence of face-to-face interaction which is seen as central to relationship development (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Malhotra, 2000). Unlike traditional service, e-government services are not constrained by distance and opening hours, and are therefore deliver convenient. Convenience is linked with control for customer (Rowley, 2006). Citizens are presented with clearly defined choices in relation to a number of characteristics of the e-government services with which they engage. Since individuals personality may impact their perceptions of control and locus of control (Bradley & Sparks, 2002), different individuals may experience e-government services differently.

In conclusion, technology mediation, which we describe as a defining characteristic of e-service, generates two inherent characteristics: e-service as information service, and e-service as self-service, each of which in their turn contribute to the nature of the e-service experience (Rowley, 2006). Technology readiness or stage of e-service adoption may have an impact on the service experience (Tsikriktsis, 2004; Zeithaml, 2002). The complementary body of work on the antecedents to e-service adoption also suggests caution in interpreting customer evaluations of e-service, particularly when their experience of e-service is much more limited than their experience of services mediated through human service agents (Bitner, Ostrom, & Meuter, 2002; Dabholkar, Michelle Bobbitt, & Lee, 2003; Yang & Jun, 2008). A related approach is to regard the e-government service experience as consisting of a number of service components, each of which evaluated separately by the web site visitors (Bauer, Hammerschmidt, & Falk, 2005; Santos, 2003; Zeithaml, 2002). There are mainly four types/levels: information service (view and collect government information), two-way communication services (communicate with government electronically, e.g. email), transaction services (transact electronically with the government), and participation services (online medium for public involvement) (Hiller & Bélanger, 2001; Layne & Lee, 2001). Each of these service levels represents a different service pattern, with unique stakeholder orientation, various types of interaction, varied levels of technological sophistication, unique security requirements and specific processes (Dorner, 2009; Holden et al., 2003; Moon, 2002; Shareef et al., 2011). From the end users' perspective services of each stages have significant difference in term of functionality and characteristics (Gottschalk, 2009), hence users experience them differently. The need to identify the scope and elements in the service experience is also acknowledged by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Malhotra (2005). In summary, technology mediation makes e-government services different from conventional way of accessing

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