Chapter 3
Digital Governance:
A Usability Study of Omani E-Government Websites

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to evaluate the usability of Omani ministry websites (OMW). The researchers depended mainly on the dimensions and typical variables proposed by Baker (2009) to measure the usability of the websites and only on a few dimensions adopted from Smith (2001). The borrowed dimensions were used to evaluate the websites' ease of use. The researchers organized the dimensions of website usability into six dimensions, which were: (1) Online services, (2) User-help, (3) Navigation, (4) Legitimacy, (5) Information Architecture, and (6) Accessibility accommodations. Based on the study findings, the researchers made a number of recommendations to improve the performance of Omani e-government websites, including the following: Users should be involved in the early stages of a website's development, in addition to automatic tools, when testing its accessibility. This will ensure that the website is usable and accessible.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid advances in Information Technology and its entry into every aspect of human life have changed how people live, and how they interact and learn. It has also had an impact on how governments serve their people. Many governments have realized the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) for improving the delivery of services to citizens. Today, governments around the world, from industrialized and developing countries alike, are embracing electronic government (e-government).

Shifting from traditional government to e-government achieves several benefits, such as increasing access to government information and the availability of services 24 hours/7 days a week, breaking down barriers between the government's agencies and it citizens, creating better engagement, better coordination, more efficient operations and services, and improving policy innovation.

Investigating e-government and examining its development has become an evolving research area. The most existing research on e-government has used the internet to examine government websites (Mofleh & Wanous, 2009). However, there is no universal instrument used to evaluate e-government websites. Although many sets of criteria have been proposed for this evaluation, little has been done on applying them to e-government websites and on the lessons to be drawn from website design (Smith, 2001).

Moreover, usability testing is a priority for website developers in order to ensure that a site is usable by its intended audience. Few developers take time however to test a website or to engage potential users early enough in its developmental stages (Guenther, 2003). Since e-governments intend to deliver their services to their citizens, usability is important. The e-government will fail to achieve its full potential unless the website usability barrier is recognized and bridged (Baker, 2009).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

While e-government experience in developed countries has shown encouraging results in delivering electronic services to citizens, as observed from the available literature, government initiatives in developing countries are still facing challenges pertaining to the implementation of such services (Al Shafi & Weerakkody, 2007). Oman took the preliminary steps necessary for this large scale project in 1998 and launched its e-government portal in 2009.

Since Omani ministries are considered a major contributor to the success of the government-to-citizen relationship, it is necessary to ensure their websites' functionality and usability in order to accomplish e-government goals. However, there is no

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