

Chapter 21

A Cross–Cultural Comparison of Electronic Government Adoption in Spain and the USA

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ABSTRACT

Electronic Government (e-government) is growing in popularity across the globe. Given the increasing relevance of electronic services in the public sector, there is a need for a global agreement on a consistent framework for assessing e-government. This study uses a cross-cultural comparison to assess the fundamentals of e-government adoption in the United States (USA) and Spain. In particular, the authors explore the effects of perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, compatibility and trust on intentions to use e-government services. A survey was administered to citizens in both countries to test the hypotheses derived from adoption literature and Hofstede's dimensions of culture. Results indicate that there are differences in the relationship between compatibility and use intention, with stronger effects in the USA sample. Furthermore, while perceived ease of use significantly impacts intentions for the USA sample, it does not for the Spain sample; and, while trust is not significant in the USA sample, it is for the Spain sample. The implications of these results, mostly consistent with the hypotheses as suggested by the dimensions of culture, are discussed for both research and practice.

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), e-government is growing in popularity across the globe, becoming a truly global phenomenon. E-government advocates posit that we have entered a new era “where citizens can use open government data to build their own tools and collaborate directly in the process of governing” (Smith, 2010 p.9). In light of the ever-increasing relevance of electronic services in the public sector, more research is needed on the cross-cultural impacts of trust and adoption factors for e-government (Gonzalez, Adenso-Diaz & Gemoets, 2010; Navarrete, 2010; Prandini & Ramilli, 2011). In this study, we perform a cross-cultural comparison to identify e-government adoption factors in two OECD member countries: the United States and Spain. The United Nations E-Government Survey of 2012 shows that Europe (0.7118) and the Americas (0.5403) score above the world average (0.4882) on the E-government Development Index (UN, 2012). Both Spain and the USA are in the top 25 countries on this index and in the top 15 countries on the E-Participation Index. The U.S. index for each category is .86 and .92 respectively, while Spain’s indices are 0.77 and 0.50 (UN, 2012).

In the USA, the government continues to invest a significant amount of resources in technology. In 2010, the Office of Management and Budget received \$35 million for the E-Government Fund; it requested an additional \$35 million for 2011. In addition to a significant financial investment by the government, American citizens have embraced this phenomenon. According to Smith (2010), in the United States, 82% of Internet users (61% of American adults) look for information or complete transactions on a government website. In addition to website utilization, citizens also take advantage of social media outlets to interact with public sector organizations. Approximately one third of online adults use diverse electronic platforms such as email, blogs, social networking sites, online video or text messages to get government information. Even more online adults (40%) use the Internet to access data about government information (legislation details, stimulus spending, etc.). According to Smith (2010, p.8), “half of government website visitors in the U.S. said that they accomplished everything they set out to do in their last government website interaction, and an additional 28% were able to do most of what they wanted to do. Just 5% said that their most recent government website interaction was completely unsuccessful.”

Similar to the USA, Spain exhibits a high-degree of e-government readiness, as indicated by the large amount of services and information available online, Spain’s educated population, and an adequate distribution of broadband services. In Spain, approximately 29% of citizens obtained information from public authorities and approximately 8% filed forms online in 2009 (EU, 2010). Recent legislation has helped the diffusion of e-government services. In June 2007, a law established citizens’ rights to access public administration services online, obliging those administrations to provide the necessary technology for this purpose. In fact, all of the ministries in the central Spanish government provide online services, and have made a commitment to reform their services, including digitalizing internal management of procedures and making them easily available to users by means of electronic signature systems.

While both Spain and the USA show great promises for the use of e-government, there are also some key cultural differences that may affect the adoption of e-government by the countries’ respective citizens. For example, in terms of national culture, Spain is lower on individualism and masculinity and higher in uncertainty avoidance than the USA (Hofstede, 2001, 1991). These cultural differences are likely to impact e-government adoption. Yet, most e-government research has been conducted in one country only (Bélanger & Carter, 2012). This research seeks to fill this gap by answering the following question: *What are the differences in e-government adoption determinants in countries with diverse cultures?*

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