

Government Information and Service Delivery Through Union Digital Centers in Bangladesh: Users' Perceptions on Good Governance

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the government information and service delivery to the rural citizen through UDC in Bangladesh. It used a descriptive and exploratory research design based on the quantitative approach. The sample comprised of 383 UDC users who were randomly selected. The data was gathered using questionnaire and analyzed through SPSS (statistical package for social sciences). The statistical findings showed that the overall perception of UDC users on the e-governance initiative found positive. Also, the results of the regression analysis show that the digital divide and good governance has a substantial impact on the overall perception of the user. It is, therefore, suggested that efforts should be instigated for improved awareness and training which helps ensure effective service delivery.

KEYWORDS

Bangladesh, Good Governance, Government Information, Service Delivery, Union Digital Centers, Users Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Establishing good governance to is a great challenge for all countries and it requires the participation of the citizen in the government decision-making process, transparency and accountability of government officials, reduction of corruption, the interaction between citizen & government and transformation (Alryalat et al., 2015; Dwivedi et al., 2017; Rana et al., 2016; Shahnewaz et al., 2015; Gaghman, 2020). It is even more challenging in the relatively less developed countries where social, political and economic conditions are seen quite instable. However, while reaping the potentials of ICTs many countries adopted the e-governance system

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to face the challenges of establishing good governance and achieving sustainable development. Sound governance is proposed to be a viable alternative, considering widespread criticisms to good governance (Mishra & Momin, 2020). In this connection, the government of Bangladesh has taken many initiatives to adopt e-governance and Union Information and Service Center (UISC) is one of those as part of vision 2020 (Mamun et al., 2018), later UISC renamed as Union Digital Center (UDC) which are established at all Union Parishad (UP) the lowest tier of local government office to render government information and-services to rural people.

The increase in e-governance has revised the governmental services that include rendering proper materials to rural people, who are deprived of major resources (Biback, 2019). Therefore, to disseminate information and deliver government services to the citizens, the Bangladesh government has started UDCs in all 4,501 UPs across the country (Begum & Khair, 2017). UDCs are well-recognized as publicly owned and privately operated information and service delivery centers (Siddiquee & Faruqi, 2013). Studies have acknowledged their role as significant for catering to the information needs of the rural community concerning the government offered services (Asad, 2011; Das, 2019), particularly in Bangladesh. Das (2019) advocated that UDCs are substantially contributing towards the initiative of Digital Bangladesh goals. Such as these UDCs have allowed the rural population to rapidly and effectively access the information in a cost-effective way and to bridge the digital gap exist at grassroots. Digital Bangladesh concept is central for providing a secure system that smoothly delivers information to the people. For the accomplishment of this goal, Union Information and Service Centre (UISC) has been established in the remote areas of rural Bangladesh. At present, the number of UDC present in Bangladesh is 4551 that is providing effective and efficient delivery of government services to all its citizens (Das, 2019).

However, the present situation and nearing timeline of Digital Bangladesh requires the country to improve its initiative robustness. It is because most of these government departments are still operating manually with personnel that are either semi-skilled or unskilled (Das, 2019). Other challenges identified include the absence of relevant e-content (Sarker, 2013), as these are limited to basic organizations and some downloadable forms. Although different government websites are providing information, the use of online services is still very rare among the rural communities in Bangladesh (Das, 2019). This combined with the lack of consistency among the UDC services further leads to its ineffective use. Thus, an understanding of how these UDCs can be made more effective is integral for optimizing the reach to its ultimate Digital Bangladesh initiative.

Recent research by Das (2019) also argues that although the government had made these share access points available, the rural communities continue to remain averse to ICT use given its lack of meaning to their everyday life struggles (Saleheen, 2015). Thereby, to enhance the UDC integration among the rural community, this study intends to evaluate the user perception towards it and how it coincides with their understanding of good governance. The significance of the study stems from its effectiveness for catering to the socio-economic difficulties by introducing the shared access points for the targeted development of the individuals while ensuring that no costly investments are made. Moreover, it would assist to contribute to the Bangladesh government's reform initiatives, given its realization that UDC provides easy access, improved governance as well as delivery in contrast to its previous initiatives of delivering efficient services. The UDC services also help to transform itself into a knowledge-based institute.

Since the success of an initiative, in many cases, is determined by the perception and attitude, experience influences perception (Homburg, 2018). This study aims to find out rural people's perceptions of UDC as an initiative of implementing e-governance at the grassroots level. This also acts as a novel point given that previous studies on UDC in Bangladesh were either related to a certain region, or did not explore the user perception. The primary focus of the earlier researches has been on the services that these UDCs are to offer.

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