



# Perceived Effectiveness of E-Government and its Usage in City Governments: Survey Evidence from Information Technology Directors

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## ABSTRACT

*This article examines the perceived effectiveness of e-government by Information Technology (IT) directors in local governments in the United States. Most of the existing empirical research has examined the level of adoption of e-government; it does not focus on what is the overall effectiveness of e-government for city governments as this study does. This is accomplished through a survey of IT directors exploring their perceptions of e-government to determine whether this is related to the overall usage of e-government in cities. Websites were the most effective service channel for getting information; the telephone was the most effective service channel for solving a problem; while in person at a government office was most effective service channel for citizens' to access city services. E-government usage was positively related to managerial effectiveness, having a champion of e-government, and perceived effectiveness of citizen access to online information.*

*Keywords:* citizen access; electronic government; IT in public administration; local government; local officials; survey research

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## INTRODUCTION

E-government research has proliferated since the rise of the Internet in the 1990s as a mainstream method of citizen-initiated contacts with government. The Internet was originally envisaged to be a major transformational force to empower citizens to affect major change in

governments (Ho, 2002). The evolution of e-government has been noted to be incremental rather than transformational (West, 2004; Norris and Moon, 2005). The literature in public administration on e-government was written during the high point of interest in the Internet as one method to decentralize government

hierarchies and focus public sector organizations on results.

Much of the e-government literature to date has examined the overall adoption of e-government in terms of its level of sophistication and breadth of information and service offerings (Ho, 2002; Norris and Moon, 2005). There is much less research that evaluates the effectiveness of e-government for public managers (Streib and Navarro, 2005). This knowledge gap in the literature is where this study fits in and where it contributes to the literature. This study is different from existing surveys on e-government because it examines effectiveness through a national survey of Information Technology (IT) directors in large-sized cities in the United States. This study uses the citizen-initiated contacts literature as a conceptual framework to discern more explicitly the effectiveness of e-government. As resources for e-government become increasingly scarce for city governments, this study attempts to address what impact e-government has actually made for city governments.

Citizen participation through e-government has been argued that it will lead to increased accountability of governments and increase citizen trust and confidence in public officials (West, 2004; Welch, Hinnant, and Moon, 2004). The Internet has been touted as one service channel that can increase trust and confidence in citizen-initiated contacts with government (Thomas and Streib, 2003). Therefore, one way of examining why citizens contact government can be found in the extensive literature on citizen-initiated contacts with government; with much of this literature essentially predating the Internet.

In order to examine the effectiveness of e-government this study covers the following. There is an examination of the citizen-initiated contacts with government literature, showing the connection between this literature and the e-government literature. There is a review of the existing e-government survey research to determine where this study fits into this body of knowledge. Following this, the hypotheses and research methods are presented. The most important part of this article is the examination

of the survey results. The conclusion outlines the importance of the relationship between perceived effectiveness of e-government and its usage.

## **Citizen-Initiated Contacts and E-Government Literatures**

The existing literature on citizen-initiated contacts examines contacts by citizens being essentially related to needs, awareness, and their socio-economic status (Thomas, 1982). There is little systematic information on the impact of the sources of citizens' contacts with bureaucracy or their satisfaction with that contact (Moon, Serra, and West, 1993; Serra, 1995). Research indicates that perceived needs for a service was the most important predictor of all forms of citizen-initiated contacts (Thomas and Melkers, 1999; Thomas and Melkers, 2000). Therefore, the need for a service with municipal government can be used to examine citizen-initiated contacts with e-government.

There are several studies that examine citizen-initiated contacts by citizens (Jones; Greenberg, Kaufman, and Drew, 1977; Vedlitz, Dyer, and Durand, 1980; Sharp, 1984; Vedlitz and Dyer, 1984; Hirlinger, 1992; Thomas and Melkers, 1999), but there is much less research that examines administrators' receptivity to these contacts (Greene, 1982; Reddick, 2005a). Citizen-initiated contacts has been an established field of study in public administration, but as noted most of the literature predates the Internet (Thomas and Streib, 2003; Pieterse and Dijk, 2007).

E-government can link citizens to government services, thus eliminating their need to interact with government employees as a means to gain access to city services (Milward and Snyder, 1996; Snellen, 2002). The movement from street-level to system level bureaucracies has evolved because of the Internet, which has changed the traditional role of citizen-initiated contacts with government (Snellen, 1998; Bovens and Zouridis, 2002).

Citizen-initiated contacts with a government agency through the Internet are usually in the form of requesting a service or lodging a

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