Chapter 51

The Influence of Government Capacity on E-Services Diffusion at Municipal Level in New Jersey

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ABSTRACT

The development of ICTs brings opportunities for governments to improve their services provision. Since early 2000, governments at all levels have increasingly enabled citizens to get e-services, or services online, which was the primary function of e-government. Although great progress has been made, studies indicate that e-services levels are still low and great variances exist. Previous research, that has explored the determinants of government performance on e-services, was often lacking an emphasis on government capacity. This study aims at examining the influence of government capacity (technical capacity, financial capacity, and administrative capacity) on e-services. With data from 146 municipalities in New Jersey, the research finds that government capacity, specifically administrative capacity, positively affects government performance in e-services.

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been used increasingly by governments to improve public service provisions. Nowadays, various e-services are available on government websites or through digital tools, such as applying for permits and licenses online, making payments for tickets and utilities through smartphone, paying taxes online, etc. In the city of Newark, besides these services, residents can register for consideration for jobs on government website, and businesses can be directly registered online too. Similar services are provided on many other major municipality websites, such as Los Angeles and Chicago.

Although great progress has been made, the reality is that governments at both municipal and national levels still perform poorly and a great gap exists. Researchers have tried to explain the diffusion and explore the determinants of e-services adoption and development. However, there is a lack of literature available that emphasizes the role of government capacity. Government capacity refers to the abilities of governments to carry out their functions, which is the foundation for government performance. And, it is expected that governments with higher levels of capacity will perform better in e-services. In this study, we tested the influence of government capacity (technical capacity, financial capacity, and administrative capacity) on e-services diffusion at the municipal level and found that administrative capacity significantly impacts e-services provision.

RISE OF E-SERVICES AND ITS DIFFUSION

Rise of E-Services

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have developed quickly over the past two decades. Since the 1990s, governments have begun to provide information and services online. Contact information for government officials and departments, public meeting minutes, budget reports, and so on are available on government websites. Citizens can also apply for permits and licenses and pay tickets and taxes online. Both researchers and practitioners viewed this as the development of e-government. E-government was defined by West (2000) as the delivery of information and services online through the Internet or other digital means. Scholars, like Kumar et al. (2007), believe that e-government can provide higher quality services and attain greater efficiency.

Recently, smartphone applications and social media have been used increasingly to provide services and engage citizens. For example, applications have been designed by the Hong Kong government to allow citizens to get information and have access to services. Hundreds of social media sites are available as part of the New York government's attempts to connect with the public. Additionally, governments have started to create a combined platform to make services delivery more convenient. For example, Singapore has the "eCitizen" portal where citizens can find information about all government services. The Singapore government website has "OneInBox" where citizens can access their government statement, payment notices, reminders, and the like.

New technologies promote e-government, especially e-services. Researchers have varied on their definitions and perceptions of e-services. Sa, Rocha and Cota (2015) define e-service as pertaining to any government transactions through online channels, such as requesting and paying for building licenses or permits. The main distinction between traditional and electronic services is that the latter involves interactions and information flow between service providers and end-users (Li & Suomi, 2007). Similarly, Zaidi and Qteishat (2012) consider e-services as those provided online, with information being the underlying thrust in the exchange. Government websites not only aim to distribute information and government updates, but also serve as a service center for delivering services. Hoffman & Bateson (1997, pp. 5) define e-services as "deeds, efforts or performances whose delivery is mediated by information technology (including the Web, information kiosks and mobile devices). Such e-service includes the service element of e-tailing, customer support and service, and service delivery". Layne and Lee (2001) emphasized the trend of e-government development with an increase of the offerings of personnel services such as payroll and timekeeping functions, online training, etc. The city of Shanghai has planned

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