


Chapter 15


E-Government and Semantics: Digital Citizenship Approaching Inclusion and Equality in Santa Catarina, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The increasing digital transformation in all segments of society has been creating demand in information management and access. Consequently, local and federal governments must adapt and launch digital services that enable inclusion and citizenship participation initiatives through digitalization and content management to meet these demands. Nevertheless, the simple conversion of physical forms to digital is not enough to enable access. This chapter highlights the relevance of the use of plain language towards information access. This work conducted action research supported by the Toyota Kata approach demonstrating how the change in the semantical construct in the forms and service description is significantly altered post digitalization of some services provided by the State of Santa Catarina Government. The results demonstrate that plain language impacts the comprehension and consumption of information, incurring more inclusive e-government services.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter approaches Plain Language for Open Access through the perspective of a citizen-centric public services perspective, presenting a case analyze of the Toyota kata approach in Santa Catarina, Brazil. For the purpose of this study Open Access is understood as an instantiation of Open Data, meaning the publication of foolproof government practices targeting to make them more accessible and comprehensible to the citizens (Sanabria & Gomes, 2014). Based on this conceptual framework, it is concluded that the rapid transformations caused by the consolidation of a heavily digital environment imposes new challenges to the processes, procedures, and responsibilities of governments entities both locally and globally. This phenomenon prompts the necessity of clear and solidly defined strategic actions that aim to provide services to society, enabling and facilitating the digital transformation, improving the State's performance in various areas (Pesquisa, 2016).

Furthermore, the costs associated with the face-to-face service is usually higher compared to online services, which indicates that the implementation of digital services can result in significant savings to the government. In Brazil, this fact is proven in surveys conducted by the Ministry of Planning, Development, and Management, which show that face-to-face service has an average cost of R\$43.68, while online service can reach R\$1.20, representing a saving of more than 97% in public resources per transaction (BRASIL, 2018a). Further studies and initiatives focusing on digitization are reinforced by the Brazilian Ministry of Science, Technology, Innovations, and Communications (MCTIC) in the document entitled Brazilian Strategy for Digital Transformation (E-digital) (BRASIL, 2018a).

Nevertheless, digital transformation should be more than a simple conversion of physical forms to digital ones. The United Nations advocates that governments must be committed to developing and releasing public services available to everyone; it means 'leaving no one behind' (UN, 2018). Without a language adequation, unavoidably parts of the population that are unable to understand the bureaucratic and legal standardized language will be excluded. According to Fischer *et al.* (2019), actions that alleviate the barriers of textual comprehension that prevent full service to the entire population should be considered. This chapter sought to answer the following research question: Does the application of Plain Language on the government sites and service forms positively impacts citizen comprehension? This work aims to answer this question through action research at the Santa Catarina State Government where the study was conducted.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The beginning of 1990 marks the process of e-government in the most rudimentary format with governments around the globe using internet-based technologies with some governments imposing service landscapes that are mandatory to some extent (Ebbbers et al., 2008). In his work discussing e-government and the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the knowledge management production in Brazil, Knight (2007) stresses the importance of political engagement in all levels, from local to State and federal, in creating cultural changes that will lead to a broader base in the use of technologies for socio-economic development. The project e-Brasil was part of an initiative aiming at creating awareness about the benefits of e-development strategies.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the efficiency of digital governance in Brazil depends on a broader connection between objectives on e-government to

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