

Chapter 27

Conceptualization of Trust in the E-Government Context: A Qualitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Although trust aspects have been investigated in e-commerce context, the e-government field is still significantly lacking from empirical studies that explore trust in e-government from the citizen's perspective. The lack of trust in e-government in developing countries is another persuasive impetus for conducting this study. The few recent studies investigating citizens' trust in e-government are conducted in developed countries. This study employed a qualitative approach (focus groups) to gain in depth understanding of the citizen's perception of e-government adoption. E-government initiative in Saudi Arabia is the main focus of this research. Based on the literature review, the key antecedent factors that affect citizen trust in e-government are identified, and a research model is build. Based on the results of the analysis of three focus groups, managerial recommendations are provided.

INTRODUCTION

In response to the fast development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), many governments around the world have sought to move to adopt electronic government solutions. This resulted in an increasing number of government websites as well as a variety of services offered.

Nearly all countries across the globe, from the poorest to the most advanced nations, have some sort of Internet presence.

The UN e-government survey (Unpan, 2008) showed that more countries are using information and communication technologies to provide information to their citizens with the possibility of online financial transactions. Of the 192 countries that are members in the UN, only 3 are not providing any services online. The UN report showed

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also that most of the countries are beginning to enter into a more advanced phase of e-government, and are adding more e-services and e-applications in order to respond to the needs of their citizens. However, the report did warn about the lack of citizens' participant and usage of e-government services by stating that:

"In some instances, governments have spent vast amounts of money building online systems and products only to observe that their citizens do not fully utilize them. This could be due to a lack of willingness and/or interest in understanding the needs of the people they serve." (Unpan, 2008, p. 13)

The above statement has motivated us to investigate how the citizens' perceived the e-government initiatives. Over the past few years, an increasing amount of research attention has been focused on e-government. Past research studies in e-government have provided a great deal of knowledge regarding the factors and variables that influence the adoption of e-government. More recently, research attention has shifted towards empirical studies that focus on the factors and processes that influence the acceptance, diffusion, and implantation of e-government initiatives (Al-Omari & Al-Omari, 2006; Allen, Juillet, Paquet, & Roy, 2001; Basu, 2004; Clark, 2003). Previous empirical studies that have researched the success and failure of e-government adoption confirm that there are many obstacles, lack of citizen acceptance and/or interest. Among the many factors studied, trust has constantly identified as critical factor that affects e-government adoption (see, for example, Carter & Belanger, 2004; Horst, Kuttschreuter, & Gutteling, 2007; Welch, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005). Although trust aspects have been investigated in e-commerce context, e-government field is till significantly lacking from empirical studies that explore trust in e-government from the citizen's perspective.

The lack of trust in e-government in developing countries was another persuasive impetus for conducting the study. The few recent studies investigating citizens' trust in e-government were conducted in developed countries (e.g., Belanger & Carter, 2008; Carter & Belanger, 2005). The study employed a qualitative approach (focus groups) to gain in depth understanding of the citizens' perception of e-government adoption. E-Government initiative in Saudi Arabia is the main focus of our research. Therefore, the main objectives of the chapter are as follows:

1. To understand trust issues from the citizen point of view in e-government environment;
2. To identify the critical factors which affects citizens' trust in e-government;
3. To empirically examined the effect of these factors and the relationships between them; and
4. To provide a comprehensive guide to governments on how to improve citizens trust and enhance their engagement in the e-government initiatives.

Therefore, the focus of this research is to investigate citizens' trust in e-government context. This report is divided into six sections. The first section discuss the definition and semantic of the trust. The second section identifies the antecedent factors of the trust. The third section formulates the research methodology. The fourth section performs the data analysis, and the fifth section provides implications for the government. The sixth session provides guidelines for future research, and concludes the chapter.

DEFINITION AND SEMANTIC OF THE TRUST

The notion of trust has been studied in a many disciplinary fields including psychology (Deutsch, 1958), sociology (Rotter, 1980), social psychol-

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