Chapter 8
M-Government for Education: Assessing Students' Preferences for Mobile Campus Services

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ABSTRACT

The main challenges of studying user preferences are related to user uncertainty related to a lack of previous experience with m-Government services. This paper investigates user preferences for potential mobile campus services. It was conducted as a pilot survey with the goal to develop and test a measurement approach for revealing preferences for services that users haven't yet experienced. The dataset used in this paper is taken from a contingent ranking survey carried out in February 2008, involving purposive sampling of third year university students pursuing a bachelor's degree at the Graduate School of Management, St. Petersburg State University. Numerical estimations reflecting the importance of services and content features were derived using ASPID-methodology (Analysis and Synthesis of Parameters under Information Deficiency), the main advantage of which lies in its ability to work accurately with different types of uncertain information on weight-coefficients.

INTRODUCTION

Today, many countries are actively engaged in various e-Government projects to effectively enhance provision of government services. Although, e-Government encompasses the usage of all information and communications technologies to deliver services to citizens and improve the quality of governmental activities, the governments have been primarily focused on Internet as a mean of public service provision. That made e-Government be often thought of as "online government" or "Internet-based govern-

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ment". M-Government, being an extension of e-Government, refers to strategic utilizing of all kinds of mobile technology, services, applications and devices for improving benefits to all parties involved in e-Government (Kushchu & Kuscu, 2004). The interactions and delivery models of m-Government are broad and include the following: Government-to-Citizen or Government-to-Customer (G2C), Government-to-Business (G2B) and Government-to-Government (G2G) as well as Business-to-Citizens (B2C), Business-to-Business (B2B) and Citizens-to-Citizens (C2C) (Rannu & Semevsky, 2005). And though the utilization of mobile technologies by governmental servants (G2G) was practiced for quite a long time, the advent of the term "m-Government" is related with public services provided via mobile technologies to citizens and business.

M-Government services represent a package of services offered in different fields such as healthcare, education, tourism, transport, logistics etc. and to a specific community, e.g., municipality, university campus, tourists etc. They may include different types of services serving as a support for activities of the communities. In order to be adopted, these packages should reflect the highest volume services that citizens and other users are likely to require (Carroll, 2005).

In spite of growing recognition of user needs and preferences having a determinative power in m-Government success, only a small portion of research to date has been concentrated on the user. Much of the user research in m-Government has been dealing with user-profiling and service quality requirements (visual and interaction quality requirements, reliability, responsiveness, accuracy, user interface, trust and customization) (Carroll, 2005, 2006; El-Kiki & Lawrence, 2006; Germanakos et al., 2005). Yet, not much attention has been given to the evaluation of potential demand for service content. The importance of exploring this dimension of user preferences is recognized and supported by empirical research. A number of studies on current use of mobile services indicated users' strong intention to control the traffic on their devices and limit incoming information to meet their local, real-time needs (Carroll, 2005, 2006).

Nevertheless, it is hard to find studies focused on evaluation of demand for m-Government services. Apart from requiring huge investments, user studies also face methodological problems where they are expected to reveal preferences for services that users haven't yet experienced. The spectrum of possible methods of demand evaluation is wide; however absence of previous experience with m-Government services limits the use of statistical methods for the investigation of user preferences for new, yet-to-be-implemented services. Given that many countries just started incorporating mobile dimension into their digital government frameworks; more comprehensive work is needed to inform approaches and methodologies for preferences assessment that would be possible to be applied on *a priori* basis, before implementing the services.

This paper contributes to an investigation of user preferences for mobile campus services. These services, being a special case of m-Government services, correspond to the service group "m-Government for education" in m-Government service categorization (Kushchu & Kuscu, 2004). Unlike mobile learning which uses technology to enhance learning and provide access to different learning materials, mobile campus services provide support for effective and safe education process by enabling instant communication and transactions between members of the campus community. These services are targeted at students, professors, university staff and campus visitors and include mobile payments, notices of class schedules, room changes and cancellations, provision of information on campus directories and on-campus activities, provision of relevant information and instructions during emergencies, and many others (Han et al., 2005; Doneva et al., 2006).