

Inhibitors and Enablers of Public E-Services in Lebanon

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines user intentions to accept or reject public e-services in Lebanon based on the model of acceptance of technology in households (MATH) and on the two-factors theory. Data were gathered in 2009 in two phases via interviews with open-ended questions in the first stage and through a survey questionnaire in the second phase. Results of the qualitative and the quantitative studies show that only a small percentage of Lebanese intended to accept government e-services. For intenders, perceived usefulness, perceived government support, computer self efficacy, and perceived government influences are key drivers of the e-services acceptance intention. For non-intenders, barriers such as fear of government control, lack of trust in security and privacy of personal information, lack of support, and lack of knowledge were most significant. In both studies, fear of government control was the most important determinant. Willingness to use public e-services will take place if the Lebanese government develops trust relationships with citizens, provides assurances that their financial details are secure, provides guarantees to protect the privacy of citizens, and does not employ e-services to increase political control over its citizens.

Keywords: E-Government, ICT Acceptance Intention, Math, Public E-Services Acceptance, Trust, Two-Factors Theory

INTRODUCTION

The success of e-government initiatives depends on whether governments can persuade citizens to accept and use online public services. Acceptance by citizens is, however, a significant global problem and one of the most challenging issues in developing countries. Research shows that providing access and creating conditions for its use do not guarantee e-services acceptance (Dwivedi, Weerakkody, & Williams, 2009; Heeks, 1999; Jaeger & Thompson, 2003; Moon,

2002; Odedra-Straub, 2003; UNPAN, 2005). Despite initiatives like monetary incentives and media campaigns that encourage citizens to go online for government transactions, most citizens in developing countries continue to prefer traditional face-to-face services (UN-DESA, 2008).

Little systematic research has, however, been conducted to understand the determinants of acceptance of online public services by citizens in both developed and developing countries, although information and communication technology (ICT) acceptance in the workplace and at home has been studied extensively in developed countries. According to van Dijk,

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Peters, and Ebbers (2008), a theory of public e-services acceptance is lacking and must be derived from a general theory of acceptance and use of ICTs applied to the government context (p. 383). More generally, Heeks and Bailur (2007) remark on the pressing need for stronger theory in e-government research. That a very large number of e-government implementations has been subject to complete or partial failure suggests that a more conceptual approach to studying information and communication technologies in developing countries is necessary (Avergou & Walsham, 2000; Heeks, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Walsham & Sahay, 2006).

This article reports the results of a study conducted in 2009 of Lebanese citizen acceptance of public e-services that is designed to respond to the call by van Dijk and others. It investigates the factors that affect the potential success for user acceptance of a virtual channel of services delivery system, services that will be offered by the Lebanese government in addition to the existing face-to-face services delivery system. We develop an integrated model of user intention to accept or reject e-government services (ITA e-Gov Model) that is based on the model of acceptance of technology in households (MATH) (Brown & Venkatesh, 2005; Venkatesh & Brown, 2001) and the Two-Factors Theory (Cenfetelli, 2004). This ITA e-Gov Model captures the influence of different external and internal factors (enablers and inhibitors) on government e-services acceptance or rejection at the first stages of the acceptance process. The ITA e-Gov Model focuses on the association between perceived outcomes, social psychological characteristics, social influences, and contextual factors and the user's evaluation in the first stages of the acceptance process.

This research makes theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions. It integrates the theoretical perspectives of ICT and public e-services acceptance and proposes a new model that captures acceptance enablers and inhibitors of the public e-services in the pre-acceptance stage. By combining the methodologies of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Decomposed Theory of Planned

Behavior (DTPB), we develop a third method for determining salient behavioural beliefs for public e-services acceptance. We think that this new method better reflects the structure of beliefs in a specific context and that it can help researchers develop measures that have already been validated for internal consistency and reliability. Our third contribution is empirical support for Cenfetelli's (2004) theory of two independent belief structures for acceptance enablers and inhibitors that help to counter the enduring TAM paradigm.

The research also makes a policy contribution to ongoing efforts in public administration in developing countries, specifically Lebanon. There has, unfortunately, been no scientific research that links Lebanese culture with ICT acceptance. The only comparative research was conducted by Rose and Straub (1998) and by Straub, Loch, and Hill (2001) who compared ICT acceptance in four Arab countries and treated these countries as one culture. However, Lebanese culture cannot be considered a pure Arab culture because it is a heterogeneous society characterized by 18 religious subgroups with a difficult history of cohabitation that has created a highly risky and hostile environment (Yahchouchi, 2009). Thus our research constitutes the first that is focused exclusively on Lebanon. Moreover, it has been conducted in Lebanon at a moment when public administration began to implement e-services. It provides the Lebanese government with information about the factors that will affect the voluntary acceptance or rejection of e-services by its citizens. At the same time, the research provides the government with information about how to increase awareness of its citizens about the transition to online public services delivery.

We begin with a description of the Lebanese context for our study. This is followed by a brief review of the technology acceptance and public e-services acceptance literature in order to create a comprehensive set of beliefs related to public e-services acceptance. We then describe the constructs related to public e-services acceptance in the Lebanese context. We propose a decomposed salient belief

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