Chapter 22
Identifying the Contemporary Status of E–Service Sustainability Research

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is a world-wide major concern, required in every domain of life, including that of government. E-services are widely acknowledged for the contribution they make to e-government. The research question raised in this study is: What is the existing status of e-service sustainability research? The research method used is a literature study that adopts a concept-centric approach. Selected literature was then analyzed using the twin concepts of e-service sustainability itself and the enabler (secondary) effects of sustainable e-services. The Triple Bottom Line's model was used to further categorize the findings using economic, environmental, and social sustainability concepts. The results of the study revealed a lack of research into e-service sustainability. By way of contrast, it revealed 20 articles that cover the enabler effect. Existing research is related to economic and social dimensions, with the most common topic being related to user satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

E-services are beneficial to citizens worldwide in many ways; indeed, they have been proven to be important enablers of successful e-government (Stamoulis et al., 2001). The number of e-services in use is increasing in both the developed and the developing world (DESA, 2012). In addition to the direct benefits of e-services, they can impact on other interdependent systems, such as economic, environmental and social systems. This is possible because e-services utilize pervasive computing devices, such as the Internet and other ICTs. To date, the e-service concept is relatively new and not well defined (Islam &

Scupola, 2011). In its broadest sense it could cover almost any sort of digital application. E-services are of particular interest in the public sector because of their potential to increase efficiency as well as effectiveness (Haque & Pathrannarakul, 2013). In this paper we delimit our scope to focus only on e-services in the public sector. We limit our definition of e-services in the e-government domain to "the electronic delivery of government information, programs, and services often (but not exclusively) over the Internet" (Dawes, 2002).
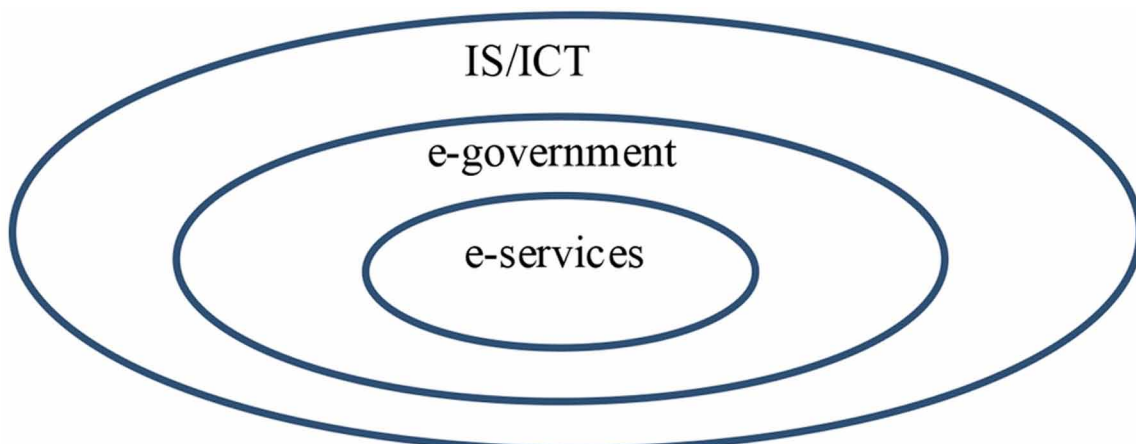
In this paper, we perceive e-services to be a subfield of e-government, which in turn is a subfield of the IS/ICT domain. This means that research into IS, ICT, and e-government in general is also relevant to the field of e-services and vice versa.

Researchers have pointed out the positive and negative impacts of ICTs on economic, social and environmental systems (Mitrea et al., 2010; Hilty et al., 2006). Sustainability, which is considered to be a positive impact, has become an increasingly important concern for political, social and economic reasons. Thus, the number of technology-related sustainability studies is increasing (Mitrea et al., 2010; Viet et al., 2011). This growing interest in the sustainability of e-government is indicated by a comparison of UN e-government surveys undertaken in 2010 and 2012: the number of instances of the term *sustainable* increased from zero to 41, respectively.

Sustainability largely emerged as a concern following the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (UNCHE) held in Stockholm, Sweden, in June 1972. The most recent UN conference, Rio+20, was held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. The message that came out of Rio+20 was one reason for selecting the e-government domain, and specifically research into e-service sustainability, as the subject of this paper. E-government in general, and e-services in particular, are both emerging fields; indeed, they are the focus of governments all over the world. Investigating the status of research into the sustainability of e-services will make it possible to direct future efforts within this field.

The research question raised in this study is: *What is the existing status of e-service sustainability research?* The boundaries of the study are limited to e-services in the e-government domain. E-services are one of the major components of e-government and sustainability is the requirement of all systems, irrespective of the domain to which they belong (UNCSD, 2012).

Figure 1. Relationship between the fields of e-services, e-government, and IS/ICT

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