Chapter 9
Managing Interactional Performance in E–Government

Françoise Simon
Research Center on Mediations, University of Haute-Alsace, France

ABSTRACT

Currently, citizen-users show a noticeable preference for in-person communication, over Internet-based delivery channels. As a result, governmental agencies still face high numbers of contacts via more traditional service channels such as phone and desk. This chapter deals with the issue of interactional performance in public e-service delivery. It offers a conceptual framework built on the literature of media choice and the theory of perceived justice. As such, it examines the interplay of service complexity, media richness, and social cues on individual media preferences. In addition, it presents key factors which lead citizen-users to the perception of a sense of equity through electronic communication. Finally, this chapter concludes by highlighting a number of possible directions for future action.

INTRODUCTON

Since the early days of e-government, there have been many predictions that e-government will metamorphose the delivery of government service for citizen-users. As a matter of fact, the primary reason why people actually use e-government is to collect information from public websites and to file tax forms (Ebbers, Pieterson & Noorman, 2008; Reddick, 2005). This is in concordance with the ways in which the government use of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has been framed in the mid-1990s,

promoting e-government primarily as a method to create an electronic face for the government and outline the policy of government agencies (Chadwick & May, 2003; Mahler & Reagan, 2006). Currently, citizen-users show a marked preference for in-person communication, over Internet-based communication options when they perceive their request as being rather complex (Ebbers et al., 2008; Gagnon, Posada, Bourgault & Naud, 2010; Streib & Navarro, 2006). Similarly, their views on the value of e-government services may not correspond with factors classically associated with the digital divide, such as race and income (Streib & Navarro, 2006). As a result, studies from various countries show that governmental

agencies still face high numbers of contacts via more traditional service channels, i.e., phone and desk (Ebbers et al., 2008).

Keeping in mind the citizen-users' preferences for traditional channels when interacting with the public sector, that may be irrespective of digital divide, this chapter offers a conceptual framework to explain how to get satisfaction and commitment from users in making up for the lack of relational cues which does characterize the electronic medium. Our rationale is based on the analyses conducted both in the fields of services marketing and information systems management, in order to improve the organizations' performance through interaction in itself, especially when service situations are inherently complex. In so doing, this paper presents a critical overview of literature on media choice which highlights the relevance of social presence to mediated environments as well as that of the media richness theory with regard to the ambiguity of citizen-users' requests. It argues also for a more systematic approach to trust breakdowns which generally result in citizen-users being more sensitive to the issue of perceived justice. The results of a survey related to public complaint handling in a French context are conducive to identify major antecedents of the sense of equity which may be perceived through interaction. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for improving interactional performance.

BACKGROUND

From a global perspective, electronic government can be defined as including all ICTs supporting government operations, engaging citizens, and providing government services. Advanced stages of public e-service delivery development usually involve two-way interactions as well as full online transactions, including delivery and payment (Layne & Lee, 2001). According to the conceptual framework proposed recently by Dawes (2009) for considering the future, e-government can further

be defined as a "dynamic socio-technical system encompassing interactions among societal trends, human elements, changing technologies, information management, interaction and complexity, and the purpose and role of government" (p. 257). As outlined by Dawes, human elements go far beyond the notions of human–computer interaction to include some key aspects as identity, personal choice, privacy, trust, adjustment and learning, and acceptance of change.

This perspective introduces at least two dimensions which underlie the public e-service delivery interactional performance, which is the level of satisfaction reached by the organization's partner in communication during their interaction. In the first instance, it somehow reflects the tension which does exist between personal media preferences and adjustment to imperative communication technologies when interacting with public organizations. In the second instance, it highlights the importance of trust which refers to the potential outcomes in terms of commitment to the organization as well as the mechanisms needed to build and maintain trust in e-government processes and services. However, much of the existing work on the development of e-government has explored it from a supply-side perspective. In addition, the demand-side explanation has been relatively unexplored beyond the initial stages of cataloguing information on the Web (Reddick, 2005). Furthermore, the lack of understanding of the potential of technologies by many officials (e.g., Jaeger, Paquette & Simmons, 2010) and the tendency to use e-government primarily as a way to make information available and distribute the views of government agencies (e.g., Mahler and Regan, 2006) have somewhat promoted websites which are not "designed to be centred on the need of users" (Jaeger & Bertot, 2010, p. 3) and hindered the potential interactional effects of e-government. As a consequence, there is a need to focus on the way in which public e-service delivery through interaction in itself leads to users' satisfaction and trust building.

Related Content

Service Oriented Architectural Principles for Interoperable and Secure E-government Frameworks
Teta Stamati, Athanasios Karantjiasand Drakoulis Martakos (2012). *Digital Democracy: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 925-953).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/service-oriented-architectural-principles-interoperable/67642

Utopia, Labor, and Informational Capitalism: Lights and Shadows of Social Media
Marco Briziarelli (2015). *Promoting Social Change and Democracy through Information Technology (pp. 49-68).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/utopia-labor-and-informational-capitalism/134252

Managing Stakeholder Interests in E-Government Implementation: Lessons Learned from a Singapore E-Government Project
Chee-Wee Tan, Shan L. Panand Eric T.K. Lim (2007). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research (pp. 61-84).*
www.irma-international.org/article/managing-stakeholder-interests-government-implementation/2027

E-Government Development and Implementation
Wayne Huang, Yinging Chenand K. L. Wang (2008). *Electronic Government: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 497-507).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/government-development-implementation/9730

Digital Governance for Developing Countries Opportunities, Issues, and Challenges in Pakistan
Bushra Hamid, N. Z. Jhanjhiand Mamoona Humayun (2020). *Employing Recent Technologies for Improved Digital Governance (pp. 36-58).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/digital-governance-for-developing-countries-opportunities-issues-and-challenges-in-pakistan/245975