Chapter 39
Global Comparative Study on the Relationship between User's Traits and Public e-Service Quality

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ABSTRACT

The study in this chapter aims to understand the relationship between user intrinsic factors and perceived e-service quality, as well as consequent satisfaction. From an interdisciplinary perspective, five major and influential factors are generated, and related hypotheses are formed according to previous research. Two leading-edge cities in terms of e-service implementation, Taipei and Tokyo, are adopted to examine the hypotheses. Because of the limitation of sample size, a sophisticated yet accountable statistical methodology called Partial Least Square (PLS) is employed in this study. The results point toward five intrinsic factors being partially significant in the Taipei and Tokyo cases, respectively.

While much of e-government or e-service research has focused on system or internal efficiency improvement, this study tries to raise another important topic regarding user traits, user perception of quality, and causality. Meanwhile, by integrating different kinds of theories and perspectives, namely sociology, management and informatics, a comprehensive blueprint can be fully discussed. The findings contribute to our knowledge of theoretical development in e-governance, service marketing, and policy marketing. In addition, the empirical results can be used as a general principal reference for other cities planning to implement e-services and can be used as specific evaluation criteria by which the two cities in the cases studies can further understand their users.

INTRODUCTION

In this information age, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been widely adopted in every aspect of daily life. In the context of present-day information society, the public administration sector certainly cannot remove itself from the comprehensive influences caused by ICTs. Many scholars have been proposing various concepts combining both ICTs and public administration, such as "digital/electronic democracy", "digital/electronic government", "Teledemocracy", "information polity", "electronic republic", "digital/electronic governance" and so on. These concepts, in one way or other, illustrate that ICTs are going to innovate new approaches in governance, posing an unprecedented challenge and stake in terms of the design and practice of public policy, and eventually facilitating a major progress in forming the value of democracy.

Discussions have promised that ICTs would provide opportunities to change political and societal environments and to create a new type of governance and life style. However, many scholars also agree that new governance models cannot be created by merely implementing ICTs. In fact, during the process of dealing with public affairs, other than ICTs, economical, societal, political and cultural factors will influence the practice of public administration. Therefore, incorporating ICTs into the processes of the public sector without any modifications to the system or environment contexts does not guarantee a real transformation of government by means of ICTs (Donk & Snellen, 1998).

More and more government agencies have already utilized websites or portals, just as the private sector has done. The use of websites or ICTs in the public sector is now a global phenomenon and public servants around the world are adopting novel ways to leverage ICTs to better serve their constituents. As these websites have been seen as the first step toward e-government, they are rapidly becoming a new aspect of governments.

Many citizens now have a brand new experience of interacting with their governments online, either to communicate their opinion on current issues, to request or submit an application or to petition a government act.

Moreover, the concept of marketing has long been adopted by the private sector, and has proven to be a great success. In the public sector, some have argued that it is unnecessary to implement policy marketing to the public as the nature of policy and public service is somewhat different from commercial business. Nevertheless, since the 1970s, more and more scholars have begun to adopt the concept of marketing within government or non-government organization. The concept of "social marketing" was born under the context of transferring the value and perspective to general public and making them accept or adopt it as a norm. Based on that context, many countries now have their own e-government systems or applications in order to make social communication easier. However, though government has built a sophisticated electronic mechanism to help it serve its citizens online, the usage of electronic government service by citizens is still at a relative low level. It has been proven that the information system was found to be underutilized or sometimes abandoned because of the lack of user acceptance in the last decade. Thus, the urgency lies in exploring where and who the target users might be.

"The Waseda World e-Government Ranking", conducted since 2005, contains six major elements which are believed to constitute a well-designed and sophisticated e-government ecosystem. From the e-governance perspective, this represents a process of knowledge delivery and user participation through e-channels. With the usage of web 2.0 technology, a full e-participation can be realized easily in cyberspace. In this context, the ranking system will introduce the new element of "e-participation" in order to complement the description of the e-government ecosystem, and in order to understand user traits vis-à-vis e-service usage.

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