Chapter 95

Consumers' Awareness of the Value of E–Government in Zambia:
Empirical Evidence

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether e-Government consumers (citizens and businesses) in selected towns in Zambia are aware of the anticipated benefits of e-Government. Awareness translates into recognition of the perceived benefits and may influence adoption as posited in Davis' 1989 technology acceptance model. Using the mixed methods research approach, an investigation follows of consumers' awareness, or lack of awareness, of e-Government benefits in three Zambian towns. To date, no significant empirical study has been done investigating e-Government penetration in Zambia evidenced by consumers' awareness. This article contributes to the current debate on e-Government in Sub-Saharan Africa by means of regression modeling which shows that apart from the traditional factors, namely 'perceived ease of use' and 'perceived usefulness' that influence adoption, the Zambian context also presents additional factors that influence adoption such as culture, cost, trust, and other social dimensions or beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

Not long ago e-Government and e-Governance were conceived as impractical and a waste of time in developing countries in Africa and India. Research findings show that this was the case because the benefits of e-Government could not easily be realized owing to the many deficiencies of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure, inexistence of relevant policies, and lack of recognition of the benefits of e-Government (Heeks, 2003; Nyirenda & Cropf, 2010; Subhajyoti, 2011). On the

e-Government demand-side (viz consumers) the lack of understanding amongst the general citizenry in Africa of what e-Government is, is well documented (Ngulube, 2007; Asogwa, 2011). Various studies have reported that many e-Government projects in Africa failed or are bound to fail because the projects were implemented without context-aware strategies, limited access to online government services, and lack of trust in the available technology platforms (Ngulube, 2007; Bwalya & Healy, 2010; Matavire *et al.*, 2010; Asogwa, 2011). This scenario is slowly changing as contemporary Africa presents opportunities in contrast to what the situation was previously – people are beginning to appreciate the role technology plays in the different governance value chains. Today people are more ready to embrace technology as an effective platform to interact with Government. This understanding and willingness has been intensified by the development and general adoption of ICT, the increasing appreciation of the benefits it has to offer in public service delivery frameworks, and the increased enactment of effective ICT policies.

E-Government has been defined as a lever applied with the objective to change outmoded bureaucracies and to facilitate increased participation in a country's democracy value chains (Ndou, 2004; Rowley, 2011). The penetration of e-Government in various governance establishments throughout the world has been facilitated by new schools of thought such as the New Public Management (NPM) and the Public Governance School (PGS). These are founded on the belief that market is more efficient than government establishments in distributing society's resources (Khalil, 2011). This entails that any interventions with regards to public service delivery should consider the characteristics and anticipations of the market (citizens and businesses as consumers). Consequently, public service management or delivery interventions which follow the citizen- or business-centric design model have a higher probability of success. Successful implementation of e-Government may culminate into improved public service delivery, reduction in the cost of public services, and responsive governance where the aspirations of the consumers are the core concern. However, this study reveals that successful implementation depends on the awareness of its consumers.

The focus of this article is on the awareness of the anticipated e-Government benefits of consumers in the Zambian context aimed at understanding whether this awareness can translate into meaningful adoption of e-Government services. The research question is: What is the current understanding of the anticipated benefits of e-Government implementation of the general citizenry in Livingstone, Kitwe and Lusaka? The research concept used in this study is premised on Davis' TAM, the technology acceptance model developed in 1989. Specifically the objective was to investigate whether Zambian citizens are aware of the pronounced e-Government benefits and whether these benefits contribute to changing government dealing in the Zambian context. The research employed the mixed methods research (MMR) approach which enabled the investigation of one phenomenon to be done from more than one vantage point as discussed further in the methodology section.

For perceived benefits of e-Government to be amassed, it is imperative that developing and emerging countries should put in place far-reaching organizational and institutional reforms, remove dysfunctional centralized governance systems and traditional patterns of social interaction, and promote robust e-Government awareness campaigns (Ma, Chung & Thorson, 2005:23; Srivastava & Teo, 2007:33; Hafkin, 2009:7). This should be accompanied and coupled with active ICT streamlining initiatives within the public sector business value chains (Misra, 2007:4; Ali, Weerakkody & El-Haddadeh, 2009). Further, Sorrentino and Niehaves (2010) opine that all e-Government initiatives should incorporate social-awareness by making sure that it is delivered through multiple delivery channels so that the heterogeneous demand side is accorded the choice of which service alternatives (physical and electronic) to explore. Because e-Government is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and depends on contextual factors to succeed, there

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