

Chapter 96

Consumer Adoption of E-Government in South Africa: Barriers, Solutions, and Implications

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines South African consumers' patterns of adoption of electronic governance systems. Three elements related to e-government adoption are examined. Firstly, the development of e-government in South Africa is explored. Secondly, the chapter investigates the barriers constraining the public's utilisation of e-gov. Thirdly, suggestions on how e-government initiatives could be better aligned to the Principles of Batho Pele, or people-centred governance, are proffered. To achieve the first objective, an extensive review of the literature encapsulating e-government, South African public services, information communication technologies and commerce is conducted. To achieve the second objective, a survey of 349 consumers from two South African provinces was conducted to explore barriers associated with e-gov adoption. Findings show that although the Batho Pele Principles are pronounced in public sector organisations' missions, their implementation within e-gov still remains a challenge. A plethora of challenges were observed to retard e-government adoption.

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

As the Sub-Saharan African population and, in particular, South African consumers embrace information and communication technologies (ICTs) in many domains of modern life including education (Brown, 2003), commerce (Donner, 2004; Matlala, Shambare, & Lebambo, 2014), and social interaction (Shambare & Mvula, 2011); the same cannot be said about the uptake of ICTs in governance (Mutula & Mostert, 2010). It would appear that there is general apathy on the part of both governments and citizens to fully implement and utilise ICTs in the public sector (Komba & Ngulube, 2012). The use of ICTs in the provision of public goods and services is a fast developing phenomenon globally, commonly known as electronic government (e-government or e-gov).

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The e-government hype is simple. E-government presents innovative approaches to addressing the traditional problems of poor service delivery (Heeks, 2006; Maumbe & Klaas, 2009). By leveraging on the power of the Internet, the provision of public services not only becomes cheaper, but more effective. In turn, these services become more accessible to citizens beyond brick and mortar government buildings. For instance, it is now possible, at least theoretically, for South African residents in remote areas to administer their tax affairs without visiting the South African Revenue Service (SARS) offices through platforms such as electronic tax filing (e-tax). Despite the obvious potential benefits e-government proffers, these are not realised in the South African context. Why is this the case? In instances where e-government services are available, there is general apathy on the part of the public to adopt. Then, again, Why? This chapter addresses these and other questions.

1.1. Chapter Structure

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 examines the literature encapsulating e-government, South African public services, information communication technologies (ICTs) and commerce with a view to defining the scope of e-government within the South African context. Attempts are made to identify the socio-cultural and socio-political dynamics that e-government in South Africa could, or perhaps, should address. Section 3 reports on the survey conducted in two of South Africa's nine provinces to discover the nature and extent of the barriers to public e-government adoption. In Section 4, some suggestions on how e-government initiatives could be better aligned to drive a people-friendly service delivery platform, as encapsulated by the Batho Pele Principles, are proffered. Lastly, Section 5 provides some concluding remarks.

2. WHAT IS E-GOVERNMENT IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT?

As an academic discipline, e-government is still developing (Belanger & Carter, 2008; Heeks, 2006). As such, there exists a multiplicity of definitions of what constitutes e-government (Heeks, 2006; Rorissa, Demissie, & Pardo, 2011). The literature espouses two major schools of thought, whereby e-government can be defined from either a narrow or a broad perspective (Rorissa, Demissie, & Pardo, 2011). While the former primarily considers technological aspects and their functionality to define e-government, the latter conceptualises e-government more holistically – to include policies, practices, and environmental factors.

2.1. Defining E-Government

2.1.1. The Narrow Definition of E-Government

Authors such as Akakandelwa (2011) and Heeks (2006), among other proponents of the narrow definition, consider e-government to be a function of the activities executable by e-government services. To this effect, Heeks (2006) defines e-government as the utilisation of ICTs by PSOs. Similarly, Layne and Lee (2001:13) define “e-government as government’s use of technology, particularly web-based Internet applications to improve access to and deliver government information and services to citizens, business partners, employees, organisations, and government entities.” Likewise, Koh and Prybutok, (2003) consider e-government as the application of ICTs in all facets of operations of a government organisation.

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