Chapter 10
Evaluating Web Sites of Municipal Corporations:
A Case Study of Leading Cities in India

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ABSTRACT

While evaluation of government websites has been a matter of interest for researchers, the perspectives and parameters of such evaluation used in these have been diverse. It is primarily because the evaluated web sites had different objectives and only a general matrix could be used for their assessment. Fortunately, web sites of Municipal Corporations have a unique advantage in this respect. The kind of information needs and citizen services required in different cities do not differ significantly in most cases. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to evaluate municipal websites of twenty major cities in India. It also examines the relationship between the income levels of the city and the quality of municipal website. While the glaring differences were observed among municipal web sites of different cities, no significant relationship could be established between the quality of municipal websites and income levels in the city.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major tasks of any e-government initiatives is to improve citizen's access to public information and services. The increasing use of

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Systems in e-government is shifting the focus of such initiative to internal integration of processes. However, any e-government initiative with focus on optimization of internal processes will serve only a limited purpose. Rather, use of ERP systems should enable governments to provide a more effective

platform for delivery of information and service to citizen more conveniently and in a transparent manner. The channel used for providing access to information and services is generally a web site/portal. Despite the increased use of ERP systems by governments for this purpose, the gap between the information needs and available information in digital form remains significant. The information gap is compounded by the inefficiencies in the content and design of the web interfaces of e-governance initiatives. Though most of the e-government initiatives in different countries have made extensive use of Internet technologies and infrastructure in developing their web interface, the success in its effective use is far from satisfactory (Welch, Hinnant and Moon, 2005; Jones et al. 2006). Thus, the need for evaluating e-government web sites and constant improvement in them cannot be over-emphasized.

While evaluation of government websites has been a matter of interest for researchers, the perspectives and parameters of such evaluation used in these have been diverse. It is primarily because, the evaluated web sites had different objectives and only a general matrix could be used for their assessment. Fortunately, web sites of Municipal Corporations (local governments) have a unique advantage in this respect. The kind of information needs and citizen services required in different cities do not differ significantly in most cases. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to evaluate municipal websites of twenty major cities in India. It also examines relationship between the income levels of the city and the quality of municipal website.

BACKGROUND

The day-to-day interactions of citizens with the government relate to the mundane governance activities that are primarily in the domain of municipal corporations that are responsible for development and maintenance of common services and

facilities. As citizens use these common services extensively and on regular basis, their perceptions about and relationship with local government are influenced by the way the information and services are delivered. It is, therefore, imperative for any government to provide for delivery of services promptly and without any major inconvenience. These web sites have the potential to improve relations with citizens and reverse the trend of declining trust in governments (Nye, 1997). While the craze, among governments at various levels, for use of e-government initiatives as a tool for improving service quality is on, the issue is whether and to what extent this objective is actually achieved.

The evaluation of web sites of Municipal Corporations and comparisons overtime can help in assessing not only the change in the quality of these web sites but also helps in gauging the level of commitment of the local government in improving its citizens services and access to information. This chapter focuses on the evaluation municipal websites of 20 major cities in India

Related Work

A number of studies have attempted to assess the websites in general (Nielsen, 2000; Alexander and Tate, 1999; Bauer and Scharl, 2000). These studies quality of website can be assessed on the basis of a number of characteristic features relating to information content, navigation, design and general appearance, accessibility, security and relevance of information. Methods and tools have also been proposed to facilitate the process of web site assessment. Wang et al. (2005) suggest the dimensions that may be used for evaluation of web sites and also identifies the factors responsible for observed success or failure of a web site. A few recent studies also attempted to evaluation of web sites for different segments such as e-commerce web sites (Oppenheim and Ward, 2006; Basu, 2002; Huang et al., 2006, Kumar and Sareen, 2010), academic and e-learning web

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