Chapter IX
Assessing E-Governance Online-Service Quality (EGOSQ)

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ABSTRACT

A primary goal of e-governance is providing online-services to citizens over the internet (Web portals) to facilitate government-to-citizen (G2C) and citizen-to-government (C2G) interactions and transactions. This chapter provides a perspective on the users' perceptions of the attributes which determine e-governance online-service quality. The research based approach is used to first develop the discussion on the needs of quality "e-governance online services" (EGOS) and then a research study is used to demonstrate development of measurement instrumentation to measure online service quality from the users' perspective. The presented method and the instrument can be adopted in any country/state with minor contextual modifications. The limitations and future directions for scholars and researchers to facilitate the knowledge in measuring and thus, improving in e-governance online service quality is also presented at the end of the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Governments all over the world, especially in developed nations are facing enormous pressures to create and deliver high quality services for their citizens. As a result of the rapid development in information and communication technology, e-governance initiatives provided online interaction using electronic means like internet. E-governance is defined as 'the application of electronic means in the interaction between government and citizens and government and businesses, as well as in internal government operations, to simplify and improve democratic, government and business as-

pects of Governance' (Backus, 2001). This chapter focuses on methods and approaches of assessing e-governance online-service quality (EGOSQ)[1] from the perspective of users of such services (Citizens). Existing studies from the domains of service quality measurement, e-service quality, technology adoption model, system quality and self service technology form the background of the chapter in order to present the conceptual understanding of online service quality parameters. The following sections deal with method to devise the instrument that can be used to measure online e-governance service (EGOSQ). This chapter is aimed to demonstrate the development of quality instrumentation to measure e-governance online service quality.

NEED TO MEASURE E-GOVERNANCE ONLINE SERVICE QUALITY

E-governance should not be seen as a vehicle to deliver information over the internet, but should facilitate citizens to participate in decision making process, reflecting their wants and welfare. "UNESCO and COMNET-IT define governance as the process by which society steers itself."[2] Citizens' awareness level, acceptance level and hopes and fears about the e-governance can be the important factors determining the success of e-governance initiatives (Agrawal and Fuloria, 2003). A high quality of online-service delivery by government will ensure high acceptance level and fewer fears. But, at present, most of the existing studies on e-governance service quality focus on the governments' (service provider) perspective. Such studies are limited to discussions on the need to develop, and to conform the quality standards (Tawil and Sait, 2002), with focus on engineering or system dimensions, or, organizing and streamlining administrative and organizational processes. Though, most of the government institutions in developing nations and government agencies till now have been ill-prepared for the dramatic changes in information technology and human knowledge, yet citizens increasingly expect the same level of service from governments as they do from the private sector. Most of the citizens and institutions perceive all government functions inward looking and self-oriented. This is analogous to the product concept in Marketing where firms try to improve their products without involving customers and without knowing customers' preferences. The results of such approach are drastically negative as customer does not adopt such products/services rapidly.

Globally, workshops and the conferences for developing quality standards for e-governance have realized the need for a separate approach for developing 'beneficiary oriented,' standards, but still, Action Plans generally emphasize IT enabled services management standards, technical standards and mere complaint management standards (E-Governance Standards Workshop, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, September 20-21, 2006).

According to e-governance maturity model, provision of information and enabling transactions are regarded as completion of first/second stage of e-governance implementation (as suggested by Gartner e-governance maturity model). Many government web portals are already providing information and enabling transactions. However, the issue arises now is how to find the success of these stages? Is mere these provisions means success? In fact, until and unless majority of citizens adopt the e-governance and use government portals extensively, the success of e-governance will not be realized**.** Once, the citizen users are satisfied with the e-services, the word of mouth is the fastest vehicle for rapid adoption of these services by other citizens. Therefore, there is a need to understand e-governance users' perceptions, specifically, what constitutes a high quality e-governance online service quality to ensure the acceptance, and participation of citizens in the governance.