

Public Awareness and Attitude about Smart Services: A Study in United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

The adoption and efficiency of mobile smart services are still in the early stages worldwide. This is especially true for governmental services requiring relatively complex business process and interactive decision making. In addition, social and cultural reasons may both support and hinder their adoption, e.g. the human factors in the business process which may be missed when the service and the communication are automated. In this paper, an exploratory survey is conducted to examine the users' perception of the smart services offered by the government among the citizens in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The main conclusion is that smart services should be viewed and designed as a part a wider socio-technical system which includes a complex network of inter-relations between the service and its business, social and cultural context. This is mainly to ensure consistency and compatibility amongst the various ways to get the same services achieved still without hindering the distinct features of accessing services via smart technology.

Keywords: E-governance, Smart Services, User Study

1.0 Introduction

During the last decade, extensive initiatives have been taken by various countries for the development of e-governance. However, there are numerous challenges to successfully implement the e-services models especially because of the lack of knowledge about internet usage among the citizens. During the last decade about three trillion US dollars were invested in the e-government programs around the world [1]. Nevertheless, the failure rate of these projects was significantly higher, especially in the developing countries. For example, in case of Turkey and Egypt, the percentage of citizens using online services is 14% and 2 % respectively [2]. Also, the e-governance success rate is not much satisfactory among the developed countries with significantly higher level of literacy rate as compared to under developed countries. It is essential to investigate the problems or challenges among

- x Are you UAE Citizen/Resident?
- x Which device or technology do you use to access the Internet?
- x Do you use Federal Government online services?
- x Which device do you prefer to access Federal Government online services?
- x How do you rate the usefulness of the Federal Government Online Services?
- x Please list the Federal Government Online services that you have notably used.
- x In your opinion, what are the reasons, which would make the interests in the Federal Government Online Services limited?

2.3 Sampling

It is vital to make sure that the collected data is relevant to the research, realistic and the sample is adequate and representative

3.0 Results and discussion

3.1 Descriptive Analysis

Q.1 Are you UAE Citizen/Resident?

In terms of demographics, the majority of respondents are indeed UAE citizens, and in particular 86% are Emirati nationals, while the other 14% are foreign residents in the country for different purposes.

Q.2 Which types of devices do you use to access the Internet?

The majority of respondents indicated that they access the Internet via Smart

Q.4 Which one of these methods do you prefer to receive Federal Government Services?

This question aims to address the preferred channel for customers to deal with the government, since there are other channels where users can interact with the government and get their transactions done.

The majority of respondents, 58%, choose the Internet as the preferred channel; moreover, they access the online channel by using their personal computers rather than smart phones. On the other hand, 55% of the respondents indicated that they would use available smart phone applications to access Federal Government Services directly instead of using their personal desktop or laptop computers at home.

Nevertheless, 42% of the participants still prefer the face-to-face contact to obtain Federal Government Services by visiting the different government offices in various cities. While 36% desire the Telephone to acquire government services by calling and talking directly to a government representative. Last but not least, 11.34% preferred to use an Agent to access Federal Government Services, and eliminate any direct interaction, which naturally incurred extra cost. In fact, these results confirm the conclusion drawn from Question 3 with regard to the keen interest of the population of UAE to use smart service and online services in general, and explains that still other channels attract different user groups, and the variation between the different channels is not really big, which indicate none of the channels is neither widely popular, nor unpopular.

Q.5 How do you rate the usefulness of the Federal Government Online Services?

It is important to know how citizens perceive the new channel of government services. The majority of respondents with 86% felt that the Federal Government Services accessed online are useful to them and perceive it as a good turning point in the relation between the government and the citizens. On the other hand, 13% of participants were unsure whether they would use this new model in general or not, thus indicating a limited benefit to them and uncertainty of its usefulness in general. However, none of the participants declined completely the model. Therefore, the results again shows that the potential of a wide adoption of this model is quite soaring and the majority of the people find it useful in a way or another.

Q6. Please list the Federal Government Online services that you have notably used?

In fact this question aims to differentiate between the frequency of used services in order to extract useful information for online and offline user behaviour.

The online service of the Emirates National Identity Authority topped the list, as it is used by 65% of the participants. Additionally, the online services provided by the ministry of interior came to the second place with 60% of the participants naming at least one online service. Moreover, FEWA came in the third position with 54%, while the ministry of health online services is actually at the fourth rank with 51%. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Labour is placed at the fifth place with 32% of participants using its services, followed by the ministry of Education at sixth position with 21%, and the last position is for the Sheikh Zayed Housing Programme online services with almost 10% of the users accessing it.

However, although the results are indicating variety in the service providers from different ministries and different type of services, but it still did not mean a wide coverage of all the services provided by the involved authorities, since the analysis of the comments collected from the participants explained that, only a limited number of services are being highly used in comparison to all available services from the engaged authorities.

Q.7 In your opinion, what are the reasons, which would make the interests in the Federal Government Online Services limited?

This question is vital to investigate the users'

High usage, but only for limited services

The participants' comments indicated that only a few number of services are being practically utilized by users, and a big number of other services failed in reaching an acceptable level of popularity among users. Nevertheless, the used services share the common characteristics of the simplicity and popularity by nature, hence obstacles of learning and education are much minimized in these services. On the other hand, the popularity

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other attendants while waiting for their turn and having a group dialogue. As a result, this raises the questions of whether a need to make the smart services more social by allowing social networking facilities or not, which will consequently increase the information sharing not only between the government and citizens but between citizens themselves, which is something that needs to be strategically decided. Nevertheless, by finalizing each service transaction by a forum for discussions and sharing experiences amongst users, since this practice shall lead to a better imitation and probably enrichment of users' experiences in general.

On the other hand, the online portal could also be more interesting for users and the experience could be relatively better as some users mentioned. Participants argued that the online access to information ease and speed could be exploited. For instance, the added value could take different formats. A 0.002 T2 12(n)12(C8T2 12(n)12(C8T2 .639 0 Tdi b)-

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