Can Marketing Strategies Enhance the Adoption of Electronic Government Initiatives?

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ABSTRACT

This article assesses the role and likely impact of marketing on the adoption of e-government initiatives. Although the role of tactical marketing in increasing awareness and enhancing adoption has been recognised, strategies required for realising the benefits of marketing e-government services have not been forthcoming. Given that citizens’ usage behaviour of e-government services remains sub-optimal and the potential contribution of marketing, we propose a set of marketing-based strategic approaches and argue that they can play an essential role in enhancing adoption of e-government initiatives and propelling citizen’s engagement with e-governance. Based on citizens’ differential levels of usage behaviour of e-government services and benefits sought from engaging in e-governance, this article classifies citizens into six distinct segments and suggests generic strategic approaches.

Keywords: Adoption, Citizen, Diffusion, E-Government, E-Governance, Engagement, Marketing

INTRODUCTION

Electronic Government (E-Government) is a key driver for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations and improving the relationship between citizens and the state. E-government offers advantages such as operational efficiency, cost savings, faster and more convenient service delivery, increased transparency in government’s operations, reduction in systematic corruption and improvement in governance (Prattipati 2003). Initially, such initiatives are characterised by design and integration hurdles though the biggest hindrance that still persists is the low adoption rates (Ghaziri 2003). E-government is far from reaching its full potential and unless the gap between what is offered and what is used is bridged, governments cannot justify large investments in e-government and it is highly unlikely to get most out of these investments (Al-Adawi et al., 2005). Consequently, further

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research aiming at increasing citizens’ adoption of e-government initiatives is needed.

In this article, we attempt to bridge the above gap by proposing a market-driven approach for enhancing adoption. Specifically, a citizen engagement framework (hereafter to be referred to as CEF) depicts various segments of citizens exhibiting different level of usage behaviour with e-government services. Also, engagement with e-governance is introduced and strategic orientations for each segment are proposed. Each strategic orientation aims at increasing usage behaviour and engagement, hence adoption. With three levels of usage behaviour (i.e., non-users, light users and heavy users) and two levels of engagement (i.e., ad-hoc engagement and on-going engagement), the strategic focus is directed to 1) convert non-users into users, 2) convert light users into heavy users, and 3) convert ad-hoc engaged citizens into citizens with on-going engagement. CEF, a framework that classifies citizens in terms of their degree of usage behaviour and benefits sought, offers a progressive pathway of ‘conversions’ in the ladder of adoption and engagement.

MARKETING, E-GOVERNMENT AND E-GOVERNANCE

The fundamental premise of marketing is to satisfy customers profitably. The success of a marketing strategy is based on understanding the needs of consumers prior to designing products and/or services in order to satisfy those needs. Heterogeneity in consumer needs often requires market segmentation for the purpose of targeting those with similar needs, hence those that are most likely to benefit from the offering. Then, the incremental value of the offering (i.e., its competitive advantage) is communicated to the target consumers. The incremental value could be functional (e.g., better service quality in comparison to existing services), psychological (e.g., better fit with the image and lifestyle of consumers) and/or temporal (e.g., time saving advantages stemming from service use). The axiom that the higher the perceived value of the offering the higher will be the likelihood of its acceptance and success, is both universal and transferable to non-commercial setting.

E-government and e-governance initiatives belong to the sphere of non-commercial activities and despite some similarities with their commercial counterparts (i.e., the adoption process over time), main differences exist. For example, the main motivation of commercial organizations is to meet, and often exceed, customer expectations by providing high in value offerings that maximize customer satisfaction. Government departments, according to Evans and Yen (2006, p. 208), however, have little motivation to meet citizens’ expectations. This, by and large, is true and poses a fundamental impediment on the usefulness of marketing to e-government initiatives. Although assertions that nowadays government employees contemplate more with the view that citizens should be treated as customers is encouraging, citizens’ satisfaction still remains a by-product of an efficient service provision (i.e., transaction satisfaction) rather than satisfaction with the service itself. The critical question, therefore, is ‘can adoption of e-government initiatives benefit from marketing and if so how?’

The starting point in assessing the usefulness of marketing in the adoption of e-government services is to decipher its nature and evolution. E-government refers to the utilisation of the Internet and the World Wide Web for delivering government information and services to citizens (DPEPA U.N. 2001). In addition, e-government has evolved through four distinct phases. Namely: Publishing (web presence); interacting; transacting; and transforming (Wimmer & Tambouris, 2002). Publishing refers to the provision of information about an agency’s mission, services and contact details. Interacting denotes the enhancement of the site’s features and search capabilities along with intentions-based programmes. Transacting is the stage that a full-featured online service is offered which allows users to conduct and complete entire tasks online. Transforming, the long-term goal of most e-government services,
Reflecting on E-Government Research: Toward a Taxonomy of Theories and Theoretical Constructs
www.igi-global.com/article/reflecting-government-research/60522?camid=4v1a