A User Satisfaction Study of London’s Congestion Charge e-Service: A Citizen Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The importance of evaluation and optimization of electronic government (e-government) services is imperative if the government organizations are to have an effective impact on the success and take-up of the services offered. Transport For London’s (TFL) London Congestion Charging (LCC) is one of the innovative electronic services (e-services) introduced by the United Kingdom (UK) government to the citizens. While some studies have addressed the impact of the introduction of the congestion charge there has been a dearth of research performed to address user (citizen) satisfaction of the online LCC system. Therefore, this research seeks to measure the citizen satisfaction of using the LCC online payment system offered by TFL. The citizen satisfaction in this context is measured using the four dimensions from the COBRA framework that comprise the cost, opportunity, benefits and risk assessment constructs. This paper presents the findings of a survey of 500 users of the TFL LCC online payment system. It also reports the qualitative feedback obtained from the participants that can be used to determine the areas that need further improvement in the current LCC e-service and potential influences on user satisfaction.

Keywords: Benefits, Costs, E-Service, London Congestion Charging (LCC), Opportunities, Risks, User Satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of electronic government (e-government) services is not only significant but also complex. There are many factors (e.g. involvement of multiple stakeholders, ability to quantify benefits and inefficiencies, etc.) that add to the complexity of evaluating e-government services. A key significance of e-government services lies on the ability of
governments to transform public administration and reduce administrative and financial burdens by delivering public services online. The user (i.e., citizens) satisfaction with e-government services has a vital influence on their large scale adoption (Osman et al., 2014). It has to be assessed at different points in time and if necessary measures have to be taken to be improved, as citizens’ expectations are changing constantly (Verdegem and Verleye, 2009). The feedback of the citizens using these electronic services (e-services) is also an important aspect to be assessed and taken into account when improving existing services or designing new ones. Despite citizen satisfaction being such an essential element in the sustainability and viability of e-government services, little research has been performed on understanding it.

Transport For London’s (TFL) London Congestion Charging (LCC) is one of the innovative e-services introduced by the UK government to the citizens. LCC was imposed with the aim of reducing congestion by having commuters who travel during peak hours pay a fee, otherwise being liable to a penalty charge. In stark contrast to the conventional road charging schemes, the LCC does not involve any toll booths or barriers (Santos and Bhakar, 2006). The method of enforcing the charge is in fact the most innovative part of the scheme. It uses a video-based system which relies on accurate reading of license plates as a means of identifying, charging and enforcing vehicles (Blythe, 2005). There are several payment methods for the LCC; Auto Pay (automated payment following an initial online registration), Online, SMS, Phone and Post. The LCC e-service system allows two options in terms of registering as an individual or as an organization (TFL, 2014). As an individual, one can register up to a maximum of 10 vehicles, also allowing discounted charges if using the Auto Pay option for up to 5 vehicles. Once registered, users can pay via the automated telephone service, or SMS as well as being able to manage their payments and vehicles online. Organisations with 6 vehicles or more can also register with special functions to this account such that multiple users can manage a vehicle fleet to allow easier administration.

Although some studies have addressed the implications of the introduction of the congestion charge (Givoni, 2012; Janson, 2008; Santos and Bhakar, 2006), there has been a lack of research performed to address user (citizen) satisfaction of the online LCC e-service system managed by the TFL. In this research, the authors’ seek to address this gap by adding to the state of the art by focusing on evaluating the user satisfaction of the LCC e-service system. In doing so, this paper presents the results of this study assessing the citizen satisfaction of the system, across four dimensions: cost, benefit, opportunities and risk. These constructs are drawn from the research performed in the Integrated Model for Evaluating E-government Services Transformation (I-MEET) and are hypothesised to be the main constructs for evaluating the citizen and providers’ perspective of e-government services (Osman et al., 2011). Moreover, this paper presents the analysis of whether the LCC e-service meets the citizens’ needs and how it can be improved.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. First, the paper presents the research context of London congestion charging schemes in UK focusing on the citizen’s satisfaction of the existing e-service system provided online. This is followed by the research design section that sets out the questionnaire design, distribution and data handling. The subsequent sections provide details regarding the survey participants’ demographic information followed by a discussion of the study findings on participant satisfaction with the online LCC service. The paper concludes by presenting the theoretical and practical implications of the study and acknowledging the research limitations and next steps for the study.
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