Chapter 9

E-Service Research Trends in the Domain of E-Government: A Contemporary Study

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ABSTRACT

Government ‘e-service’ as a subfield of the e-government domain has been gaining attention to practitioners and academicians alike due to the growing use of information and communication technologies at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. This paper conducts a thorough literature review to examine the e-service research trends during the period between 2005 and 2009 mostly in terms of research methods, theoretical models, and frameworks employed as well as type of research questions. The results show that there has been a good amount of papers focusing on ‘e-Service’ within the field of e-government with a good combination of research methods and theories. In particular, findings show that technology acceptance, evaluation and system architecture are the most common themes, which circa half of the studies surveyed focus on the organizational perspective and that the most employed research methods are case studies and surveys, often with a mix of both types of methodologies.

INTRODUCTION

E-services, intended as services provided through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) are a recent technological innovation, which is designed to provide real-time, anyplace, 24/7 accessibility and high quality value added services at individual, organizational and societal levels. Until now, however, in the literature there has not been a universally accepted definition of e-services (e.g., Scupola et al., 2009).

Although the term ‘e-service’ is generally used in relation to e-services provided in different sectors among which the private and public
sectors (e.g., Scupola et al., 2009), in this paper we refer only to government e-services, that is services provided by the government to the citizens through the use of information and Communication Technologies. For the purpose of this paper, we define e-services within the e-government domain as “the electronic delivery of government information, programs, and services often (but not exclusively) over the Internet” (Dawes, 2002).

In recent years, e-government has become both an important research domain especially in the context of public policy and has gained strategic importance in public sector modernization (Wimmer et al., 2008). However, despite the growing demand for accessing government services through modern information and communication technologies, Wimmer et al. (2008) reported that there has been a deficiency in e-government research concerning the future government and ICT with specific focus on e-services. This study has been the main motivation to investigate the status quo of recent e-service research within the e-government domain, thus leading to the main research question of this paper: What are the methodological and theoretical trends of e-service research within the e-government domain in the last few years? In order to investigate the research question a thorough literature review of circa 150 papers (Webster & Watson, 2002) published over the period 2005-2009 has been conducted. The papers have been mainly analyzed according to the types of research question investigated; the theories used as well as the unit of analysis (perspective) and research methods employed (Webster & Watson, 2002). The major contribution of this article lies therefore in providing a thorough and updated overview of e-services research within the e-government domain over the last few years.

The paper is structured as follows. In this introduction, the background, motivation and research question of the study have been provided. The following section describes the research method with special focus on the search process and criteria for information source selection, data collection and analysis. The next section presents and discusses the results, while the last section provides some concluding remarks and suggestions for future research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Selection of Papers

This paper is based on a systematic literature survey of papers published within the period between 2005 and 2009. As Figure 1 shows, in order to make the research process rigorous, thus increasing the validity of the study, Webster and Watson (2002) guidelines for literature review and Grönlund and Andersson (2006) guidelines for paper selection and analysis have been adopted. According to Webster and Watson (2002, p. 4), “the major contributions are likely to be in the leading journals. It makes sense, therefore, to start with them. …… You should also examine selected conference proceedings, especially those with a reputation for quality”. In order to find the leading journals, the guidelines of AIS’s ‘Senior Scholars’ Basket of Journals, as listed in Figure 1 had been explored. This search method also helped to frame the boundary of the literature review and to limit the content of the analysis.

Furthermore, other relevant journals within the e-services field (See Figure 1) were also selected. Being e-services a relatively young field of research, it was assumed that newer journals within the field contained also relevant and interesting research. Finally for identifying the conferences related to e-government, Grönlund and Andersson’s (2006) suggestions have been mostly followed (See Figure 1), but also some other relevant conferences have been included.

Search Procedure

Webster and Watson (2002, p. 4) suggest that “a systematic search should ensure that you accumulate a relatively complete census of relevant