Citizens and Mobile Government Adoption: A Comparison of Activities and Uses

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ABSTRACT

In electronic government or e-government research there is an increased importance being placed on the investigation of new and emerging technologies. Mobile government is one area that has received very little research, but can have a tremendous impact on the way that citizens engage with their government. This paper asks two research questions. First, what are the important factors that predict mobile government adoption by citizens? Second, are there any important distinctions between mobile government compared to other common cell phone activities? The data used to answer these questions is taken from a survey of cell phone users across the United States. The results indicated that mobile government adoption was best predicted by mobile phone use and social factors. Demographic factors, associated with the digital divide, were not found to be highly correlated with mobile government adoption. In addition, mobile government adoption is different from other online cell phone activities, such as going to a social networking site or getting a weather forecast online. The results of this paper imply that future research should study more closely the adoption of mobile government activities.

Keywords: Citizens, Digital Divide, Mobile Government, Public Opinion Survey, Technology Adoption

INTRODUCTION

Mobile government can simply be defined as the extension of electronic government or e-government to mobile platforms (Goyal & Purohit, 2012). It promises access to government services at any place and time, which is important for citizen engagement in government (Emmanouilidou & Kreps, 2010). Mobile government reinforces e-government claims towards more efficient, effective, and open government; basically fitting the agenda of e-government (Rossel, Finger, & Misuraca, 2006). Mobile government is a “strategy and it is implemented by the government to provide information and services to government employees, citizens and other organizations through mobile devices.” (Lee, Tan, & Trimi, 2006, p. 115). As of December 2012, 87% of American adults have a cell phone and 45% of adults have a smartphone (Pew, 2013). Therefore, we know that mobile phones are readily used by American adults, and should be viewed as an important vehicle for citizen engagement.

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According to Trimi and Sheng (2008, p. 54), mobile technology has the advantages of “mobility” and “wireless.” Mobile devices typically include PDAs, laptops, cellular phones, tablets, and Blackberries, free users of physical ties to the desktop. The “wireless” characteristic of mobile technology refers to the method of transmitting information between a computing device and a data source without a physical connection.

Research, for instance, indicates that mobile government technologies can especially assist governments to get information and make decisions quickly in response to natural disasters, anytime, and anywhere (Amailef & Lu, 2011). Mobile government allows for just-in-time communication and collaboration among a large number of residents and responders in disasters (Jaeger et al., 2007). Mobile technology has a great potential to improve overall public service delivery (Moon, 2010). In fact, small applications running on mobile devices (or mobile apps) have become a widely adopted way of increasing citizen interaction with government (Sandoval-Almazan et al., 2012).

There are several important benefits noted for the adoption of mobile government, namely wider reach, always on, more personalization, cost effective, faster information flow, increased democracy, a solution for the digital divide, and easy learning curve (Goyal & Purohit, 2012). There are also several challenges associated with mobile government such as privacy and security and accessibility of mobile applications (Kumar & Sinha, 2007). One of the challenges for governments that want to invest in mobile government is making an effective business case for its adoption (Ntaliani, Costopoulou, & Karetsos, 2008).

Why should governments interested in enhancing citizen engagement want to adopt mobile government? Research has shown that government agencies are making the move from e-participation to m-participation (de Reuvera, Steinh, & Hampe, 2013). Mobile participation can be another service channel that can enable new services and engagement for citizens. Ahn and Bretschneider (2011) in an empirical case study of e-participation in South Korea, showed the importance of e-government to enhance citizens’ participation in government. Empirical research does examine end users adoption of mobile services and found that citizen government engagement was enhanced (Al Thunibat, Zin, & Sahari, 2011).

E-government is said to have altered the citizen contact experience, by making it more convenient, speedier, and efficient, and thereby creating higher levels of satisfaction than contacting through more traditional modes such as the phone or in person contacts at a government office (Cohen, 2006). Existing research has started to move from focusing on the supply of e-government services to what citizens’ actually demand (Reddick, 2005). Linders (2012) suggests that there has been a transition from e-government (citizen as customer) to we-government (citizen as partner), with citizens being the key to its development.

An OECD (2011) report states that mobile government can improve the quality of life of citizens, especially those that have been digitally excluded. For example, mobile technologies can be used for convenient access to public information and services. Citizens, for instance, can receive m-health assistance, financial transactions, and the delivery of educational content. Especially for those individuals in remote areas, mobile government can aid in bringing citizens closer to their government.

However, research suggests that the most common type of citizen interaction with government is through the managerial model and its focus on public service delivery (Chadwick & May, 2003). Examining Chadwick and May’s model, Reddick (2011) found that the vast majority of Internet users have visited government web sites for information and services. The least impact was increased participation, with around one-fifth of Internet users participating online with government. Somewhere in between was government consultation with citizens for engagement. Therefore, this research indicates that mobile government has not been able to
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