A Framework for Assessing Governmental Websites Quality: The Case of Iranian Free Economic Zones Websites

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ABSTRACT

E-government has provided the state-run sector with numerous opportunities to offer a variety of services through websites to citizens and the private sector. These websites have been launched in order to provide easy access to government services, boost the efficacy of the government-run sector and reduce operational costs. Given the point that many of these websites have gradually been developed and have scarcely been standardized to meet the requirements of site visitors, it is necessary to develop models for quality assessment of such websites. In this study, an information systems quality assessment (ISQA) based method along with fuzzy analytic network process (ANP) has been exploited to assess the quality of governmental websites. In order to validate the proposed model, it is applied to portals in six Iranian free trade zones. Finally, the assessment results are discussed.

Keywords: e-Government, Fuzzy Analytic Network Process, Information Systems Quality Assessment, Website Quality Assessment, Websites

INTRODUCTION

E-government consists of governmental organizations’ use of Information And Communication Technology (ICT) to improve their communications with citizens, the private sector and other governmental organizations (Mnjama & Wamukoya, 2007). E-government emphasizes on using any ICT tools by governmental organizations to improve operations, share data and provide services to citizens (Jupp, 2003). In this definition, e-government is an instrument for modernizing the governmental sector. It also underscores communications with other organizations through IT for more collaboration between governmental organizations or
between governmental organizations and citizens. Websites constitute a major instrument in improving e-government in which a web-based technology provides access to the government’s services and data in an effective manner (Brown & Brudney, 2001).

With technological developments, it is much easier to provide services of better quality. During the first years of establishment of e-governments, most services were provided in the form of unilateral information, but web technology has facilitated a new generation of e-government. Improvement of services and increased interaction in their offering has coincided with the integration of services. In the first generation of e-governments, only unilateral web-based information was provided to users. In second generation, governmental websites have been enhanced by developing functional and nonfunctional features. In the third generation, bilateral interactions have been developed between government and its audience. The fourth generation of e-government involves mutual transactions too. Transferring money between the government and the private sector is an example of mutual transactions. In the fifth generation of e-government, fully integrated communications take shape between government and its users and all services are provided electronically. In this phase, all state-run organizations are integrated to provide services to citizens and the private sector (Schelin, 2003).

The services provided by e-government websites are divided into three groups as follows:

1. **Information services**: Governmental organizations provide services to citizens for the purpose of education, recreation and knowledge;
2. **Transactional services**: Governmental organizations transfer value to citizens;
3. **Operational services**: Governmental organizations work out new mechanisms to lead the organization’s operations with integrated information systems and human resources on a network (Koh, Prybutok, & Zhang, 2008).

The first generation of e-government focused on information services. Gradually with the development of web technology and the evolution of e-government, transactional and operational services are expanding and logical balance is taking shape between the three categories.

The new generation of e-government services has provided organizations with the opportunity to benefit from operational services, which require integration in the governmental sector both horizontally and vertically. Operational services could be provided by e-governments when electronic services are integrated, so that governmental organizations could be able to interact in the web. Alignment of government sector with electronic services involves the following activities (Beynon-Davies, 2007):

1. Identifying the main fields for e-services;
2. Identifying and implementing access channels;
3. Reengineering and development of communications management systems;
4. Integrating operational systems with logistics;
5. Making sure of a secure data exchange and interaction within e-government;
6. Sharing data and services with other relevant organizations;
7. Creatively restructuring organizational processes by using IT enabled tools.

The aforementioned measures need to be totally undertaken in a governmental organization to be able to implement web-based operations. Evidently, transition from the second to the third generation of e-government websites requires widespread efforts and serious determination in the government sector. In this stage, the sole implementation of an advanced website would not help an organization realize its objectives. Reengineering of processes based on the capabilities of e-government, intra-organizational and inter-organizational integration and laying out infrastructures for sharing data and services are the most important preludes for transition
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