m-Government Adoption in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of mobile government services in Saudi Arabia. By collecting data through surveys from citizens and employees in Saudi Arabia, this study shows that the high level of mobile penetration in the country offers an opportunity for Saudi Arabian government to offer mobile government services in the country. The results suggest that although a large percentage of population does not have access to mobile technologies, there is still a strong desire among users for the provision of mobile government services. The effective implementation of mobile government services would enhance the technological development in Saudi Arabia. However, there exist certain challenges. Sufficient level of understanding among the Saudi Arabian population about the benefits of mobile government services is lacking. There is lack of the customization of mobile government services and lack of access to mobile technologies would be a challenge.

Keywords: Challenges, Customization of Services, E-Government, Mobile Government, Opportunities

INTRODUCTION

The majority of the previous studies about the opportunities and challenges facing mobile government have focused on its implementation within European countries where the mobile penetration rate has reached 100 per cent (Public Service, 2011). Furthermore, a large proportion of the research has concentrated on countries where mobile government has already become an important part of the provision of services, in countries such as Hong Kong, Germany, Estonia and Singapore (Jotischky & Nye, 2012). As a result, very little research has been conducted into the potential opportunities and challenges which are likely to be associated with the implementation of mobile services in countries such as Saudi Arabia where it has not yet been introduced. Furthermore, the relevance of empirical studies which have focused on the topic of mobile services is further diminished by the fact that very few of them focus on the provision of mobile...
services by the government. Rather, a large proportion of these studies have focused on the introduction of mobile technologies within sectors including the banking industry and the healthcare industry where such changes are predominantly driven by a desire to increase productivity and focus on the need to cater to consumers (Oxford Business Group, 2008). Such examples do not adequately reflect the increased level of complexity which is associated with the introduction of mobile services by the government, where the stakeholders which are involved are more complex, involving citizens, government employees, public administrators, tourists and business partners (Bouwman, de Vos & Haaker, 2008). These issues represent a significant gap in the research literature. Hence, it is hoped that this dissertation which will focus on critically analysing the various opportunities and challenges which are associated with the implementation of mobile government services in Saudi Arabia will not only be useful in increasing the effectiveness of any future implementation, but will also be a valuable contribution to the existing body of research literature.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to analyse the challenges and opportunities which are associated with the implementation of m-government services in Saudi Arabia. This aim is met by fulfilling the following objectives:

1. To explore the benefits which are associated with m-government for both Saudi citizens and government employees;
2. To identify the key challenges which may prevent the uptake of m-government in Saudi Arabia;
3. To identify the steps which should be taken in order to increase the effectiveness of m-government.

THE CONCEPT OF MOBILE GOVERNMENT

A range of research has been conducted into the development of m government services in other countries. For example, Jotischky and Nye (2011) suggest that the growth in the range of m government services which has occurred in many African countries in tandem with an increase in mobile penetration is likely to increase the transparency of political processes. However, Bhavnani, Chiu, Janakiram and Silarszky (2008) argue that their research in the introduction of m government services in India demonstrates the importance of it being rooted in government policy framework. In particular, it is suggested that the implementation of a Mobile Service Delivery Gateway to act as a bridge between the country’s mobile service users and the existing e governance infrastructure of the government is highly effective at broadening the reach of m-government services to rural citizens.

There is a significant difference in the way in which the role of mobile services is perceived. According to researchers such as Hayes and Lemstra (2008), m-government services are perceived to be playing an important role in providing consumers with a range of services which are not available within standard offerings, thus contributing to the creation of a ‘new mobile ecosystem’. Research which has been conducted into usability issues pertaining to mobile applications suggests that characteristics such as ease of navigation, text source and colour rendering are important determinants of the usability of a mobile application (Shneiderman & Plaisant, 2010). This is expanded upon within research which has been conducted by Rabi’u et al (2012) which suggests that it is important to ensure that the speed of the internet is well managed in order to ensure usability. This can be achieved by providing a software platform which is capable of supporting a display which is both vision friendly and speed friendly. In short, it is important for the emphasis on the design of a usable mobile application to be on the provi-