Enhancing Citizens’ Trust and Confidence in Government through Digital Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, there has been an erosion of citizens’ trust and confidence in their governments behind which, lies many reasons. This paper examines how digital transformation of government may play an important role in improving this eroding trust and confidence. Using a systematic literature review, the paper identifies factors that influence citizens’ trust and confidence in government as an institution. Among the key factors that are commonly identified across the literature are citizens’ satisfaction and expectations, transparency, accountability, digital transformation of government and performance of the government. The literature also points towards a lack of knowledge and understanding in the community of how transformation of government can influence the growing decline in citizens’ engagement with government. To this effect, an initial conceptual model is proposed which captures the key constructs that may lead to better understanding of how to rebuild trust and confidence in government administrations through the digital transformation of government.

KEYWORDS

Digital Transformation, E-Government, Government, Trust and Confidence

INTRODUCTION

Governments are undertaking efforts to improve their processes in providing more efficient and responsive services to their citizens. Rapid developments within information technology have brought about changes in the way government organisations interact with their citizens resulting in the introduction of e-government as a mainstream service delivery method in the public sector. However, over ten years of implementing various e-government projects have revealed that governments across the word have faced many challenges, the biggest being lack of adoption and use by citizens. Researchers have attributed this to lack of willingness to use e-government to have been influenced by declining trust in government and their practices (Aljazzaf et al., 2010; Colesca, 2009; Teo et al., 2008). This paper focuses on examining the influence of digital transformation of governments on citizens’ trust and confidence. The Internet has facilitated enhancements to all facets relating to government services and their operations for the benefit of citizens, businesses, employees and other stakeholders through enabling transformation within the service delivery system. However, irrespective of the worldwide enthusiasm towards e-government, its endeavours have mostly fallen short in comparison to their potential (Bannister and Connolly, 2011). This view of e-government is more visible in the context of developing countries, where only a small portion of such projects has become successful in achieving their goals or regaining the trust of citizens. Government authorities have been motivated to implement information technology within their operations so that they can respond towards the
changes occurring within a country, such as increase in the level of competitiveness, achieving economic development, and controlling the unemployment rate etc. The Internet in particular is seen as a channel that can facilitate potential improvements in the performance of government agencies and thereby help increase the level of satisfaction that citizens have of government. Thus, proponents of e-governments have argued that it can play a very important role in rebuilding the loss of public confidence in government’s performance as well as helping to improve citizens’ satisfaction of public services within a country (Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006; Morgeson et al., 2011). Several studies have also proposed that there are a number of reasons behind the decline in the level of trust among citizens. Some of the reasons identified during our literature review include political scandals, change in the role of mass media, poor economic performances, perception of citizens on the performance of government, and changes occurring within the social and cultural environment as well as possibility of policy failures. However, implementation of e-government practices can play a very important role in rebuilding the trust of citizens in the government.

Citizens expect government or public servants to serve the public interest with fairness and manage public resources in an efficient manner. Fair and reliable public services can act as a catalyst to improve public trust and create a favourable environment for business. At the present time, there is an evident decline in the trust of citizens in governments and e-government services (Tolbert and Mossberger, 2006; Morgeson et al., 2011). Implementation of e-government practices plays a very important role in enhancing public services that are required for building the trust of citizens. However, it is noted that citizens’ trust is an intricate perception. Factors influencing trust and confidence of citizens are not inherently understood. Additionally, many studies have identified a clear need for developing a better understanding related to the drivers behind rebuilding trust in citizens in relation to use of e-government practices (Colesca, 2009; Abu-Shanab and Al-Azzam, 2012; Bélanger and Carter, 2008; Alateyah et al., 2013). Therefore, this research aims to identify and examine the factors that have an impact on trust of citizens relating to e-government practices as well as citizens trust and confidence in government through digital transformation.

Additionally, the study is contributing towards enhancing current understanding of e-government and citizens’ trust relationship within e-government practices. This is pursued through critically reviewing various published research studies as well as secondary grey literature. In particular, the paper will examine the concepts related to trust in a) technology (or Internet), b) e-government and c) government in order to develop a relationship among the three concepts.

The study will also assist in developing a conceptual model based on appropriate theoretical underpinnings provided by existing literature. Finally, the literature review will facilitate in developing hypotheses to test relationships that will be formulated in a conceptual model, which will subsequently be evaluated using empirical data in a developing country context. The literature review conducted in the study helped to analyse key factors relating to the adoption of e-government services and the influence of citizens’ trust in this context. Further, this study will also provide outcomes related to the impact of these factors in relation to Bahraini (which is a developing country) citizens’ outlook on trust in government, e-government and technology (i.e. the Internet) as part of its planned future research. In this context, the research will examine the key challenges that affect the implementation of e-government practices that could lead to developing trust among citizens. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: The subsequent section offers a broad overview of the literature. This is followed by discussing the findings of a systematic literature review on trust in the context of e-government. Based on the literature review, a conceptual model is proposed for evaluating the influence of digital transformation of government on citizens’ trust and confidence in the following section. The research methodology used for the study is outlined next, followed by concluding reflections.
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