A User-Centric Evaluation of e-Government Services in the GCC Region: Case of State of Qatar

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ABSTRACT

Evaluating users’ satisfaction of e-Government services has been addressed by numerous studies. These mainly looked at e-Government users as citizens who are nationals and comply with the local culture of the governments providing these services. However, the GCC region has a particular culture stemming from the social structure and working environment. The expatriate population from different backgrounds form a significant portion of e-Government users. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore users’ satisfaction towards the electronic services provided by governments in the GCC region represented by the State of Qatar. In order to examine the suitability of the e-Government service portal, a cross-sectional survey targeting the users of three common e-Government services in Qatar evaluated users’ satisfaction based on the four dimensions of the COBRA framework (Osman et al. 2014): Cost, opportunity, benefit and risk. SEM analysis demonstrated a good model fit and supported the hypotheses related to the effect of risk and benefit on users’ satisfaction.

KEYWORDS

Benefit, Cost, e-Government, GCC Region, Opportunity, Qatar, Risk, Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, the world has witnessed a huge move towards the adoption of technology as a mean to fulfil different purposes ranging from entertainment, learning, and professional requirements to formal administrational and governmental obligations. This has notably been powered by the technological inventions, such as faster smartphones and connected tablets. Another reason can be attributed to the innovation in the global culture that does not consider the “e-” channel optional anymore but complementary, and sometimes mandatory (Leidner and Kayworth, 2006). Meanwhile, countries in the GCC region demonstrated an interesting and particular aspect of how technology has been quickly spread and accepted. These developments can be attributed to different factors: global, local and economic. The global propagation of technology and the quasi-instantaneous availability of new technologies in the GCC triggered a high interest in exploiting it optimally. Furthermore, the local social and cultural composition of the GCC countries’ populations where expatriates from different backgrounds, in some cases, outnumber the local citizens motivated governments in adopting modern
technologies to better administer and protect the available resources. Finally, the economic factor undoubtedly has an important effect on technology adoption in the GCC region. With economies majorly relying on oil and gas industry, GCC countries ensured placing themselves at the top of the list of the world’s wealthiest countries. Therefore, the cost of innovation remains marginal compared to the utility provided by implementing new solutions based on innovative technologies. In this study, we focus on evaluating how technology has been adopted and adapted for the development of e-Government services offered in the GCC countries. We particularly consider the State of Qatar as a fair representative of the region and given its actual developments in the field of e-Government. We therefore examine the readiness and maturity of e-Government services from a users’ satisfaction point of view. To measure satisfaction, we consider the factors presented in the COBRA model developed by Osman et al. (2014). The model hypothesizes the effects of cost, opportunity, risk and benefits of using e-Government services on the overall users’ satisfaction. The aim would therefore be to understand whether these factors are as influential as they proved to be in other contexts and whether the COBRA model is an appropriate instrument to evaluate the modern e-Government services in the GCC region. We refer in this study to the term “users” or “residents” rather than “citizens” in order to properly reflect on the actual usage of the services offered, or controlled, by the legal authorities and to do justice to the composition of the society in these countries.

TECHNOLOGY IN QATAR’S PUBLIC SECTOR

The State of Qatar is geographically located in the Arab peninsula and is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Its oil and natural gas resources allowed the country to witness high-speed development in various aspects. Qatari e-Government initiatives started in the early years of the previous decade as part of a larger effort to modernize other sectors such as health and education (Al-Shafi and Weerakkody, 2007). Despite the fact that Qatar is categorized as a developing country, like all GCC countries, huge efforts were, and still are, undertaken to advance the nation forward and to position itself among the greatest nations. As opposed to many developing countries where technology proliferation is lagging, Qatar pioneered a number of initiatives to exploit the latest technological developments (Faisal and Talib, 2015). Financial investments and administrative reforms were done to secure a sustainable base for implementing public e-Services such as e-Government, e-Health and e-Learning. Nevertheless, it has been estimated that these e-Services are yet under-utilized and the adoption rate can be boosted (Al-Shafi and Weerakkody, 2008).

At the time of this writing, “Hukoomi”, the Qatar’s e-Government service portal aggregates over 1000 services carried out by over 230 entities. These services target a variety of user categories such as citizens and residents (G2C), businesses (G2B), government (G2G) and others. Given their highest rates of e-Government usage, we limit our study in this paper to examine only the services offered to users under the G2C model. To fulfil this objective, we have selected the three most commonly used e-Services: the traffic violations electronic service offered by the Ministry of Interior, the automated service for renewal of health cards offered by Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), and the online payment of utility bills provided by the Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa).

Traffic violation e-Services aim to provide road users and the traffic police department with detailed and timely information about violations breaches of road rules. To improve the effectiveness of these services, main roads have been equipped with radars directly connected to headquarters’ information systems that process and store image feeds. When a violation is filed, the owner of the vehicle is dynamically informed by an SMS alert through Metrash2 (a mobile app companion for the suite of e-Government services). Drivers may later view and pay online, either directly through the MOI official website, via the Hukoomi e-Services gateway, or directly using the mobile application.

The second e-Service examined in this study is the renewal of health cards offered by Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC), and the online payment of utility bills provided by the Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa).
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