Citizen-Initiated Contacts With Ontario Local E-Government:
Administrators’ Responses to Contacts

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Ontario, Canada’s municipal e-government adoption. This paper specifically focuses on how e-government has increased citizen-initiated contacts with these local governments. This study uses survey data of these local governments to determine the key factors that predict increased citizen contact with e-government. What these municipal governments most commonly are doing is informational e-government, such as providing downloadable forms for manual completion. Transactional e-government is done less often, with very few local governments offering online payment of taxes, for example. The regression results indicated that offering more online services or e-services and having a separate information technology (IT) department developing the e-government budget increased citizen contact with e-government. The traditional factors that are used to explain citizen-initiated contact, such as socioeconomic status of the community, were not found to have any impact on increasing citizen contact with e-government.

Keywords: citizen access; electronic government; IT diffusion; IT in public administration; public sector

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

E-government has been defined as the use of the Internet to deliver services and information to citizens and businesses (Ho & Ni, 2004; Holden, Norris & Fletcher, 2003; Reddick, 2004a). There are several studies that examine the adoption of e-government at the local level in the U.S. (Edmiston, 2002; Fletcher, 2003; Ho, 2002; Holden, Norris & Reddick, 2004a; Moon, 2002; Reddick, 2004b).
However, there are few studies that have empirically examined e-government at the local level outside the U.S. (Criado & Ramilo, 2003). Therefore, most of the empirical evidence on local e-government adoption is provided from the analysis of a single country. In addition, most of the work on e-government literature focuses on the features of local governments that have adopted the Internet for information and e-service delivery (Edmiston, 2002; Ho, 2002; Moon, 2002; Reddick, 2004a). A smaller number of studies actually has tested the impact of key features that explain e-government adoption rates (Ho & Ni, 2004; Holden, Norris & Fletcher, 2003; Reddick, 2004b).

Citizen-initiated contacts with government occur when individual citizens contact government personnel with requests for services or complaints (Thomas & Melkers, 1999). Increased citizen-initiated contact with e-government is important, since it enhances political participation and validates government institutions (Thomas & Streib, 2003). E-government is a way to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of citizen and business access to local governments. Few studies have examined how e-government has changed citizens’ interaction with their local governments (Thomas & Streib, 2003). The studies that have examined citizen-initiated contact with public administrators focus on the perceptions and characteristics of citizens and their contacts (Serra, 1995; Thomas, 1982; Thomas & Melkers, 2000). Few studies examine administrators’ responses to citizen-initiated contacts (Green, 1982). Therefore, the existing literature presents only one side of the relationship between citizen-initiated contacts and government, because it has not extensively considered bureaucrats and their responses to contacts.

Increased citizen interaction with government is a tool for enhancing democracy, since it represents an avenue for increasing service delivery and confidence in government (Green, 1982). With such an emphasis on enhancing performance at all levels of government, e-government is an excellent mechanism with which to achieve this goal (Ho, 2002). Therefore, this study examines through survey research, municipal e-government adoption in Ontario, Canada, to see how developed these local governments are and to discern whether e-government has increased citizen-initiated contacts with government.

Ontario, Canada, was chosen for two reasons: (1) for four years in a row, this country was rated as the most e-government-enabled national government according to Accenture, an information systems consultancy firm (Accenture, 2004); and (2) it is the most populous province in Canada with the largest city in the country; namely, Toronto.

In order to examine the impact of e-government and its relationship on citizen-initiated contacts, this paper first outlines the existing literature in both areas and demonstrates how this study fits into the literature. Second, the evidence of e-government adoption at the local level in Ontario is presented. Third, six key hypotheses are outlined, and a model of citizen-initiated contacts is tested empirically. The conclusion summarizes and suggests