Chapter 7

How to Migrate Citizens Online and Reduce Traffic on Traditional Channels Through Multichannel Management: A Case Study of Cross–Organizational Collaboration Surrounding a Mandatory Self–Service Application

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ABSTRACT

E-government channels are a key to achieving economic savings from public digitization. Citizens tend to use multiple channels in a service encounter and often use e-government channels as a supplement instead of replacing traditional channels. There is a lack of knowledge regarding how government organizations apply findings from user studies to migrate citizens online while reducing traffic through traditional channels. The authors present a case study on how public authorities collaborate to create a multichannel strategy for an online application for single parents. After the multichannel strategy was implemented, there was an increase in the use of the application and a reduction in telephone calls. The authors wrote this chapter to contribute to channel choice and multichannel management literature.

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INTRODUCTION

E-government is promoted as a means to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of public authorities as well as citizen satisfaction (Chadwick & May, 2003; Ho, 2002; Layne & Lee, 2001). As e-government channels generally have lower transactions costs than traditional channels, citizens’ migration from traditional channels towards e-government channels is regarded as key to achieving savings (The Danish Government, 2011). However, literature reviews of the e-government field show that the papers studied lack practical recommendations on how to achieve these benefits (Heeks & Bailur, 2007; Hofmann, Räckers, & Becker, 2012; Madsen, Berger, & Phythian, 2014).

The channel choice (CC) and multichannel management (MCM) branches of e-government examine how citizens and employees choose communication channels in a public service encounter and how government organizations can migrate citizens towards the most efficient channels (Ebbers, Pieterson, & Noordman, 2008; Kernaghan, 2013; Pieterman, 2010; Pieterman, Ebbers, & Madsen, 2017; van den Boer, Arendsen, & Pieterson, 2016). The majority of CC and e-government adoption studies are conducted in settings where citizens have a choice of channels. These studies typically revolve around increasing the adoption rates of digital channels. There are few studies in mandatory settings where citizens have already adopted e-government channels. Thus, the continued use of traditional channels among those who have adopted e-government channels remain unexplained (Ebbers, Jansen, & van Deursen, 2016; Madsen & Kremmergaard, 2015a; Reddick & Anthopoulos, 2014). Although strategies to fully integrate government organizations’ channels have been suggested (Pieterman, 2010; Wirtz & Langer, 2016), they remain theoretical. Conducting a MCM strategy in practice is complicated, especially when the channels involved are managed by several organizations (Kernaghan, 2009, 2013; Roy, 2009). There is a lack of knowledge and practical recommendations for how such cross-organizational collaborations can be conducted. Therefore, scholars have called for case studies of successful MCM projects (Janssen & Kuk, 2010; Kernaghan, 2013; Mundy, Umer, & Foster, 2011; Wirtz & Langer, 2016), and qualitative studies of citizens’ combined use of traditional and e-government channels (Ebbers, Jansen, Pieterson, & van de Wijngaert, 2015; Ebbers et al., 2016; Schmidthuber & Hilgers, 2017). This paper addresses these gaps by answering the following research question; how can public authorities successfully implement a mandatory channel strategy, to increase citizens’ use of e-government channels and simultaneously reduce the use of traditional channels?

This paper presents a longitudinal case study (Yin, 2014) of a cross-organizational collaboration surrounding a mandatory online self-service application. The authors conduct a study among a group of citizens who have largely adopted the e-government channel. Thereby they analyze multichannel government-to-citizen (G2C) interaction occurring in a post-adoption environment and how government organizations can conduct multichannel management in such settings.

The next section contains a description of the case and its setting. Then follows a presentation of existing literature on CC and MCM to position the paper, illustrating the relevance of the research question and expected contributions. Next, the authors present methods for data collection and analysis, before turning to a discussion of the findings in relation to CC and MCM literature, and contributions to research and practitioners. The final section presents concluding remarks, limitations, and recommendations for future studies.