Chapter 9
An Assessment Study of Indian State Government Portals

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ABSTRACT

Does the e-readiness of a country or a state give any insight into the success of their e-government projects? Does scaling up of e-readiness help to measure the acceptance of e-government projects by citizens? Research has failed to provide a direct answer to these questions. While an e-readiness index summarizes the infrastructural condition of a state or country in terms of network readiness and availability of hardware facility; e-government readiness implies the acceptance of e-government projects by the citizens in a state or a country. So, the e-readiness index cannot clearly depict the e-government readiness of a country. Since e-government projects are broadly categorized as Government to Citizen, Government to Business and Government to Government, it becomes difficult to quantify the satisfaction level of the stakeholders. For analysing the acceptance of e-government business models particularly the web based ones, researchers (Yang, 2002; Kašubienė & Vanagas, 2007; Janssen, Kuk & Wagenaar, 2008; Morgeson & Mithas, 2009) often adopted the quality criteria used in evaluating service offered by of e-commerce sites. The most pervasive concept of quality in use is the extent to which a web service meets and/or exceeds a citizen’s/customer’s expectations. Portals at the Federal Government level in India were developed with the idea to form a ‘single window’ access to the facilities provided by the states or union territories to the citizens in an integrated platform. The idea behind such investment

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on state wise portals was to serve the citizens better but there was hardly any attempt from the government side to assess the acceptance of the portals. Some of the portals have counters to keep a track of visitors and email facilities have been provided to serve queries of the visitors. So the effectiveness of the portals has become a questionable issue today. In this study we have tried to concentrate on Indian State government portals and assess the service quality provided by them. It was observed that State wise Service Quality issues in e-government differ significantly when global parameters like usability, adequacy of information, navigation facility interactivity are considered. So, to evaluate the portals a conceptual framework based on previous research works was proposed. Quality dimensions were identified to assess service quality of government portals and each of the state and the union territory portal was audited based on the parameters proposed like usefulness of information, adequacy of information, citizen centric information, usability, accessibility, interaction, privacy, security and citizen participation.

INTRODUCTION

E-government or electronic government has evolved as a popular concept in public administration that supposedly ensures efficient and effective (Heeks, 2001) service delivery to the citizens and stakeholders with proper interconnectivity of related government departments. The concept also assists in helping to enhance interactivity, decentralization and transparency in the working of government. The United Nations (UN) and American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) (2002) has defined e-government as “utilizing the Internet and the World-Wide-Web for delivering government information and services to citizens”. The services of e-government also include use of other mode of ICT in addition to the Internet and the Web, such as “database, networking, discussion support, multimedia, automation, tracking and tracing, and personal identification technologies” (Jaeger, 2003). Fountain (2001) appositely termed this concept of rendering government service as ‘digital government’ or ‘virtual state’ instead of e-government.

E-government projects can be broadly classified into three categories; Government to Citizen, Government to Business and Government to Government. As a result, the concept of e-government is perceived differently depending on the type of stakeholders who use the service. There is no universal definition of e-government, but prior research unanimously concedes that e-government involves: the automation or computerization of existing paper-based procedures that will prompt new styles of leadership, new ways of debating and deciding strategies, new ways of transacting business, new ways of listening to citizens and communities, and new ways of organizing and delivering information (Yildiz, 2007).

Since the introduction of electronic government is a relatively newer concept in a traditional democracy like India, general acceptance and frequency of use has been observed to be considerably low. Though there have been some success stories like ‘e-Seva’, ‘SETU’, ‘Bhoomi’ and FRIENDS, which have gained appreciation nationally and internationally, there have been many other endeavours from the Government of India that have barely received a mention in any of the platforms and are rarely used by the stakeholders.

Implementation of country level projects to achieve citizen centric government in a country like India with vast diversity has proved to be a herculean task. The following factors must be addressed: expansion of the subcontinent, menacing population growth, cultural diversity, political interference, digital divide, knowledge divide, lack of infrastructure. These are just a few of the problems that have thwarted the growth of e-government projects countrywide. However, the growth of ICT and the demand for