Chapter IX

Exploring the Role of Broadband Adoption and Socio-Economic Characteristics in the Diffusion of Emerging E-Government Services

Abstract

The penetration of the Internet and opportunities involving information and communication technologies (ICTs) have occurred at an escalating rate within the private sector. This has caused governments and public sector organisations around the globe to become aware of their potential and consequently utilise them; thereby triggering investments in e-services (Choudrie et al., 2004a). However, the e-services offered by governments are much more than simple automation. E-services are meant to dramatically improve all areas of government activities: from democratic participation using online voting to improving the efficiency of citizen interactions with the government by providing online government services (Barc & Cordella 2004). Other countries around the globe are undertaking various e-government measures. Similar to them, the United Kingdom (UK) government is also undertaking steps that ensure it is progressing in accordance with these countries. For this purpose, the introduction and experiences of utilising a number of government services that are offered electronically via the ‘Government Gateway’ in the UK
is pertinent. These e-government services include council tax bills and accounts, housing benefits, child benefit claims, carer’s allowance, jobs online, state pension forecasts, self assessment of tax and tax credits, landweb direct, and the national blood services (Government Gateway, 2004). This is in contrast to the traditional method, whereby access to government services was undertaken by the citizens visiting ‘physical, brick foundation’ locations. Therefore this novel phenomenon offers a great amount of convenience and ease for citizens’ use (Government Gateway, 2004). However, it is not known whether the citizens of the UK are aware of such services. Further, questions are still emerging concerning whether the citizens are actually adopting the newly offered services. Therefore the initial aim of this chapter is to examine citizens’ awareness and adoption of e-government initiatives, specifically the Government Gateway in the United Kingdom. Since these services have been recently introduced, an investigation is needed to study if the demographic characteristics and home Internet access are affecting the awareness and adoption of these services. Therefore the second aim of this chapter is to examine the affect of the citizens’ demographic characteristics and home Internet access on the awareness and adoption of e-government services. To fulfil these aims, this study undertook an empirical examination of the awareness and adoption of the Government Gateway amongst UK citizens. This research offers a contribution to various stakeholders including the government agencies who could require a distinction to be drawn between the adopters and non-adopters of e-government services. That is, from the results of this research the government agencies could better understand in a simpler and detailed manner, the problem of low adoption. This could allow the formulation of a strategy that promotes awareness and diffusion. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of research undertaken on the citizens’ adoption of e-government services and a brief overview of the Government Gateway and its purpose. The findings are then presented and discussed. Finally, a conclusion to the research is provided. It is important to mention that the research methodology for this chapter is already presented and discussed in previous chapters. Therefore, this chapter does not include research methodology and only presents empirical data in the form of tables.

Background

The Definition and Benefits of E-Government Services

E-government is being defined in various ways, each differing according to the afforded purpose. In this research, the definition being applied is the one offered by the European Information Society:

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