Key Challenges of E-Government Adoption in Less Developed Countries: The Case of Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

The Government of Saudi Arabia has given a great attention to the e-Government program and the transformation process that leads to the successful implementation of such program in Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, in recent years e-Government has been the favourable theme for numerous studies and reports. Yet, there is a lack of systematic empirical evidence regarding the key challenges for the e-Government implementation in less developed countries in general and in Saudi Arabia in particular. Consequently, this paper is an exploratory attempt that seeks to analyse the key challenges for implementing e-Government project in Saudi Arabia, as well as to establish the main obstacles to the deployment of such new technology and the associated causes and possible solutions to avoid potential drawbacks and overcome all problems. Using a sample of 50 experts, the author found that trust is the first factor inhibiting wider adoption of e-Government application in Saudi Arabia. The results of this study have major implications for policy makers, as they suggest the notion that the e-Government applications will not work without building a solid trust foundation with citizens.

Keywords: E-Government, E-Government Adoption, Less Developed Countries, Saudi Arabia, Trust

INTRODUCTION

Governments all over the world are developing electronic services as they found out the importance and benefits of e-government and its applications for citizens, businesses and governmental agencies (Alshehri & Drew, 2010; Lee et al., 2003; Mishra & Mishra, 2012). Nowadays because of vast networks of interacting organizations, responding to complex problems of societies and providing solutions and improvement of private sector in e-business, the traditional model of government is not working any longer. In fact, governments realized the vital necessity of improvement in order to sustain their position in the global and local competition (Davidrajuh, 2004; Hassan et al., 2011; Sharifi & Zarei, 2004).

Nowadays, different governments have seized the opportunities provided by information and communication technology as the ideal way to rethink and reformulate their adminis-
trative works. This restructuring concentrates not only on the internal aspects involved, but also on those related to the interaction between government and other organizations, social groups and citizens.

However, there are few research studies on e-government in general and specially in developing countries and most of these studies focus on general e-government implementation framework (Alshehri & Drew, 2010). The technological infrastructure aspect of e-government dominated most research studies. For example, Leigh and Atkinson (Davidrajuh, 2004; Hassan et al., 2011; Leigh & Atkinson, 2002; Mishra & Mishra, 2012) focused their work on evaluating government’s web sites and provided recommendations on how to improve the design and functions of web sites to make them more useful and easier to use by citizens. Other researchers discussed the G2G issues in depth such as Ezz (2003) who focused on government adoption to e-government in Egypt and concluded that e-government adoption may have a limited impact unless the decision making process is better understood and the related organisational problems are addressed.

Yet others investigated the barriers and challenges to e-government such as technological, financial, governmental, managerial, and political problems (Gilbert et al., 2004). Certainly the importance of these studies is not denied, but very little has been written on citizens’ Trust in e-government in both developed and developing countries. There is many researchers talked about trust in e-commerce or on line shopping (e.g., Kini & Choobineh, 1998; Lee & Turban, 2001; Walczuch et al., 2001; Chong et al., 2003; Gefen, Karahanna et al., 2003; Gefen, Rao et al., 2003; Kim et al., 2003, Salam et al., 2005; Wang & Emurian 2005; Hassan et al., 2011), however very little have been written on trust in e-government (e.g., Merrill Warkentin et al., 2002) and nothing so far in the issue in developing countries in general and Middle East in particular.

However, research in e-Government in general and e-Government in less developed countries in particular is still in its infancy. Most research has been either descriptive or theoretical/speculative, and there is a lack of solid research models to guide future research in this area. There have been a number of attempts to identify the key barriers which are involved on the e-Government implementation (see for example, Accenture, 2002; Caldow, in press; Chadwick & May, 2003; Davidrajuh, 2004; Grant & Chau, 2005; Jansen, 2005, Mishra & Mishra, 2012); however, few of them can provide strong theoretical or statistical support for the existence of these barriers. Hence, full-scale research conducted in a highly scientific manner must be undertaken.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nowadays, the Internet has opened up different opportunities for Governments to improve their services even further. The Government of Saudi Arabia has also recognized the potential of the Internet. Previously developed Computer Systems and services are getting web-enabled and made available to the Public via the Ministry’s website. Turning the Government slowly but surely into an “e-Government.”

E-commerce in Saudi Arabia is a reality. Internet waves have landed in Saudi Arabia shores. Until now the tactics of most companies and banks in Saudi Arabia rested on upgrading their infrastructures by the development of information technology and human capital. This electronic environment formed the base for the Saudi government to perform affairs electronically. The confidence in digital technology is flourishing every day affecting the way Saudi Arabia citizens operate, learn and interact. Granted, Saudis, while facing the issue of impersonal information, reacting to the e-surroundings with varying degrees of confusion depending on their degree of knowledge and awareness. In general, people are extending their use of e-facilities as their experience grows with the system (Al-Shaban & Burney, 2001).

The government of Saudi Arabia understands the importance of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in the de-
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