State e-Government Portals in Malaysia: An Empirical Investigation

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ABSTRACT

Most of the international e-Government benchmarking studies have focused on national government websites such as portal of ministries at the national level. This paper examines the level of sophistication of e-Government websites for different states in Malaysia, as opposed to a national level assessment, both in terms of the breadth and depth of e-Government service offering. This paper adds to the existing body of knowledge in relation to e-Government web portal assessment in two ways. First, studies pertaining to e-Government in Malaysia focus mainly on implementation issues at the Federal/National level; The authors examined State level implementation of e-Government services. Secondly, they used a predetermined instrument to assess the sophistication level of State government web portals, by consolidating different measurement items from our review of literature over the past ten years. The authors analyzed the website for a total of thirteen states in Malaysia, in relation to six different dimension measures of e-Government service offerings, as prescribed by literature. These six dimension measures are the extent of transparency, interactivity, usability and accessibility of the portal, citizen participation, security and privacy, and maturity level of services. A content analysis of the web portal was done, using a predetermined instrument developed based on our review of literature on this topic, in the past ten years. Their findings suggest that different State Governments in Malaysia demonstrate different levels of maturity in relation to the six dimensions measured.

Keywords: Content Analysis, E-Government, E-Portals, Malaysia, State Government

BACKGROUND

As e-Government projects have moved from the initial stage of development towards the more sophisticated stages, there exists a need for ongoing evaluation and assessment of government websites from a worldwide perspective as well as local perspective. Such assessments are needed to measure the extent to which e-Government portals have been able to address citizens’ needs and offer services that are demanded by citizens. There exit two main issues that governments should pay attention regarding government web portals: 1) provision

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of delivery features/tools that facilitate surfing of government portals by the users (citizens), and 2) provision of online services according to citizen’s needs and expectations. The former issue is mainly concerned about such matters as Usability (Ease of Use) (as addressed by: Kaaya, 2001; Giant & Gant, 2002; Stowers, 2002; Holzer & Tae Kim, 2003; Pina, Torres & Royo, 2009), Accessibility (as addressed by: West, 2001-2008; UNDESA, 2005), Interactivity (as addressed by: Laporte, de Jong, & Demchak, 1999; Demchak et al., 2000; La Porte et al., 2002; Holzer & Tae Kim, 2003; Kaaya, 2001; Pina, Torres & Royo, 2009), Security and Privacy (as addressed by: West, 2001-2007; Stowers, 2002; Holzer & Tae Kim, 2003; Pina, Torres, & Royo, 2009) and similar matters related to surfing and browsing the websites. Evidently provision of such service delivery features is mainly aimed to attract users to exploit e-Government web portals and to facilitate use of services. The later issue involves such matters as Citizen Participation (as identified and emphasized by OECD, 2003, p. 23; Torres, Pina, & Royo, 2005; Spacek, 2008; Seang-Tae KIM, 2006), e-Consultation (UNDESA, 2003, p. 16; and OECD, 2003), as well as online execution/completion of services and their sophistication. Such mentioned delivery features and services are expected to meet citizens’ expectations, as well as industry/legal standards. Technically speaking, investigation and evaluation e-Government web portals include assessment of maturity status of them, in terms of- both breadth and depth of online services and features/tools offered to citizens. Based on the complex definition by Grant and Chau (2005, p. 8), e-Government is “A broad-based transformational initiative enabled by leveraging the capabilities of information and communication technology: (1) to develop and deliver high quality, seamless, and integrated public services; (2) to enable effective constituent relationship management; and (3) to support the economic and social development goals of citizens, businesses, and civil society at local, state, national, and international levels”. Apparently it’s desirable for users to have online access to as much services as possible. In addition, e-Government web portals are expected to offer full online executable services according to present enhancement in the web technologies and industry standards. Hence, given the importance of e-Government service delivery, assessment of maturity status of e-Government portals is a significant issue that should be addressed. As a result of aforementioned need, various international studies have tried to assess status of e-Governments around the world (e.g. UN/ASPA, 2001; UNDESA, 2003-2005, 2008, 2010; West, 2001-2008; Accenture, 2001-2007; Capgemini, 2001-2010). Benchmarking has been an effective approach for making comparison among different countries in order to gauge and compare situation and status of different countries. As a consequence of those benchmarking studies, best practices of e-Government projects are introduced and discussed. Though there’s has been a number of global studies, which have focused on assessment of maturity status of e-Government, and in which Malaysia has been an object of evaluation, such studies have had their own limitations and drawbacks that necessitated pursuit of such further studies as this. Local government websites such as municipalities, city councils and state departments, which belong to lower hierarchies of government systems, are either ignored or have received less attention (OECD, 2001; Holzer & Kim, 2005; Norshida, 2008). In contrast to previous studies, which have focused on national/federal web portals such as websites of ministries, this study focused on states government portals in Malaysia, which at lower hierarchy level have a closer interaction with people and address citizens’ needs at local levels, as compared with national/federal web portals, which are mainly concerned with national issues. No report or research study was available to address web portals’ maturity status at local levels in Malaysia. The sole exception to this has been municipality of Kuala Lumpur, which has been a target in e-Governance Municipalities Worldwide by Holzer and Tae Kim (2003, 2005, and 2008). In addition, different global e-Government studies have used vari-

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