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Exploring Quality of E-Government Services in Middle East

Yousef I. Abuzawayda

Misurata University, Information Systems Department, Faculty of Information Technology, Box. 2040. *Misurata- Libya*

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ABSTRACT

Background: Technology development has led to a change in the way governments, individuals, institutions and business entities provide quality services to the public. In Middle East, governments have embraced technology as an efficient way through which services are provided to citizens. Through e-Government, various services are provided to citizens and this is a major development. **Objective:** The main objective of the study is to explore the quality of e-government services in Middle East. **Results:** The application of various technology platforms has helped citizens in Middle East to access quality services through e-Government. Electronic government which is also known as connected or online government refers to the process by which government and citizens interact through the use of information and communication technology. The main aspects of e-Government in Middle East are the concepts of governance, information and communication technology, e-citizen and business process re-engineering. **Conclusion:** Middle East is effective in providing essential services to citizens through electronic interactions. Interaction between government and its citizens through technology is faced with certain challenges even through the benefits are numerous. The quality of e-Government services is very important as it is a way through which citizens are provided with standard, effective and essential services.

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INTRODUCTION

Technology a major aspect of globalization remains one of the most exploited developments that have led to a change in the way services are provided to citizens in Middle East. Individuals, business entities, organizations and governments in different parts of the world are embracing technology in different perspectives. Electronic government or e-Government is a means through which government and citizens interact through different technology platforms. In Middle East, e-Government remains a key factor of economic development especially in the current trend whereby different technology platforms are used in various departments and ministries. One of the main objectives of the governments in Middle East to promote e-Government is to change the existing government system. This is for purpose of transforming the way services are provided to citizens through information and communication technology. The use of technology as a way to change from the existing governmental system is exposed to certain challenges that once addressed the system will remain effective. Recently, United Arab Emirates announced an e-Government strategic Framework with the view of transforming all government services especially the national identity management infrastructure (The Economist, 2013). The framework aims at supporting government to citizen transactions alongside promotion of trust and confidence on the use of internet. The quality of e-Government in Middle East is a major issue that has raised a lot of concern. This research work seeks to explore the quality of e-Government services in Middle East. The main objective of the study is to explore the quality of e-government services in Middle East. In addition to suggest suitable recommendations based on the findings of the literature

The transformation in the way government in Middle East interacts with citizens and business entities is a major development with numerous benefits such as efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery (Gil-Garcia, 2012). However, the development or adoption of an electronic way through which government interacts with citizens and business entities is faced with certain challenges. One of the main challenges associated with the process of e-Government is the concept of digital divide (Dokhtesmati *et al*., 2011). The gap between those citizens in Middle East who know how to use internet and other technology platforms and those

Corresponding Author: Yousef I. Abuzawayda, Misurata University, Information Systems Department, Faculty of Information Technology, Box. 2478. Misurata. Libya.
Tel: +218912136786, E-mail: yzwayda@umit.edu.ly

who do not know how to use various technology platforms is wide. This has far-reaching implications in that government is not able to reach all its citizens through information and communication technology platforms. In this view, e-Government in Middle East is faced with the challenge of inequality in public access to government services (Andersson and Djeflat, 2012).

Major challenges in middle east:

The number of citizens with adequate knowledge on how to use internet is low and this is a major challenge. This is because without adequate knowledge on internet use affects the quality of e-government services in Middle East. For an electronic government project to succeed in Middle East, every citizen of age is supposed to have knowledge on how to use computer and internet. Additionally, winning the confidence of citizens and changing the manner in which individuals use technology as a way of accessing services is a major challenge. The concept of resistance to change is a major challenge experienced by the government in Middle East to offer services through online platforms (Mahmood, 2013). However, with the increased use and availability of information and communication technologies, many citizens in Middle East are acquiring the essential knowledge on computer and internet use. This is a major step that supports the development of technology infrastructure in government institutions whereby quality services are provided.

The aspect of quality in regard to services delivered through online platforms remains a major challenge in relation to use of various technologies by government. For instance, the use of technology compromises the quality of services provided to citizens by government (Finger and Sultana, 2012). This is because once a mistake is done by any government agency or ministry, the entire country is affected. The quality of e-government services in Middle East is compromised through mistakes made by ministries or government agencies. In regard to the concept of quality, the issue of privacy whereby citizens are forced to interact electronically is compromised. The use of technology by government to deliver services to its citizens and engage with different business entities compromises the security of citizens (Bwalya and Zulu, 2012). Through electronic way of service delivery, the government is able to obtain information about its citizens. Through increased surveillance by government, it becomes quite easy for government to access private and confidential information about citizens (Saha, 2012). In this case, citizens will fear from actively accessing government services a measure that compromises reliability of service delivery.

The quality of e-government services in middle east:

The quality of e-Government services in Middle East is affected through weak security measures. Security remains a major challenge associated with electronic form of service delivery by government in Middle East. The use of technology is faced with the problem of security whereby instances of identity theft, piracy, hacking, and credit card fraud and cyber-terrorism are common (Bhattacharya, 2012). With increased use of technology by government to enhance service delivery and interaction between government and citizen, the security welfare of citizens in Middle East is compromised. Instances of hacking whereby personal or government websites are accessed by hackers affects the quality of e-Government services in Middle East (International Business Publications, 2012). Cyber-terrorism and cyber-bullying is another major challenge which affects the smooth flow of information from government to citizens. In addition, once the government websites are attacked by viruses, it becomes quite hard for citizens to access the essential services. Additionally, through electronic service delivery by government to citizens, it is possible for government to remove critical or essential information from the public domain (Information Resources Management Association, 2012). This means that the level of accountability in regard to service delivery is limited to the entire public.

In addition, the cost of technology platforms is very high and the government incurs a lot of money to implement projects that enhance effective transfer and provision of services to the public (OECD, 2013). Accessing fast and reliable technology platforms such as internet and computers by citizens require strong infrastructure hence government is forced to incur high costs. The cost of a computer is high for families that earn low income hence inequality in accessibility to government services is experienced in Middle East. Accessing internet by citizens is also a major challenge that makes it hard for government in Middle East to enhance provision of quality services. Indeed, reliability on e-Government services is affected as a result of high cost of information and communication technology. Moreover, people living in remote areas in Middle East are not able to access government services as internet and other technology platforms are not accessible (Shareef *et al*., 2012). This means that the quality of e-government services in Middle East is compromised as not all citizens are able to access the right services.

Various articles, journals and books have been used in this research with the objective of analyzing the quality of e-Government services in Middle East. According to an article by Dr. Ali Al-Khouri, winning public trust and confidence on the use of internet is a major challenge (Al-Khouri, 2013). Indeed, information and communications

technologies have changed the ways through which citizens, businesses and government interact. This is happening effectively despite, the various challenges associated with the use of technology to enhance provision of services. The success of digital economies in Middle East is attributed to massive use of internet and computers to reach citizens. Information and communication technologies are the essential building blocks of modern societies in Middle East (Alshawi and Arif, 2012).

Findings:

According to World Bank, e-Government enhances transfer of political information and process to the public through technology platforms such as internet. Through e-Government, online interactions and transactions are enhanced. The commitment of Middle East government to improve relationship with citizens and business entities is enhanced through e-government. The objective of government in Middle East is to enhance efficient delivery of quality services at a minimal cost (Gasco, 2012). Increasing the level of information knowledge through online platforms is another major development realized through e-Government. Realization of the numerous benefits through e-Government is not a simple task as complex technologies and infrastructures are required. Integration of governments and business entities is another major goal realized through e-government in Middle East. There is an urgent need to improve the quality and efficiency of e-Government sites in order to win public confidence and trust. E-Government maturity in Middle East is required as various countries have not adopted the new technology of interacting with citizens and engaging in business transactions. For instance, many businesses entities are aware of Dubai e-Government services but few use such opportunity to transact online (Soofi and Ghazinoory, 2013).

According to various case studies and literature review, the success of e-Government services in Middle East is affected by certain challenges that call for use of effective means to enhance equality in accessing government services. Reliability, security, privacy, digital divide and accessibility are the main factors affecting the quality of e-Government services in Middle East (Downey and Jones, 2012). Additionally, the quality of e-government websites is another challenge affecting service delivery by government to its citizens. The quality of e-Government services in Middle East is influenced by factors such as reliability, accessibility, security, privacy and digital divide. In most parts of Middle East, e-Government websites are not considering performance and quality of services offered (Mahmood, 2013). Accordingly, the maturity of e-Government in Middle East is at a very low rate especially in respect to design. Governments in Middle East are sensitizing citizens and business entities to create awareness on e-Government services.

Recommendations:

E-Government is one of the most effective ways through which provision of government services to the entire public is enhanced. Indeed, there are certain challenges that affect the quality of e-Government services in Middle East. To enhance quality of services delivered to citizens, it is important for government to overcome the challenges associated with e-Government services. Major recommendations in this view include, designing government websites that are effective, efficient and reliable to enhance security of citizens and ministries (Oxford Business Group, 2012). The use of antivirus programs is an essential way of enhancing security of online platforms. Sensitizing citizens and business entities on the importance of using technology platforms such as internet and computers to deal with the challenge of digital divide is important. It is appropriate for government to make the cost of internet and other information and communication technologies accessible to every citizen. Ensuring that remote areas are covered with strong networks to enhance equality in accessibility to government services through technology platforms is another essential recommendation.

Conclusion:

Technology remains a major development in Middle East that has led to a change in the way governments, individuals and business entities acquire or access services. Governments in Middle East should take advantage of the various benefits that accrue through the use of information and communication technologies to interact with citizens and business entities. The quality of e-Government services in Middle East is affected by certain factors such as security, privacy, reliability, quality and digital divide. Once the challenges are overcome, interaction between government and citizens alongside business entities will become efficient and enhance economic growth. It is important for governments in Middle East to raise awareness on online public services in order to promote e-Government.

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