Citizens' Perspectives of E-Governance

H. M. Jha "Bidyarthi"[1]* and Ashish K. Srivastava[2]

ABSTRACT

E-governance implementation leads to information sharing at each small unit level in the masses and to high awareness and transparency in governmental / organizational functioning. It is seen as having a key part to play in the modernisation of public services, in widening participation and in reducing social exclusion. However, active and effective engagement of citizens is a prerequisite for success if these aims are to be achieved. There has been relatively little research done on adoption of e-government in public citizens. This study explores citizens' perspectives of e-government through survey of a Taluka of our country and compares its findings with similar studies elsewhere in the world. The paper brings to the fore various key issues including social, cultural issues that inhibit the adoption process of e-governance in a developing country like ours unlike just its perceived usefulness observed by citizens of other countries. The paper observes that an understanding of its citizens' perspectives can help the governments of the countries better plan their services and also provide useful information to governments of other developing countries.

Keywords: E^2-Governance, Netizens, Variables

1. Introduction

Everywhere in the world governments are using the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in enhancing sustainable development. Many national, state and local governments in the developing countries have tried to e-enable their service delivery mechanisms. Moving out of the urban areas, the take up of these services have been low primarily due to accessibility issue for the bulk of the population in these countries. But there has been other issues also that reveal the perspectives with which a common citizen approaches towards the electronic services and governance mechanisms (Gupta, Kumar, and Bhattacharya, 2004). The present paper is an attempt to enlighten these perspectives of the citizens towards e-governance through a *Taluka* level study of a population consisting of both urban and rural habitats of highly, moderately educated respondents belonging to lower and upper middle class society. The awareness, accessibility, enthusiasm and response to e-service facilities at their doorsteps by this population and the underlying reasons for the same indicate that there is another side of the e-governance efforts which need to be addressed equally seriously apart from technology, finance, management and economics of it. Lyle D. Wray (2001) recognized that work systems require the successful integration of the values, interests, and needs of different stakeholders including citizens if they are to function well and positively

[1] Department of Business Administration and Research, Shri Sant Gajanan Maharaj College of Engineering, Shegaon - 444 203, Maharashtra, India
[2] Institute of Management, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur, Chattisgarh, India
* *Corresponding Author:* (E-mail : hmjhabidyarthi@ssgmce.ac.in, Telephone: +91 9422881261 Fax: +91-7265-252346.)

enhance human experience to bring about excellent e-governance (E^2-Governance).

2. E-Governance Perspectives

Electronic Governance or E-Governance or e-gov is an "application of Information technology to the functioning of the Government". It purports to ensure EAT – efficiency, accountability and transparency in the functioning of the government, and when used by other organization i.e. private enterprises then in their functioning as well to provide the citizens any time any where services. A formal definition of e-governance is the application of electronic technologies in the following three areas of public action1: relations between the public authorities and civil society; functioning of the public authorities at all stages of the democratic process (electronic democracy); and the provision of electronic public services. In other words, it is the use of IT solutions, in conjunction with other policy and interventions, to improve different aspects of governance (Saxena, 2005). It endeavors to strengthen the government / organization – citizens relationship. The national e-governance plan (2003-07) reflects the strategic intent of Indian government in the right perspective of e-governance and many projects are earmarked under this plan for the same (Jha "Bidyarthi" and Bokad 2004). Citizens' charters have been prepared by different offices and displayed appropriately to see that EAT principle is followed in practice and ensures a citizen-friendly face of governance i.e. netizen. Reflecting the growing citizen-centric philosophy e-government is viewed as providing "one-stop, non-stop" services in a manner where "owner is transferred to the people" (Chee-Wee, Shan, and Eric, 2007).

The practices of e-governance are, nevertheless, on the rise world around. In the UN's e-government report, Southern and Eastern Asia was ranked third in the regional comparison, behind North America and Europe. Some individual Asian counties received high rankings in the 2004 E-government Readiness Index, notably the Republic of Korea (5), Singapore (8), and Japan (18). Other e-government surveys and reports, such as Accenture's e-government leadership reports and West's global e-government report, also gave high marks to some developed counties in Asia for their e-government development. These Asian countries, however, do not seek to follow a single path in developing e-government practices (Lee, Tan, and Trimi, 2005).

There is a well-acknowledged precept that democracy requires an informed citizenry. Information creates trust and is the mechanism for ensuring that politicians serve the electorate. Democracy is effective when there is an unimpeded flow of information between citizens and government and there is a high level of authentic citizen participation in the political process (Watson and Mundy 2001). Implementing a true e-democracy requires a careful and comprehensive plan for citizens to learn how to use it (Bellamy, Warleigh, 2001). First, an initiation stage is required to create the infrastructure (that is, software firms, methodologies, consulting skills), acquaint governments and citizens with the concept of e-government, and learn how to scale from a handful to tens of thousands of online government services. Once the foundation of skills and knowledge has been built and the idea has gained currency, large-scale adoption is feasible—the infusion phase. Mirroring marketing trends, Citizens are not satisfied with a one-size-fits-all solution, and customization is demanded.

3. Citizens' Perspectives

A common man looks for good governance; let it come to him manually, mechanically or electronically. He/she expects fairness and ease in dealings and wants to feel the government and its representatives in his / her hearts. It is expected that a citizen does not have to move from pillar to post for even a tiny work, as it has been the experience of the ages. A citizen in the democratic system is the master and hence services have to come to him / her instead of he / she going to services i.e. online services in place of inline services (Thalheim, 2000). Government-led citizen engagement exercises are proliferating in many countries in diverse areas of planning and policymaking, at both local and national levels. Furthermore, significant effort is being directed at engaging citizens in hard to reach categories such as disabled people, ethnic

minority groups, young people, etc. However, while many of these initiatives are indeed harnessing and exploiting the capabilities of ICT for communication between government and citizens, an extensive review of the literature (Damodaran and Olphert, 2006) revealed only a small number of publications describing active citizen engagement in the development, shaping or selection of those technologies and service delivery system. In most cases where citizens have been involved in some aspect of technology development or evaluation in relation to e-government, the engagement has had a very specific and limited focus, such as the creation or evaluation of websites (Olphert and Damodaran, 2007).

The choice of citizens for electronic delivery of government services over their traditional delivery can be considered as a technology adoption decision. Among the many variables that influence people to accept or reject information technology, two are especially important. First, people tend to use or not use an application to the extent they believe it will help them perform their job better. This is referred to as "perceived usefulness." Second, even if potential users believe that a given application is useful, they may, at the same time, believe that the system is too hard to use and that the performance benefits of usage are outweighed by the effort of using the application. Thus in addition to usefulness, usage can also be influenced by "perceived ease of use." These two variables influence the attitude of end users towards a particular technology and thus indirectly influence the actual usage of the technology (Mirchandani, Johnson Jr. & Joshi, 2008).

4. E-Services at Citizens' Doorsteps

The perspectives of e-governance and those of citizens are complimentary to each other. To reach the citizens with the desired deliverance has been designed number of e-services and are operational on countrywide basis in India. Developing countries, and India prominently among them, are investing heavily in e-governance and e-government systems, driven by the promise of efficiency and transparency in governance, and of using ICT to leapfrog the slow progress of development. Over the last decade hundreds of e-government systems have been deployed in India. However, according to World Bank estimates almost eighty five percent of the systems fail, indicating a loss of thousands of crores of rupees. Better revenues and delivery of services by urban local bodies to citizens (Haus and Heinelt 2005) do not in themselves solve the problem of governance. It needs citizens' participation and transparency in operations. Other than capacity building, training and providing better systems which go into the input side, citizens must be able watchdogs (Rahul De', 2006). The present study took a sample of eight such e-services which are available at the doorsteps of the citizens for detail analysis. These are described as follows:

Electronic Payment of (Telephone & Electricity) Bills: The electricity corporation of Maharashtra has initiated a mechanism where the monthly electricity bills can be paid electronically and thus citizens can avoid going to receipt counters of the corporation or post offices and standing in long queues for payment of their electricity bills. So is the case of BSNL – Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited offering to its subscriber the facility of e-payment of telephone bills from their respective places. BSNL even offers discount in bills by 1% if paid electronically by the subscribers.

Electronic Payment of Insurance Premiums: The Life Insurance Corporation of India accepts premium payments from its policyholders through electronic mode to avoid inconveniences.

E-Banking: The Automate Tailor-Made Machine system has already become popular for cash withdrawals by the bank account holders of different banks through ATM cards. There are number of ATM counters operated by different banks in different cities and places.

E-Ticketing: The Indian railways has introduced the facility of booking reservation tickets for all classes through email to great convenience to railway commuters. This is available at a nominal charge.

E-Post: The post offices have started sending mails and letters through email on request from its customers. The post office at the other end makes arrangement for the delivery and confidentiality of such mails saving time and cost in postal deliveries of letters.

E-Applications: The Maharashtra Technical Education department has made elaborate arrangements for single window electronic application system for all its technical degree and diploma courses imparted by institutions of Maharashtra State including private technical institutions by the aspirants. This saves time, money and energy of lakhs of students applying for these courses.

E-Trading on Stock Exchange: The deafening ring of stock exchange is history now. One can trade in the stock exchange sitting in his home miles away through electronic mode.

E-Learning: Number of e-learning modules is available for the students and teachers to upgrade their learning and skills. The Eklavya channel launched by IITs of the country makes available online the class room lectures delivered by its top faculty members any where in the country.

5. Study Assumptions

The techno-management efforts to design, device and implement e-governance would always fall short of the desired success Sam citizens willingness to use them for availing required services. Since the mechanism is meant for citizens their support is direly needed. Citizens on the other hand appear to be inert of the benefits of this mechanism and are rather afraid of the unseen dangers underlying it that alleviate them from using the electronic tools for experiencing good governance. The present study advances with this assumption in sight.

6. Methodology of Study

The present study was conducted at *Taluka* level at Shegaon *Taluka*. The *Taluka* is a sub-urban area of the State of Maharashtra with 75000 resident population and over 25000 floating population. A sample of 250 respondents drawn from local engineering and other colleges, government offices and local habitats was drawn which was introduced a well structured questionnaire dealing with eight variables of electronic governance for the chosen eight e-services (ref. Table no. – 1) that are easily accessible by people here. The eight variables were awareness, accessibility, use, language barrier, non-availability of e-services under one-roof, complexity, relative advantage, and compatibility. The study covered respondents of varying age groups with different educational backgrounds, income and social profile, and occupational traits. The data collected was tabulated and analyzed.

7. Survey Analysis

Responses to eight services in terms of ten variables were not identical. While e-applications have been found very popular, for the reason that the Directorate of Technical Education, Maharashtra does not accept applications in other form, the citizens of the *Taluka* find electronic payment of bills and premiums to be most disliked e-services. The data have been presented in the following Table 1.

8. Citizens E-governance Interface Comparison

Developed countries have a long history and culture of democratic governmental structure and capitalist economic system, with many governments forming in the 1500's. Many developing countries have not completed its process of establishing an effective and transparent governmental structure as well as an efficient capitalist economic system. The differences in history and culture, citizens, government officers, and technical staff between countries are also noticeably large. A long history of ruling by an absolute powerful emperor has a prolong impact on modern governmental structure and system. Governmental

agencies and organizations are generally more effective/powerful than private sectors in carrying out electronic government implementations. The level of transparency of governmental management mechanism and decision-making process is relatively low.

Table 1: Showing Responses for E-Services in Shegaon *Taluka*

S. No.	Particulars	Responses towards electronic services							
		E-Payment of Bills	E-Payment of Premiums	E-Banking	E-Ticketing	E-Post	E-Applications	E-Learning	E-Trading on Stock Exchange
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Awareness	100%	83%	56%	48%	Nil	100%	12%	24%
2.	Accessibility	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
3.	Use	Nil	Nil	Nil	11%	Nil	100%	06%	Nil
	Tradition being reason for non-use	100%	100%	100%	15%	100%	Nil	95%	100%
	Cost being reason for non-use	Nil	Nil	Nil	100%	Nil	Nil	Nil	13%
	Inconvenience being reason for non-use	100%	100%	100%	20%	Nil	Nil	95%	09%
	Lack of Trust being reason for non-use	100%	100%	100%	74%	NA	Nil	95%	100%
	Fraud being reason for non-use	100%	100%	100%	Nil	NA	Nil	Nil	Nil
	Lack of Knowledge being reason for non-use	100%	100%	100%	23%	51%	Nil	76%	100%
	Intermediaries being reason for non-use	Nil	100%	Nil	63%	Nil	Nil	100%	100%
4.	Language Barrier	100%	100%	10%	100%	53%	Nil	Nil	100%
5.	Non-availability of e-services under one-roof	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
6.	Complexity	100%	100%	100%	100%	NA	47%	Nil	100%
7.	Relative advantage	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
8.	Compatibility	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Because of those historical reasons and practically some advantages existing in governments, many university graduates and talents favor to work for governments. As a result, governmental officers and/or technical staff in governments are generally more knowledgeable than those in private sector in using information technologies and systems in their daily work. Citizens of developed countries have high Internet access and computer literacy but still have digital divide and privacy issues. They are relatively more experienced in democratic system and they more actively participate in governmental policy-making

process. Those of developing countries have low Internet access and they are reluctant to trust online services, few citizens know how to operate computers. They are relatively less experienced in democratic system and less actively participate in governmental policy-making process. (Yining, Chen, Russell and Wayne, 2007)

In a similar study in North Cornwall by A. Phippen and H. Lacohée (2006) on "eGovernment — Issues in Citizen Engagement" the highest percentage of respondents i.e. 32% agreed that people were more likely to use a service provided by a member of their own community than an outsider emphasizing the traditional manual service delivery system.

The first rush of e-government, and for that matter e-governance, has brought mixed results for local government across Australia. Web sites exist for most local governments, but the types of e-government vary from place to place both within and between the state systems (Toole, 2007). Approximately 1 in 10 citizens using on-line government services. This is a very small percentage compared to countries such as Canada, where half of the population engage with the Government on-line. (Phippen and Lacohée, 2006)

9. Observations and Findings

People always fear to experiment new things and newer means of functioning. In the initial stages, any e governance project is likely to face criticism and setbacks because of lesser public participation. Further owing to lower literacy rate and language barriers in majority of the Indian states, the reach of the project remains restricted to the literate people in the society. Citizens of the *Taluka* under study are not enthusiastic about using e-services even though there is awareness about it amongst them and all the chosen e-services are accessible by them any time. They are comfortable with their ongoing method of receiving these services. Further, people still want hand written documents; they don't seem satisfied with computerized copies. Cost appears to be the reason for not using some services particularly e-ticketing. If it is compulsory for them to have those services through e-mechanism only as in case of e-applications then only they resort to availing e-services otherwise even though much beneficial they feel averted to using it as in case of e-learning. However, when the costs are borne by the employer organizations (third party) they feel free to use such e-services. They also opined that availability of e-services under one roof could create more excitement in them and they could visit such places frequently and in due course of time they could get used to availing of these services. Some of the issues that citizens concern most are increased relevance and value of solutions generated, ownership of solutions, enhanced democracy, social inclusion, and community cohesion, mutual respect and understanding, increased economic and commercial activity, and sustainability.

10. Emerging Perspectives

Citizens want efficiency in services but are surrounded by the myth of frauds, cost, lack of knowledge in handling the services and trust on the e-service that keep them away from these services. They want to see the live demonstration of the working of these e-services and share the experience of the people using these services before removing their fears from it. Brokers and intermediaries are found to be very passive in initiating the use of e-services by their clients in order to maintain their manual contacts to be used in canvassing them in their favor. Mirchandani, Johnson Jr. and Joshi (2008) found that there are some commonly cited features of the vehicle i.e. website of electronic governance and these are reliability of the services and information provided, ease of use, appropriateness of the format and level of detail of the information, quality of content (completeness, relevance and accuracy), visual appeal and user friendliness of the website, ability to receive personal services without interacting with human staff, ability to receive service how and when the citizen /constituent wants, ability to tailor the delivery of the service more towards the citizen/constituent, attractiveness of website's appearance, sense of community created by the website etc. In this sense governments have sought to emulate the commercial world in the first instance by

developing a form of e-government that includes four types of interaction (Symonds, 2000):

- Simple information
- Allow access by citizens and businesses (even update particulars) —weak form of interactivity
- Allow online transactions and purchases, or electronic sending of tender information
- Integrated portal of all government services and information.

11. Concluding Remarks

Giving stakeholders the direct access to government transactions via electronic means essentially removes human intermediaries, which may shift from transactional burden (i.e. interpretation of and search for additional information) to citizen clients. E-government is still very much in its infancy, and with the technical infrastructure now in place, a far more difficult task lies ahead if it is to make a significant impact on the interface between citizen and government The top-down approach of popularizing e-governance needs to be supported by the bottom-up approach where citizens perspectives play the most important role. All policies and practices relating to e-governance needs to take this in to account for quick and solid progress towards e-governance. It suggests that to develop an integrated platform for making high-quality e-government services, governments need to pay attention to the services and success factors important to citizens. Improving perceptions of the reliability and appropriateness of the information and the ability to exert more control are important and should not be ignored. It is needed to practice service encounter (AKesson, Skale´n and Edvardsson, 2008) that refers to the focal interaction between a service organization and its external as well as internal customers. The service encounter is a major opportunity for an organization to make an impression in the minds of its customers as they evaluate service quality. The way in which customers are treated has a direct impact upon their perceptions of satisfaction with how the service was performed. In the past, service encounters have involved personal interactions between frontline employees and customers. More recently, such interactions have been increasingly mediated by technology. This is especially relevant for service orientation in the context of e-government.

Finally, for e-governance projects to be sustainable for citizens, they must provide cost-effective services, reducing red tape and corruption. A basket of one-stop citizen services should be available under one roof ranging from registrations to bill payments and the services should be available uninterrupted regardless of technology issues. The format should be easily understandable and available in local languages. If e-projects are in colloquial language, it would benefit both the government and the citizens more. Very often language barrier could lead to the failure of a project. Further, effective handling of complaints should be built into the system.

References

A. Phippen and H. Lacohée (2006): eGovernment — Issues in Citizen Engagement, *BT Technology Journal*, 24, 2, 205-208.

1. Aleš Dobnikar and Alenka Žužek Nemec (2007): eGovernment in Slovenia, *Informatica*, 31, 1, 357-365.
2. Bellamy, R., Warleigh, A (2001): Citizenship And Governance In The European Union, Continuum, London.
3. Chee-Wee Tan, Shan L. Pan, and Eric T.K. Lim (2007): Managing Stakeholder Interests in E-Government Implementation: Lessons Learned from a Singapore E-Government Project, *International Journal of Electronic Government Research*, 3, 1, 61-84.
4. Dinesh A. Mirchandani & Julius H. Johnson Jr. and Kailash Joshi (2008): Perspectives of Citizens Towards e-Government in Thailand and Indonesia: A Multigroup Analysis, *Information Systems Frontiers*, 10, 4, 483-497.
5. Gupta, M.P., Kumar, Prabhat, and Bhattacharya, Jaijit (2004): Government Online, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Ltd., New Delhi.
6. Haus, M., Heinelt, H. (2005): Urban Governance And Democracy, London, Routledge
7. Jha "Bidyarthi", H.M., Bokad, P.V. (2004): "Managing Multiplicity in Citizens' Identity - A Taluka Level Case Study" published in "Promise of E-Governance. Operational Challenges" edited by M. P. Gupta, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, New Delhi.

8. K. B. C. Saxena (2005): Towards Excellence in e-Governance, *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 18, 6, 498-513.
9. K. Wong, C. Fearon and G. Philip (2007): Understanding eGovernment and eGovernance: Stakeholders, Partnerships and CSR, *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management*, 24, 9, 927-943.
10. Kevin O'Toole (2007): E-governance in Australian Local government: Spinning a Web around Community? *International Journal of Electronic Government Research*, 3, 4, 58-75.
11. Leif Skiftenes Flak and Jeremy Rose (2005): Stakeholder Governance: Adapting Stakeholder Theory to E-Government, *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 16, 642-664.
12. Lemuria Carter and Vishanth Weerakkody (2008): E-government Adoption: A Cultural Comparison, *Information Systems Frontiers*, 10, 4, 473-482.
13. Maria Åkesson, Per Skålén, and Bo Edvardsson (2008): E-Government and Service Orientation: Gaps between Theory and Practice, *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 21, 1, 74-92.
14. M.D. Williams (2008): E-Government Adoption in Europe at Regional Level, *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*, 2, 1, 47-59.
15. Mateja Kunstelj and Mirko Vintar (2004): Evaluating the Progress of E-Government Development: A Critical Analysis, *Information Polity*, 9, 3-4, 131-148.
16. Rahul De' (2006): E-Government Systems in Developing Countries: Issues and Concerns – Discussion, *IIMBM Management Review*, 18, 4, 377-388.
17. Ralf-Eckhard Türke (2006): Towards Productive and Sustainable Forms of Interaction in Governance, *Kybernetes*, 35, 1-2,164-181.
18. Sang M. Lee, Xin Tan, and Silvana Trimi (2005): Current Practices of Leading E-Government Countries, *Communications of the ACM*, 48, 10, 99-104.
19. Senid Gerin and Brane Vujičić (2007): eGovernment Services in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Informatica*, 31, 1, 373-377.
20. Thalheim, B. (2000): Entity-Relationship Modeling, Springer-Verlag, Berlin.
21. Richard T. Watson and Bryan Mundy (2001): A Strategic Perspective of Electronic Democracy, *Communications of the ACM*, 44, 1, 27-30.
22. Wayne Huang, J D'Ambra, and V Bhalla (2002): An Empirical Investigation of the Adoption of Egovernment in Australian Citizens: Some Unexpected Research Findings, *The Journal of Computer Information Systems,* 43, 1, 15-22.
23. Wendy Olphert and Leela Damodaran (2007): Citizen Participation and Engagement in the Design of e-Government Services: The Missing Link in Effective ICT Design and Delivery, *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 8, 9, 491-507.
24. Wray, Lyle D. (2001): e-Government: From Inline to Online Public Services, Cal_Tax Digest.
25. Yining Chen, H.M. Chen, Russell K.H. Ching, and Wayne W. Huang (2007): Electronic Government Implementation: A Comparison between Developed and Developing Countries, *International Journal of Electronic Government Research*, 3, 2, 45-61.

About the Authors

H. M. Jha "Bidyarthi" is Professor, Department of Business Administration and Research, Shri Sant Gajanan Maharaj College of Engineering, Shegaon, Maharashtra, India. He holds an I.D.D. (D.H.) from Allahabad Agricultural Institute, Allahabad under ICAR Sub-Committee on Dairy Education, New Delhi, M.B.A. and Ph.D. from University of Bihar, Muzafferpur, Bihar, India. In his 27 years of teaching experience he has published over 100 research papers including those on e-governance on which he also completed a project financed by AICTE, New Delhi under its Research Promotion Scheme during 2004 – 2007 and successfully supervised a doctoral research work under Sant Gadge Baba Amravati Universiity, Amravati.

Ashish Kumar Srivastava is a Reader in the Institute of Management, Pt. Ravishankar shukla University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh. His academic qualification is B.Sc, MBA, LL.B and PhD in Business Administration. He obtained his PhD from M.J.P. Rohilkhand University, Bareilly (UP). The area of his research work is consumerism and other related fields of Marketing. He has participated and presented papers in more than Twenty five Seminars and Conferences of national and International repute held in India. Three students have been awarded their PhD and five students are doing their research work under his supervision. He is also associated with various assignments of teaching, research and administration.