



E-Services of Government of India and Its Acceptability Among Educated Indians

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ABSTRACT

E-governance basically refers to the processes and structures that encompass all forms of electronic interaction between Government (elected) and the Citizen (electorate). There are basically two broad dimensions of the e-governance, e-services and e-democracy. E-services emphasizes an innovative involvement of the citizen as a customer, includes little more than gathering the information, downloading files or making online transactions. It is said that such software will not only get rid of red tape, but will also increase transparency. Files and dossiers will no longer have to move from table to table. No longer will Indian people need to pay endless visits to government offices to get their proposals cleared. This paper explores the possibilities and potential of adopting e services in India and the acceptance level of e-governance among educated Indians.

Keywords: E-governance, E-Services or E-Seva, Internet, Information Technology, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Government of India.

1. Introduction

Internet has made tremendous impact on the activities of modern societies. With the advent of Internet a significant transition can be seen in their approach and the way they are working. India has emerged as the fastest growing IT hub in the world. When it comes to IT services, the world is coming to India. In India the software boom started some where in the late 1990s. This success can be attributed to the excellent teamwork between the Government and the Industry. The Government of India, considering the performance of the Indian software industry, has extended all support, including fiscal benefits, availability of high speed data communications and infrastructure and has ensured almost red-tape-free system. With a Compound Annual Growth Rate of 28 percent during the last 5 years, the IT industry's contribution to India's GDP is expected to rise to 7 per cent by 2007-08 against 4.8 per cent in 2005-06. Expected to generate exports worth US\$ 60-75 billion in 2010, the IT sector will contribute US\$ 115 billion to the economy from allied sectors as well. In terms of employment creation, the industry is expected to create about 11 million jobs (directly and indirectly) over the next three years. The overall success of the IT industry in India has shown spill over effects to other industry in the country. The major sectors which are witnessing a special thrust for adoption of IT are: Government administration, Insurance, Banks, Energy, Financial Institutions, Defence, Public Tax System, Ports, Customs, Telecom, Education and Small Office/Home Office / Individuals. Large sectors with slow IT penetration rate, such as textile industry and healthcare, are being encouraged by the government and the private sector to adopt IT.

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India could well be on the way to becoming an information and knowledge society and contrary to popular perception, its impact will be far-reaching, down to the villages and could bridge traditional divides. Development of information and communication technologies catalyzed and led up to E-governance, which has now become the most, talked buzzword the world over. E-Governance is about a process of reform in the way Governments work, share information and deliver services to external and internal clients for the benefit of both government and the citizens and businesses that they serve. E-Government harnesses information technologies such as Wide Area Networks (WAN), Internet, World Wide Web, and mobile computing by government agencies to reach out to citizens, business, and other arms of the government to: Improve delivery of services to citizens Improve interface with business and industry Empower citizens through access to knowledge and information and Make the working of the government more efficient and effective. Very precisely, it refers to the use of ICT, particularly the internet, as a tool to achieve better government and to enable better policy outcomes, higher quality of services with more efficient use of public funds. It helps in increasing the efficiency of government processes and greater engagement with citizens and business. *E-governance* describes the use of electronic delivery for government information, programs, strategies and services. These are available on-line 24/7.

2. E-Services and E-Seva

There are basically two broad dimensions of the e-governance: e-services or e-seva and e-democracy. **e-Services** or "eServices" is a highly general/generic term usually referring to the provision of services via the Internet (the prefix 'e' standing for "electronic", as it does in many other uses). It is a Web jargon, meaning just about anything done online. e-Services include "e-commerce", it also includes non-commercial services like services come under eGovernment. E-services under e-governance emphasizes an innovative involvement of the citizen as a customer, includes little more than gathering the information, downloading files or making online transactions. Whereas *E-democracy* refers to activities that increase citizen involvement including virtual town meetings, open meetings, cyber campaigns, feedback polls, public surveys and community forums (such as through e-consultation and e-voting).

In India, the main drivers of E-seva have been efficiency gains and effective delivery of policy outcomes. Cost reduction is the major driver under efficiency for ICT use by governments: Replacing paper-based application processes with Internet applications cuts down costs of data re-entry and checking, Improved booking arrangements – more efficient use of scarce resources: skilled staff and facilities, Greater sharing of data within government – eliminate costs of multiple collections, data reconciliation and checking, Reduce government publication and distribution costs by relying more on on-line publications, etc.

3. E-Governance Initiatives in India

The last couple of years have seen e-governance drop roots in India, there have been major initiatives among different governments towards ushering in information technology and its tools in the functioning of government. Government has already started investing highly on IT. The government has also approved the policy of allocation of 2 to 3% of budgets for IT. E-governance spending in India is estimated to have grown by 60 per cent to US\$ 480 million in fiscal 2003-2004 from around US\$300 million in 2002-2003.

Missions and Objectives: With the sole mission of bringing administration closer to the common people thus offering efficient and effective services, government of India is evolved with the following objectives.

- To provide a friendly, affordable, speedier and efficient interface between the government and the public,
- To ensure greater transparency, efficiency, objectivity, accountability and speed that can help tackle most of the maladies of the government by providing efficient services to the public,
- To provide responsive and transparent services to the citizens of the state,
- To provide cost effective service and at the same time improving the quality of service,
- To provide a single window for government services at all levels.

“The National e-Governance Plan (2003-2007) of Indian Government seeks to lay the foundation and provide the impetus for long-term growth of e-Governance within the country. The plan seeks to create the right governance and institutional mechanisms, set up the core infrastructure and policies and implements a number of Mission Mode Projects at the center, state and integrated service levels to create a citizen-centric and business-centric environment for governance. (http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan.php) ” It reflects the strategic intent of the central government in the right perspective. Many projects are earmarked under this plan, and it is trying to address the digital divide. The central government has analyzed and appreciated the concept by creating a separate e-governance department headed by a secretary to trigger e-governance in India. The World Bank, ADB and UN have been approached, and in response they are generously funding e-governance projects.

“A 12 point minimum agenda was identified, in consultation with IT Managers (officers at the level of Joint Secretary) of Ministries/ Department of the Government of India, as minimum Agenda for e-Governance for implementation in all the Central Government Ministries/Departments (<http://darpg.nic.in/arp-g-website/ReformInitiatives/eGovernance/IndianExperience/EgovExp73.doc.>)” The few among them can be summarized as; each ministry/department should have PCs and should have its own website. Attempts should also be made to enable completion and submission of forms on line. They should also develop packages so as to begin electronic delivery of services to the public.

At present almost all the departments of government of India and state governments are having their own websites, which are providing services to public be it online application form, providing e-ticketing etc. www.goidirectory.nic.in is a one point source to know all about Indian government websites at all levels and from all sectors. The National Portal of India (<http://india.gov.in/>) is also developed with an objective to enable a single window access to information and services being provided by the various Indian Government entities. The content in this Portal is the result of a collaborative effort of various Indian Government Ministries and Departments, at the Central/State/District level. This Portal is Mission Mode Project under the National E-Governance Plan.

A study conducted by Indian Market Research Bureau (IMRB) on the state of e-governance readiness in various central ministries and departments found that About 61 per cent of the central ministries and departments were found to have a precise definition of e-governance and defined it as a creator of a simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent (SMART) government. Twenty-six ministries and departments scored 128 out of 128 on e-governance, 55 per cent of the ministries and departments considered IT as one of the key areas where performance was regularly monitored by the top officials and 59.4 per cent of the central ministries and departments claimed to have created a well documented IT action plan/policy guidelines. Most ministries and departments had completed their basic automation in terms of PC, printers, scanners etc. IMRB study indicated that though India was currently at the first stage of e-governance readiness, levels of adoption are fairly high and was increasing rapidly.

4. People's Perception, Readiness and Adoption of E-Services

It is not only the responsibility of the government but also a responsibility of people to adopt with ICT enabled services to increase productivity, efficiency of their work. However, people are reluctant to act rationally. Even the most important and valuable information system may become no use if it fails to create popularity by user. Creating demand for any newly introduced system or services requires huge time to create service awareness, acceptance, educate, use and adaptation process. These issues become the most critical part for any electronic service delivery system; specially, because of high illiteracy level, low standard of living and availability of high quality of ICT equipment is very low. We have discussed above the efforts put in by the government to make the e-governance plan a success. Let us now discuss people's awareness, perception and practice of e-governance in India. To make our study more specific we have limited our study to the use of e-governance by the public in the area of service delivery only.

4.1 Internet Usage

A survey was conducted with the help of the questionnaire and distributed among the internet users through email to get the responses, therefore targeting only internet users. The questionnaire is divided in two sections one exploring the usage of internet and other related with the four government websites providing e-services to the public. This section's questions are based on TAM (Technology Acceptance Model). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is an information systems theory that models how users come to accept and use a technology. The model suggests that when users are presented with a new software package, a number of factors influence their decision about how and when they will use it, notably:

- Usage: the degree or frequency of using website or intentions of using it in near future.
- Perceived usefulness (PU): "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance".
- Perceived ease-of-use: (PEOU) - "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort."

While looking at the educational level of the respondents, it was found that the all of the respondents are graduates and above. Among the respondents 71% consider themselves as intermediate computer user, 24% of them are advanced users and only 5% of them are beginners. As far as usage of internet is considered corresponding with the use of computers 61% of the respondents said that they are using internet regularly both in office and at home or cyber café, 33% are classified them under moderate user and 5% termed them as infrequent users. One interesting point can be noticed here is that all these 5% respondents are more than 40 years of age. This shows that internet in India is quite acceptable among young generation and still lot of scope is left for the government and others to develop or increase the use of internet among old age.

For 67% of the respondents internet is very important for their professional and personal life, 33% accepted that it is somewhat important and no one thinks that internet is not at all important for his or her life. Other very obvious results have come out which correlates the years of using internet, frequency of using it and its importance in life. 79% of the respondents out of those who consider internet as very important are using it for more than 4 years, again among regular users (62% of total respondents) almost 85% consider internet as an important means for performing their daily activities. This can be interpreted as those who are using it for more than 4 years are quite comfortable with internet and now have become more or less dependent on it. This could also be interpreted as the usefulness and ease in using internet.

4.2 E-Services: Awareness and Practice

The next section of the questionnaire was all about the awareness of e-governance and its practice by citizens. As far as awareness is concerned all the respondents gave the positive responses, i.e. 100% of the respondents are fully aware of the e-governance concept and its practice in India. To make the study more focused and simple we took 10 websites of GOI dealing with different services (President of India, Planning Commission, Income Tax Department, Supreme Court of India, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), Passport Office, Indian Airlines and Air India, Women and Child Development, Indian Railways, Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)). Then the respondents were asked to mark those websites which they are aware of or have heard about it, and also those websites which they have surfed and used for some purpose or the other, whether it is related with gathering some information, applying online, downloading forms etc.

We can analyze through figure 1 that, the most popular and visited site is Indian railways, around 86% of the respondents are aware of it and 82% of them have used it, again passport office and BSNL is acquiring the 2nd and the 3rd respectively among the most popular and known site. It is seen that all those sites which are directly related with the service delivery are mostly known among respondents than other websites. The

question regarding the sources of information about the websites of the government, 40% of them came to know about the Indian railways and Indian airlines through search engines, and media played the major role in the awareness of the websites like income tax and passport. One important result can be observed that there is a gap between awareness and using these websites. This can be found out by the third section of the questionnaire which is specially targeting the usage, usefulness and ease of use of these websites.

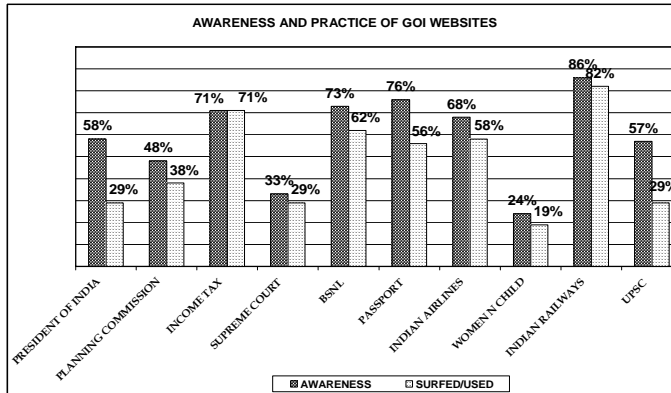


Figure 1: Primary Data (Filled Questionnaire)

4.3 E-Services: Usage, Ease of Use and Usefulness (UEU)

For analyzing the UEU of e services provided by government of India, we have taken four websites and clubbed it into two groups: first category i.e. category A deals with the services like railways and flights which give all sorts of information related with railways and flights and providing online tickets, the second category i.e. category B deals with passport and income tax of the citizens, provide related information, online application and other facilities.

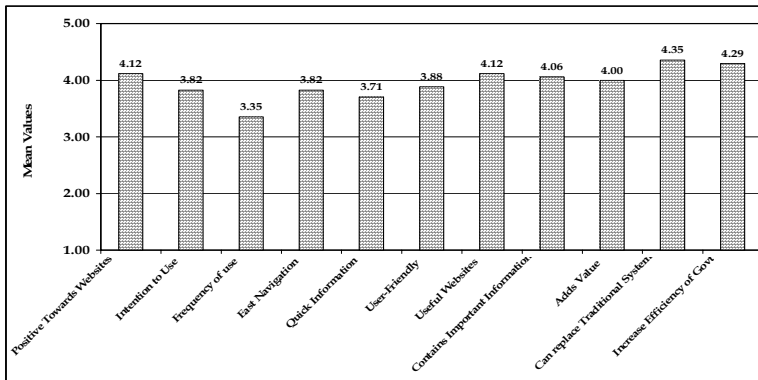


Figure 2 : Image Profile of www.indianrail.gov.in and www.indian-airlines.com
Source: Primary Data (Filled Questionnaire)

Usage: Under usage we have put three basic statements which are measured on five point Likert Scale ranging from strongly agreed at 1 to strongly disagree at 5. The average mean value comes to 3.76 and 3.59 for category A & B respectively. This shows a reasonable degree of satisfaction with the usage of these websites.

Ease of Use: under ease of use again we have mentioned three statements related with the ease of use of these websites and are measured on five point Likert Scale ranging from strongly agreed at 1 to strongly disagree at 5. The average mean value comes to 3.8 and 3.9 for category A & B respectively. This shows a fair degree of satisfaction with the ease of use of these websites.

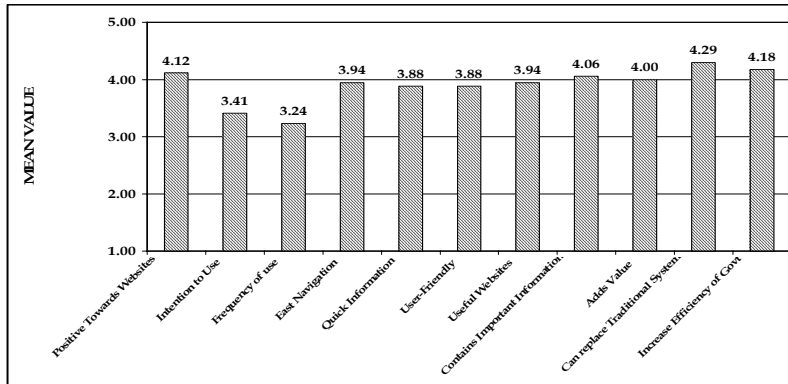


Figure 3: Image Profile of www.incometaxindia.gov.in and www.passport.nic.in
 Source: Primary Data (Filled Questionnaire)

Usefulness: Under usefulness we have put five statements (mentioned in figure 2 and 3) which are measured on five point Likert Scale ranging from strongly agreed at 1 to strongly disagree at 5. The average mean value comes to 4.16 and 4.09 for category A & B respectively. This again shows an admirable degree of satisfaction with the usefulness of these websites. Separately we can see through the figures regarding the *usage, ease of use and usefulness* of the four government websites the weighted mean average on the 5 point Likert scale for usage is 3.76 which shows that there is positive perception towards the *usage* of the website, again for the *ease of use* and *usefulness* the mean average came out are 3.80 and 4.16, which again are showing the positive attitude towards these websites.

Thus we can say that among the computer literates and internet users’ government websites are doing quite well and are gaining popularity. Educated Indians are quite satisfied with the services and are also hopeful towards the increase in the efficiency of service delivery of government offices through e governance.

5. Concluding Remarks

Thus IT enables the delivery of government services as it caters to a large base of people across different segments and geographical locations. The effective use of IT services in government administration can greatly enhance existing efficiencies, drive down communication costs, and increase transparency in the functioning of various departments. It also gives citizens easy access to tangible benefits, be it through simple applications such as online form filling, bill sourcing and payments, or complex applications like distance education and tele-medicine. The simple study done here have helped us in formulating an idea about government efforts and peoples perception regarding the aim of better service delivery is concerned among the internet users. E governance has picked up very fast and is getting positive responses from them. Whatever gap is left to become fully trust worthy and satisfactory will be covered by increasing the use of internet and cheap availability of information technology. Moreover the success of e governance also depends on the ease-of-mode of payment. Generally it is found that in India although the use of credit cards have been increasing tremendously, but paying online or on online payment especially through credit/debit card or through internet/mobile banking is very low. This all depends on the trust factor; consumers appeared to be much more concerned with the security of the online payment than they are with that of traditional system. Thus to make e-governance acceptable in the country there is need to teach computers

and increase the accessibility of internet among Indians. To fill the gap between awareness and practice government needs to do lot of workshops all over the country to make us understand the usefulness and advantageous of e-services or e-seva for better performance. Despite the positive results, there are areas which are left to understand the overall performance of e governance from both elected and electorate side. There is a need to study and analyze all the goals and objectives/purpose of e governance like democracy, etc. There is a further scope to study the attitude of rural people and those who are living in urban areas but are not using computers or internet for some reasons or the other.

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