

# E-Government, A Modern Phenomenon

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## PREFACE

This LiveAdmins publication is a completely internet-based, compilation-type research paper written to explore the e-Government phenomenon. It is the first of two papers; while this one will look into the roots of e-Government and how it may / should be established from a theoretical point of view, the next one will examine in detail the theory on e-Government, the progress made to date (from a global and regional perspective), pros and cons, impediments to its progress, etc.

As neither me nor my company is an expert on this issue and as countless reputed organizations have already published numerous documents on the subject, I will rely heavily on their work, with very little input of my own. LiveAdmins is, however, an expert of the online user experience, of bridging the gap between business and consumer, of establishing trust between website owner and website visitor, of Live Chat online customer service. One objective of this paper is to introduce the idea of chat assisting with the success of e-Government; another is to better understand e-Government as a modern phenomenon.

## FIRST, SOME KEY TERMS

In order to define **e-Government**, I will rely on the following three sources: the World Bank, a research article from the *Journal of Applied Sciences* upon which the United Nations (UN) website itself relies, and the Global Business Dialogue on Electronic Commerce (GBDe). While, undoubtedly, other organizations may have something to add in defining this term (this phenomenon) and while, admittedly, the above-mentioned global organizations have also relied on research from renowned firms such as Deloitte and Gartner, amongst others, still, I feel the World Bank, the UN, and GBDe are in a unique position to provide us with the most *comprehensive* definitions as their focus is most global.

First, World Bank's definition:

“‘E-Government’ refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions.

...

Analogous to e-commerce, which **allows businesses to transact with each other more efficiently (B2B) and brings customers closer to businesses (B2C), e-government aims to make the interaction between government and citizens (G2C), government and business enterprises (G2B), and inter-agency relationships (G2G) more friendly, convenient, transparent, and inexpensive.**<sup>1</sup>”

Now we look at the research article relied upon by the UN website which is called “Government to E-government to E-society”:

“Gartner defines e-government as the continuous optimization of service delivery, constituency participation and governance by transforming internal and external relationships through technology, the Internet and new media.

...

In technology, e-government and e-commerce all represent the introduction of technological innovations. However, unlike e-commerce, e-government is usually defined as the use of technology to enhance information sharing, service delivery, constituency and client participation and governance by transforming internal and external relationships. This includes transactions between government and business, government and citizen, government and employee and among different units and levels of government. The favourable characteristics inherent in the Internet such as speed, user-friendliness, low cost and wide accessibility enable the governments to adopt and move towards e-Government.<sup>ii</sup>”

And finally, let’s look at GBDe’s definition:

“Electronic government ... refers to a situation in which administrative, legislative and judicial agencies (including both central and local governments) digitize their internal and external operations and utilize networked systems efficiently to realize better quality in the provision of public services.<sup>iii</sup>”

To differentiate **e-Governance** from **e-Government**, we again refer to the research article from the *Journal of Applied Sciences*:

“While e-government is defined as a mere delivery of government services and information to the public using electronic means, e-governance allows citizen direct participation of constituents in political activities going beyond government and includes E-democracy, E-voting and participat[ion] [in] political activity online.<sup>ii</sup>”

And here’s some elaboration on what **e-Governance** is:

“... e-governance is a broader concept and includes the use of ICT by government and civil society to promote greater participation of citizens in the governance of political institutions, e.g., use of the Internet by politicians and political parties to elicit views from their constituencies in an efficient manner, or the publicizing of views by civil society organizations which are in conflict with the ruling powers.<sup>iv</sup>”

My focus in this paper will be almost entirely on **e-Government** (as defined above) but because the definitions are to some degree overlapping, **e-Governance** may be covered as well. For simplicity’s sake, unless there is a good reason to use the term ‘e-Governance’, I will simply only use the term ‘e-Government’.

Additionally, there is a phenomenon known as **m-Government (mobile government)**. As m-Government is not my focus in this paper, I have relied on the conveniently accessible definition from Wikipedia:

“**Mobile government, m-Government**, is the extension of e-Government to mobile platforms, as well as the strategic use of government services and applications which are only possible using cellular/mobile telephones, laptop computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs) and wireless internet infrastructure.<sup>v</sup>”

This way of government functioning and provision of public services is too new and undeveloped for me to give it serious attention in this paper. Further, since m-Government branches from e-Government, whatever chance future m-Government initiatives have rests with the success of today's e-Government initiatives.

## **FACTORS GIVING RISE TO E-GOVERNMENT**

Now that we have looked at what e-Government is, the question remains: What has sparked the trend of government bodies shifting to e-Government? Of course, with advancements in information and communication technology (ICT), *it's possible* but what are the real driving forces behind the e-Government initiatives worldwide? Practically speaking, why would government bodies the world over want to shift many of their operations and public services online? And where did this concept of “the citizen as a customer” come from, especially considering government bodies have historically been regarded as aloof?

### **Governments Evolving in Response to the Information Age**

According to a policy brief from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) highlighting lessons learned from its member countries' experiences with e-Government initiatives,

“Building trust between governments and citizens is fundamental to good governance. ICT can help build trust by enabling citizen engagement in the policy process, promoting open and accountable government and helping to prevent corruption.<sup>vi</sup>”

Referring back to the World Bank's definition of ‘e-Government’, the benefits of e-Government include *less corruption* and *increased transparency*. ICTs accomplish more transparency, and this helps reduce corruption and aids in governments agencies achieving more citizen trust. Government officials often don't explain themselves to the people because they “have bigger fish to fry” and feel that answering to the masses is of no use but this is far from the truth. In fact, the more government bodies are willing to disclose, the more trust they earn.

Furthermore, one of the reasons so many people suspect their governments of foul play and subscribe to a myriad of conspiracy theories is because they are kept in the dark about government operations and the activities of officials. Undoubtedly, everything cannot be disclosed as there are security risks to consider but by the same token, *everything can't be labeled a matter of national security and hidden from the people!*

Minding that most authorities upon which I am relying only think from a positive, practical, business point of view in regards this phenomenon, I make room for another advantage of not just e-Government but modern information and communications technologies as a whole: It is more difficult for government bodies, or anyone for that matter, to commit atrocities and just get away with it in our Information Age. Basically, ICTs make it easier to “blow the whistle” on acts of cruelty that would in previous times go unnoticed internationally. This serves as a deterrent for certain individuals / groups / organizations who would otherwise not hesitate to commit such acts. There are so many oppressive governments / organizations / groups / individuals who are being kept at bay by the fear of outsiders being outraged by their behavior and reacting in a way unfavorable to them. This is closely related to the themes of *less corruption, increased transparency, evolution of government bodies in response to the Information Age*, and of *e-government*; but since it was not explicitly stated in any text I read, I felt it needed to be said.

## **A More Demanding Citizen**

Turning back now to the OECD policy brief,

“Since the advent of computers, and more recently the Internet, pressure on governments to perform better has increased, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) have provided them with the capacity to do so via e-government.<sup>vi</sup>”

Now, where did this “pressure on governments” come from? The development of computer and information and communication technology has not only spawned countless innovations, but it has also transformed the way business is done, the way companies advertise or sell, the way firms compete, what they aspire to as organizations. The advancement in ICT has empowered consumers – e.g. the internet gives them a huge database on who has what and how to get it, and they therefore have access to a wider selection of goods; they can often ascertain best prices without having to run around town visiting numerous shops; they can determine which brand has the most customer complaints through social media and therefore know which company’s products not to buy; and the list goes on. Businesses have been, and still are, under pressure to become more customer-centric – to re-engineer their business processes to cater to this demanding modern customer’s needs. The businesses that invest most into customer service are the ones who will be most successful. And so, companies look to be the ones rated with the highest customer satisfaction according to their page on Facebook; they modify their product offerings to match what customers want rather than tell them “what you see is what I have”; they give competitive rates and offer promotions in their physical stores and online stores; along with a host of other measures in order to satisfy this demanding modern customer.

To put things in proper perspective, it’s not as if consumers are having it too good or that businesses are suffering; with the changing times and technology, all people’s lives have become

more demanding. This is one of the reasons why people not only expect a customer-centric approach from businesses but also from their government bodies. They expect detailed information on how to apply for this or that permit with the least amount of hassle and least face-to-face. The more face-to-face encounters that occur for minor, but required, paperwork, the more chances of government officials wanting handouts, or of discriminating against a particular group of people, or of committing other corrupted or unjust acts against citizens. The modern demanding citizen wants a more transparent government. With populations and unemployment rising rapidly globally, people demand to know what steps their leaders are taking to generate more jobs and rebuild the economy. With the cases of corruption rising, people want to know how their money is being spent by their leaders. Just as the most successful businesses are the most customer-centric, so the most successful government bodies will be those that are most customer-centric.<sup>vii</sup>

## **E-Governance Means A More Involved Citizen**

E-Governance focuses on ICTs being used to involve citizens more in the government's activities and decisions, to empower them to modify or even create policies.

“... [E-government] can help an individual's voice to be heard in a broad debate, harnessing ICT to encourage citizens to think constructively about public issues and assessing the impact of applying technology to open up the policy process.<sup>vi</sup>”

## **E-Government, Better for Everyone**

Turning back to the definitions cited in the first section of this paper, e-Government accomplishes greater speed in all G2C / G2B / G2G interactions; pleasantness, user-friendliness, and convenience for all parties; wider accessibility of government services; cost reduction; less paperwork; and even economic growth. For elaboration, we move to the OECD policy brief.

E-Government improves efficiency “... in mass processing tasks and public administration operations” and “... can generate savings on data collection and transmission, provision of information and communication with customers.” Also, “Significant future efficiencies are likely through greater sharing of data within and between governments.”

E-Government reduces costs and facilitates economic development.

“E-government contributes to other economic policy objectives by reducing government expenditures through more effective and efficient programmes, improving business productivity through administrative simplification and promoting the information society and ICT industry.<sup>vi</sup>”

Undoubtedly, public demand is the main reason government bodies take up e-Government initiatives but it's not the only reason. Governments make their websites user-friendly and public

services convenient not just for the citizen but also for their own organization's needs. According to a survey conducted by Deloitte Research of "... more than 250 state-level government departments in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States"; government agencies who use a customer-centric approach (includes both G2C and G2B) report being significantly more successful in the following areas: (1) easier customer access, (2) better information on operations, (3) more agency recognition, (4) less employee time spent on non-customer activities, (5) more customers served, and (6) fewer employee complaints.<sup>vii</sup>

And once government bodies see the advantages of using a customer-centric approach, they should follow through with providing online services.

“Successful services are built on an understanding of user requirements, and online services are no different.

...

The internet can help ... governments ... appear as a unified organisation and provide seamless online service. As with all services, e-government services must be developed in the light of demand and user value, as part of an overall service channel strategy.<sup>vi</sup>”

## E-GOVERNMENT MODELS

Now that it is clear on why this phenomenon exists, I will present various *theoretically* effective e-government models in order to point out the *key milestones* and *stages in the process* of establishing e-Government. I will not discuss modern or real-life implementations of these models or e-Government readiness of various regions / governments in this paper (although I will do so in another one, along with detailed analysis of all models supplemented by various other recommendations on how to implement effective e-Government and hurdles in the path). The models showcased here have been crafted by renowned organizations and compiled in the same research article from the *Journal of Applied Sciences* relied upon earlier. I will present models suggested by World Bank, the United Nations and American Society for Public Administration (UNASPA), Gartner (and others), and Deloitte and then I shall conclude with the authors' own suggestions.

Delineated below are the e-Government models:

“World Bank 3-stage model:

- **PUBLISH:** Publish implementations of e-government diverge widely in their design and content, but developing nations generally can start the process of e-government by publishing government information online, beginning with rules and regulations, documents and forms

- INTERACT: E-government has the potential to involve citizens in the governance process by engaging them in interaction with policymakers throughout the policy cycle and at all levels of government. Strengthening civic engagement contributes to building public trust in government
- TRANSACT: Governments go further, by creating websites that allow users to conduct transactions online. Potential cost savings, accountability through information logs and productivity improvements will be important drivers

UN's five-stage model: ...

- EMERGING PRESENCE: A single or a few independent government web sites provide formal but limited and static information
- ENHANCED PRESENCE: Government web sites provide dynamic, specialized and regularly updated information
- INTERACTIVE PRESENCE: Government web sites act as a portal to connect users and service providers and the interaction takes place at a more sophisticated level
- TRANSACTIONAL PRESENCE: Users have the capability to conduct complete and secure transactions, such as renewing visas, obtaining passports and updating birth and death records through a single government web site and
- SEAMLESS OR FULLY INTEGRATED PRESENCE: Governments utilize a single and universal web site to provide a one-stop portal in which users can immediately and conveniently access all kinds of available services

Gartner's four-stage model: ...

- WEB PRESENCE: In this stage, agencies provide a web site to post basic information to public
- INTERACTION: In this stage, users are able to contact agencies through web sites (e.g., e-mail) or do self-service (e.g., download document)
- TRANSACTION: In this stage, users (including customers and businesses) can complete entire transactions (e.g., license application and procurement) online and
- TRANSFORMATION: In this stage, governments transform the current operational processes to provide more efficient, integrated, unified and personalized service

...

Deloitte's six-stage model: ...

- INFORMATION PUBLISHING/DISSEMINATION: Governments provide users with increased access to information

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- OFFICIAL TWO-WAY TRANSACTION: Agencies are used to provide interaction between governments and users by using information and communication technologies such as digital signatures and security keys
- MULTI-PURPOSE PORTALS: Governments utilize a single portal to provide universal service across multiple departments
- PORTAL PERSONALIZATION: Governments enable users to customize portals according to their own desires
- CLUSTERING OF COMMON SERVICES: Governments enhance collaboration and reduce intermediaries (between operational processes) in order to provide a unified and seamless service and
- FULL INTEGRATION AND ENTERPRISE TRANSACTION: an ideal vision in which governments provide sophisticated, unified and personalized services to every customer according to their own needs and preferences<sup>ii</sup> ...”

All of the models indicate that making a website is only the beginning of the process of implementing e-Government. From there, different models take different approaches and even have different opinions about what e-Government entails. However, essentially, they all push for more interaction – G2C, G2B, and G2G – and indicate that eventually, this interaction should develop into online transaction between the government body and citizen / businessperson, and then into better interaction within the bureaucracy itself (G2G) in order that public services can be delivered in the most effective way.

Now, while the models showcased above present only e-Government models, the authors of the cited research article extend these models to include e-Governance in an effort to include all elements of a society – such as “the social, economic, legal, political, demographic, global and technological factors that are seen in the environment.” I find their model to be the most *complete* and as they have themselves said, best able “to capture the vision and ideas of e-Government”, and thus I have included it below:

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- WEB PRESENCE: The government makes its presence by offering information to the citizens, which was hitherto available only at the designated places and at designated times. However the citizens are not empowered to respond to government at this stage. Citizens are considered as mere information consumers at this stage.
- INTERACTION: From the static stage the government enters into dynamic stage. Simple interaction between the government and the citizen starts at this stage. From mere consumer of information, the citizen is now able to respond to government actions and reactions.
- TRANSACTION: At this stage the users are matured enough to transact with the government in the form of paying taxes and duties, filing of returns, obtaining licenses etc. The security and privacy part of the government and citizens are taken care at this stage.

...

- **INTEGRATION:** This stage involves both internal and external integration. For external interfaces, governments build a single and unified portal providing integrated and seamless services instead of separate and distributed services. To achieve this aim, governments should initiate an internal integration to re-engineer existing processes by reducing bottlenecks and intermediaries.
- **E-SOCIETY:** The integration process when it is reaching its maturity leads to the emergence of e-Society. The e-Society can be broadly defined as one that uses digital media in most relationships: peer to peer (personal communications, business to business purchases etc.); government to other (government online); other to government (voting/governance); peer to other (business to consumer, etc.). Electronic government is very flexible when compared to the traditional government which is highly bureaucratic in nature leading to undue delay. So, e-society will be ideal for the people with better ways provided by e-government with the use of information and technologies in Public Administration combined with organizational changes and new skills which help to improve the public service and democratic processes.<sup>ii</sup>

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## CHAT FACILITATING E-GOVERNMENT

As mentioned earlier, all of the e-Government models presented include interaction and transaction as an essential component of e-Government. And as discussed at length in previous sections of this paper, government bodies must gain citizen trust in order for e-Government to have a chance. And in order to build trust, governments must not only make information available via their websites, but they must be available / accessible to citizens. Most agencies accomplish this by publishing their official phone number but then are bombarded with calls or simply don't answer. As government operations are shifting online, so should customer service. According to the Deloitte Research survey mentioned earlier, approximately 60% of government departments predicted that in the future, the majority of customer service would be provided through the internet.<sup>vii</sup> This study was conducted about 10 years ago and it seems we have made more progress but I don't think the prediction has come true. I believe chat is the missing link.

Chat will allow for online interaction with a live government representative; it will make the government seem accessible to citizens by offering service for as long as the internet is open (24/7). It will reduce customer service costs. It will offer web citizens more convenient service than can be provided by phone and more complete service than can be provided by email. Chat is the most logical means of delivering customer service for government bodies that are moving towards e-Government.

Neither I myself nor my company LiveAdmins are experts of e-Government, and this is why I have relied so heavily on sources for this compilation-type research paper. However, what LiveAdmins does excel in is providing online sales & customer service through Live Chat technology. We are most familiar with themes such as user online experience, website interaction, bridging the gap between business and customer, establishing trust between website and visitor, convenience and

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speed of interactions, reducing cost for customer service, and the like. We have been delivering solutions based on these themes for businesses across a multitude of verticals for 10 years now and as e-Government initiatives seem to be on the rise globally and particularly here in the Middle East, we feel it is time that chat is used to expedite e-Government initiatives.

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