

Searching for New Channels to Improve E-Government Services in the United States

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Abstract

Electronic government in the United States is struggling to attract the majority of citizens to use its online provided services as opposed to traditional services. E-government is dynamic and should be at the forefront of innovation, but it has strayed heavily from this path and is severely lacking in integration with social networking and mobile applications. In addition, the lack of a developed citizen profile feature for e-government that enables the integration of all government services, user names and passwords, is at the core of a real "one-stop-shop" environment. This paper explores the way the United States government can improve their e-government platform in these three areas and how they can learn the ways to do so from the private sector and apply it to the public sector through the mechanisms of policy diffusion: Learning, Economic Competition, and Imitation. It concludes that mechanisms of policy diffusion can be applied to the learning and absorption of private sector innovations to the public sector e-government, with respecting differences between the two. Governments can use private sector innovations but they must be retooled to suit the citizens' needs, expectations and security.

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List of Abbreviations

C2G - Citizen-to-Government

CIO - Chief Information Officer

DMV - Department of Motor Vehicles

G2C - Government-to-Citizen

G2B - Government-to-Businesses

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

OCED - Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development

1. Introduction

The basic rationale behind the implementation of e-government involves the systematic transformation of the way citizens interact with government. Many countries throughout the world are working to develop the best format of e-government to provide the largest amount of information and services for citizens and businesses to reinvent the interaction between government. The rapid development of information and communications technologies (ICTs) has made this a reality. With the help of newly developed ICT technology, governments are realizing that by applying the same principles and technologies that are fuelling the e-business revolution, they can achieve a similar transformation (Silcock, 2001, under "Parliamentary Affairs"). The United States government has been one of the leaders in the innovation of e-government and has taken notice of the shift to e-business models to simplify and attract citizens to use e-government services as opposed to traditional methods of service delivery. In the United Nations E-Government Survey for 2012, the United States ranks 5th on the World E-Government Development Index, which serves to show the highly developed platform the United States has to work with. The United States received high marks for working to develop a "one-stop-shop" portal for information and services, which has made its e-government for citizens much easier and more functional. The following chapters will focus mostly on the United States e-government. I will introduce new ideas from other e-government initiatives and the private sector to derive the best improvements that can be made for e-government in the United States to fully flourish and meet its goals.

The potential for e-government to expand is no longer limited by technology. However, the overall level of usage remains relatively low compared to traditional service delivery methods, even in countries that are making greater efforts to enhance take-up, and

notwithstanding continued progress in the provision and sophistication of e-government services (UN E-Government Survey, 2012). The efforts made by the private sector over the years have proven that technology is moving very quickly and the barriers that held back many innovative ideas have been lifted due to new technology becoming available and expanding over the years. Taking advantage of the introduction of devices such as smart phones, interactive voice response systems, digital television, and self-service terminals, the private sector has been making use of multiple channels for a long time (E-Government Act, 2002). The potential for government to expand into new areas furthering the reach and capabilities of e-government is the next milestone. The private sector for years has implemented new technology to reach consumers via multiple channels of delivery. The success of the private sector is apparent in that the use of services via internet options has been steadily rising year after year which in turn generated profit and made previously unreachable people aware and accessible to their businesses. On the other side, governments who have not ventured into more service delivery and marketing of these options are following the trend of private business that have not fully pushed their businesses online. Many businesses have websites, which offer few services and information, but have not fully integrated their business into a full online platform, which takes advantage of all possible methods for outreach and service delivery. As a result, many are in serious trouble and are being overtaken by competitors who realized the advantages early on and made the effort to educate their customers and provide multiple channels to provide an all-inclusive system online. The parallels between government institutions who fail to go the whole way are beginning to surface and the reality is troubling and dangerous to the future development of e-government services online.

The significance of the experience of the private sector to the public sector is extremely important in that it has time test knowledge in the implementation of e-commerce.

Governments are still relatively new to the online sector and considering that they hold a monopoly on the services provided, their user-uptake and performance is rather lackluster. Successful businesses in the private sector online have multitudes of competitors that are attempting to grab a piece of the market, yet many rise above due to quality of services they provide. Governments due to a lack of competition on the market have failed to provide citizens with private sector quality services, which lead my research to investigate if there are certain things e-government can learn from the private sector success online.

The first stage has been implemented and the development of the infrastructure and attitude towards an e-government establishment is in effect. The United States e-government has a successful and efficient platform in regard to complete confidence of sensible material and protection of citizen's data. The next step is to discover what the public sector can learn from the private sector in terms of delivering electronic services following the logic to learn from the successful one. The areas in which the government can adopt new service delivery methods are crucial, but the complexity of these new service delivery methods to be used by government must be addressed.

One must acknowledge that the government is not the private sector and there are different responsibilities and goals at play. The public sector must follow a fair multichannel delivery model that strives to include all mainstream ways to interact with citizens. The private sector can have different approaches that are concerned with targeting individual markets of consumers, which their services are built and customized specifically for. The government does not have this luxury and their services must be tailored to fit the interaction with all citizens to be impartial and equal. Governments are to be accountable, transparent and reliable while private companies only have to compete on the market.

The U.S. Government has shown the commitment to advance e-government services for citizens to the next level. However, the motivation and focus appears to be on

restructuring, rather than the development of new innovative services and channels of delivery. The importance of innovating e-government is crucial to the uptake of new citizens to government services online. The public sector can learn from the private sector and other government approaches around the world. The technology exists and new methods are at work in both the public and private sphere. The lack of insight as to the importance of these features is apparent and the public sector in the United States has much to learn.

This paper aims to examine the ways in which the U.S. government can improve e-government in order to provide better services over delivery models. If the overall goal is to achieve maximum penetration to citizens through different methods to increase user-uptake of e-government services, then one must ask how is this possible? With the intention of tackling this goal, more research must be conducted into new methods not currently implemented. The research question of the paper is the following: How policy learning occurs between online commercial / social media and e-government services?

The United Nations E-Government survey illustrates that the U.S. is on the right track in developing the infrastructure of the e-government platform. The quality of the services has improved and become more user-friendly through substantial reforms. The creation of the “one-stop-shop” portal shows the commitment of the government to create a user-friendly service environment. Government to Citizens (G2C) services along with Government to Businesses (G2B) are very much developed and are regarded as a point of reference for other countries around the world. The United Nations E-Government Survey stresses the importance of supporting multichannel service delivery as a way to offer many new ways to help interact with citizens in order to respond to their needs more effectively and with their integral participation (United Nations, E-Government Survey, 2012). A major channel in which the United States still has much to develop is the integration of their mobile services in relation to e-government. Questions that arise are how can the government learn from private

companies? Are there mechanisms in which the government can use to determine which new innovative methods the private sector is using and apply it to e-government?

This paper's hypothesis is that if the government adopts and exercise some of the successful practices and policies of private sector, it will systematically attract more citizens to use e-government services and therefore begin to shrink the divide between use of traditional methods of service delivery and e-government services. This is crucial to e-governments in the United States because the risk of future development of services is dependent on the success of the current success of e-government. As of 2012, the budget of e-government programs in the United States is currently under review in order to assess their success and value according to the money spent on the programs. If more users are exposed and are knowledgeable about government services online, then the cost saving benefits of e-government will substantially begin to take shape and begin to have a significant impact to reduce the use of traditional methods of G2C and G2B transactions and information gathering. If successful, it can promote a new generation of e-government services and platforms to be implemented throughout everyday life in the United States.

1.1 Organization of the Thesis

My thesis will be structured as follows: Chapter Two is describing the Methodology of the thesis. Chapter Three is a literature review on e-government, e-commerce, theories surrounding policy diffusion and policy transfer. This will be followed by Chapter Four that examines the current initiative's in e-government in the United States. Chapter Five is the analysis and includes the pillars of rejuvenation of e-government and application of the mechanisms of policy diffusion to the pillars. The analysis will focus heavily on the private sector such as format of online profiles, marketing and smart phone app development. Final chapter will consist of conclusion and further recommendations.

2. Methodology

For the purpose of situating facts and layout of the current state of the United States e-government, I have derived insightful data from *The United Nations E-Government Survey 2012, e-government for the people*, (United Nations, E-Government Survey, 2012) which is the most recent document about the status of e-governments around the world. The most up to date information is very important considering that it will determine where the United States is at the moment and it will help guide as to where the United States e-government can improve. The UN survey will only allow us to identify what are some current holes of e-government in the United States and help develop new ideas to advance e-government.

Policy diffusion is used interchangeable with policy transfer, which involves one government looking into legislations, ideas, policy options and reformation plans passed by other governments, with the effort of trying to see adoptable plans into their own work. However, governmental organizations and political parties have been far slower to use data to improve their service offerings and devise innovative policy interventions (Escher and Margetts, 2007). Since this applies to governments around the world, I have decided to analyze what would be possible for policy transfer or partial policy transfer from the private to public sphere while acknowledging their differences. In the analysis of the possibilities of policy diffusion from the private sector to e-government within the United States, I will suggest three pillars to rejuvenate e-government in the United States and analyze them with three mechanisms of diffusion: learning, economic competition and imitation. These three mechanisms are set by scholars Charles R. Shipan and Craig Volden (Shipan and Volden, 2007, 12) who elaborated comprehensively on policy transfers in which I will use this as a framework for my analysis.

Learning from the private sector is no longer a secret nor taboo, yet governments are lagging way behind private companies in providing online beneficiaries with satisfactory

services on the scale and quality of the private sector. In order for a comprehensive study on how can we learn from the private sector, I will examine available literature on policy diffusion between states and the private sector. It will assist in the understanding of the ability of government to adopt new features the private sector has created to attract users to its services. How can the policy be transferred to the public sector and will it work? The analysis of this thesis will focus on three sections that will highlight the different areas of improvement the United States can make to its e-government platform to increase promotion of its services, quality and user-uptake. I will elaborate why mobile applications are crucial for user-uptake, followed by social networking enhancements and finally I will elaborate on the crucial importance of an integrated citizen profile. Aside from the three pillars to rejuvenating e-government, I will touch upon the limitations of policy diffusion from private to public sector because regardless of the fact that the public sector can learn from private sector, there are many non-adoptive features in which governments cannot use due to the accountability, transparency and reliability that they owe to its people. Private companies, especially online social networks are concerned exclusively on profit or in Facebook's case about reaching one billion users, which is not the goal of any of the government in the world. For this and many other reasons, after I layout the current situation in the United States I will analyses what the US government can learn and what they cannot learn from private sector.

The method of answering specific research question of the thesis is a country case study based on document and data analysis. Generally said, I will be looking at the current literature, official documents, statistical data and implemented policies concerning e-government of the United States, but more importantly, I will analyze policy diffusion options, benefits and challenges from the private sector to the United States e-government. The case study selection was not random. The United States of America is among one of the most developed country and stands as one of the world's most technologically advanced

powers. However, adopting new innovations such as e-government does not necessarily mean that they were built perfectly and that does not allow for improvements in the area.

3. Literature Review

In the course of this chapter, I will briefly outline some of the theories surrounding e-government in general, the definition and premises of the informational government. I will also provide context related information about current theories on e-government services. In this section, I plan to provide the literature overview of policy diffusion from private to government sector theories and different interpretation of diffusion in general, also to elaborate why policy diffusion is recommended for e-government and why further analysis is needed.

There is no single unified definition of the e-government, but the overall consensus accepted by almost all authors is that e-government is an online delivery of services by government for its citizens. In chapter one of the book *Governance and Information Technology*, (Lazer and Schönberger, 2007, 2-4) e-government is defined as a tool for the creation of an information society. Scholar Vincent Homburg in the book *Understanding E-Government* (Homburg, 2008, 88) defines e-government as the system in which its services are available for people at any given time, which is different from the traditional approach. Scholars generally agree that the concept of e-government is mostly designed as a great bridge and channel between beneficiaries (citizens) and providers (governments), but not all authors agree that is completely harmless. Authors who are taking a neutral stance on the matter, and tackling the new apparatus of governments in the digital age, are Christopher C. Hood and Helen Z. Margetts who elaborated on a new governmental toolkit as totality reaches out to individuals in providing information and services. The authors elaborated their ideas in the book *The Tools of Government in the Digital Age* and laid out the possibilities for

the government to reach out without providing recommendations whether new tools “ought to be used extensively or modestly.”(Hood and Margetts, 2007, 77) The authors explain further that the digital tools and government-citizen interface is fairly the same for all the governments around the world but the e-government possibilities varies depending on many factors.

The e-government delivery channel, as it has been said, is a government platform that naturally and by its logic cannot take on board all policy recommendations from the private sector simply because there are profound differences between private and public sector. The first is concerned only about profit; the latter is in a normative approach considered about public wellbeing. However, the e-government delivery channel is an open space, transparent vehicle for the public sector to provide services and information for almost all its citizen and in the United States in particular, considering the digital divide in the U.S. is considerably low when compared to other countries in the world. It is very important to be inclusive of policy diffusion from private to public sector bearing in mind that the two have similar mechanisms, but have different goals as well.

Considering that I intend to layout the diffusion of policies from private to the public sector, I will elaborate further on the theories concerning diffusion in general. When it comes to the diffusion of policies, one of the most important theories is the *Diffusion of Innovation* from 1962, (Rogers, 2003, 6-7). The diffusion is explained as adopting, copying and simply modifying one policy for the purposes of another institution or organization. Everett Rogers who wrote *Diffusion of Innovation* 50 years ago, further explained how innovation's diffuse gradually because there is no previous experience in regard to the “the new thing” and it takes time for the innovation to be adopted into the official policy of an institution or organization. Rogers wrote many chapters just to prove that an innovation must have a very convincing strategy and practices to be adopted by doubtful policy makers who are used to “making

things the way they were.” (2003, 20) Taking into account that the concept of e-government is fairly new, it does not come as a surprise that many governments around the world lack ideas and policies that will enable the online interface to be more productive and beneficial. Rogers claims that the conservative institutions are the last to adopt innovations and diffusion of policies, nevertheless, the government of the United States of America was amongst the pioneers to adopt all online opportunities (mostly related to online campaigns, internet raising awareness campaigns, election campaigns, etc.) There is a reason to believe that there can be a better marketing plan regarding the usefulness of e-government services in the United States.

Scholar Sandra Braman has recently published a book (Braman, 2009) that looks across and in depth in the need for a better understanding of the transformation of the bureaucratic welfare state into the informational state. Braman tackles the issue of power and clarifies the terms within the informational state furthermore. To understand e-government is to also understand its potential. Transformative developments in the U.S. government is an extension of its constitution which is a living document that grows and changes as time passes to meet the demands of the current generation.

There are many theories that are looking past one individual intention and motivation for using e-government services, to name just two: the *Technology Acceptance Model* (Davis, 1989, 982, 985) and the *Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology* (Venkatesh et al. 2003, 997). These theories have identified what are the perceptions on the usefulness, ease of access, information flow and content, all of which are crucial to the promotion of usage of e-government services. Government and the private sectors e-commerce could be moving more towards convergence due to similar technologies used by both to provide services to their respective customers and citizens. Considering that Electronic commerce (e-commerce) means any interaction online that involves transaction of

information across the web it is important to look across some authors who have written about the importance of e-commerce and its success when it comes to businesses flourishing.

The significance of e-commerce to e-government is the disproportional success the private sector has had with its online transition compared to e-government. Since private business embraced e-commerce, it has continued to rise year after year in usage and has transformed the way private companies do business in the modern world. The government has attempted this transition but with minimal success in its implementation. One area in which the government has attempted to bring in private sector ideas is in the support of multi-channel service delivery mechanisms such as support for e-government on mobile phones with the introduction of smart phone apps as a way to offer alternative means of services for citizens. Jeffrey Roy is one of the scholars who also supports multichannel service delivery and has undertaken research in the e-government of Canada (Roy, 2007, 148 - 169) to prove how it is possible to employ some of the ideas from private sector to the public sector. Many other authors including Hans J (Jochen) Scholl, Karine Barzilai-Nahon, and Jin-Hyuk Ahn (Scholl et al. 2009) have proven that there is plenty of interaction and exchange of ideas possible between e-government and e-commerce in that they can learn from one another, proving that policy diffusion is possible between these two. These authors have agreed that the public sector can learn from the private sector and vice versa. However, they have also identified difference in these areas: environmental drives and constraints, organizational mandates and scope, internal processes, complexities, and incentives (Scholl et al. 2009). Other authors such as Barry Bozeman (Bozeman, 1988, 672) and Bernard Carsten Stahl (Stahl, 2005, 1- 19) are mostly focused on limits and boundaries shared by the private and public sector, which are crucial to address because not everything that is derived from the private sector can be easily transferred to the public sector. The authors have pointed out important aspects of the private sector in that it serves as a testing ground for innovative

service and information delivery mechanisms. The government can see the success of features the private sector has implemented online by examining the adoption of identical services appearing on other websites. For example, the adoption of providing visitors to websites suggestions of products based on their interests developed in their user profile is now profoundly found across the web. Can the same model be adopted in e-government to offer localized and user specific services based on a citizens most urgent needs?

David VanHoose is a scholar who comprehensively looked across the relevance of the study of e-commerce economics and elaborated on how the e-commerce revolution affects the economy. In the book *E-Commerce Economics*, (VanHoose, 2003) VanHoose offered a full analysis on how e-commerce is revolutionizing business across the globe. Another author who has drawn attention to the rocket high potential of the e-commerce is Lindsay Percival-Straunik (Percival-Straunik, 2001). The author was dealing with the history of e-commerce or “e-business” as she refers to it and elaborated that the reason why private businesses using e-commerce are so successful is because their motto is “the customer is the king” (Percival-Straunik, 2001) and the customer is now online. Private businesses that see customers making the shift online have realized that customers have become more involved in social networking. As the social networking numbers begin to rise so has the private sectors initiative to incorporate social networking into their business to increase promotion and gain new customers to their businesses.

The publication *Promise and Problems of E-Democracy* (OECD, Caddy, 2007) by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) is tackling the pros and cons of the services online and its focus is mostly about security issues. It raises the biggest concern, which is the citizen centricity and protection of the citizen. The fact remains that security is a huge aspect to the implementation of new services to e-government and could be the defining factor as to why certain services are still not available or will not be

implemented. As e-government's begin to explore new ways to protect citizens online, the fears will slowly recede. The OECD points out that a shift from a government-centric paradigm to a citizen-centric paradigm is occurring that places the attention on social, organizational and institutional factors to develop (OECD, 2011). The development of user-based upgrades to e-government is essential to developing a familiar platform that citizens are aware on how to use and how to customize.

The impact and emergence of e-government has been extensively discussed and studied in recent years, however, as we witnessed, previous research in the field has been focused mostly on e-government in general and as the overall picture begins to change, new platform between citizens and government will have to follow. Considering that citizens in the United States are becoming more tech savvy and the online world is prevailing in providing services and information, there is still a lot of room for further research. The question about improving e-government services by policy diffusion from private to public sector in the United States has not been studied sufficiently, hence the need for further research and analysis into the new possibilities for e-government and how can policy diffusion enhance or challenge the concept.

4. The United States E-Government's Current Initiatives

In the course of this chapter, I will clarify the current practices of the United States and will touch on some of the significant parts of e-government in the United States and where it is today. The most significant developments of e-government in the United States stems from the E-Government Act of 2002 (E-Government Act, 2002). This act worked to establish the first Federal Chief Information Officer and developed a framework for the future, which included new ICT quickly spreading throughout the United States at the time. Fast broadband allowed the planners to envision a heavy internet-based platform that could

feasibly improve and allow the transformation of many traditional government services to make the switch to an online-based service delivery platform.

The E-Government Act of 2002 established many key aspects of e-government that have and will be implemented over the course of its enactment. Provisions within the section Title II, Federal Management and Promotion of Electronic Government Services Sec. 202 B, (E-Government Act, 2002, 202) deals with the performance integration of the act. The provisions within this section state that agencies should consider including the adoption of innovative information technology, including the appropriate use of commercial best practices (E-Government Act, 2002). The significance of this section is that it states that the best practices of the private sector *should be considered* when developing the e-government platform. The extent at which the government has adopted methods from the private sector remains mostly around the adoption of a simple interface reworking of government websites. The adoption of new social networking aspects remains to be implemented on a scale that integrates the services from the government with social networking capabilities. The private sector in recent years has heavily integrated their businesses with social networking capabilities, while the U.S. e-government platform has barely scratched the surface of the sector. As it has been seen, the United States has not invested enough resources to develop it as a possible driving force of the promotion of e-government services.

Soon after President Obama was elected, he proposed a memorandum for the heads of executive departments and agencies within his administration on the subject of transparency and open government. Within the memorandum, he mentions three top priorities for e-government: government should be transparent, government should be participatory, and government should be collaborative. He states: "Executive departments and agencies should use innovative tools, methods, and systems to cooperate among themselves, across all levels of government, and with nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals in the private

sector" (The United States Government, White House). So far, the government has implemented some of the most advanced e-government in the world, which is why President Obama stresses the innovation of new ideas into e-government that focuses not only on the restructuring of the platform but to make the move to innovate it on a new level.

As the e-government sector develops each year in the United States, the focus lately has been to restructure the platform to make it increasingly user friendly for citizens and most importantly for the government to reduce costs for maintaining the e-government platform significantly. Due to budget constraints and the discovery of the massive waste throughout the e-government platform in the United States, the Chief Information Officer (CIO) Vivek Kundra, who was newly appointed by the president of the United States, Barack Obama in March 2009, helped create the 25-Point Implementation Plan to Reform Federal Information Technology Management, (The United States Government, White House). Within this plan, the CIO acknowledged that despite spending more than \$600 billion on information technology over the past decade, the Federal Government has achieved little of the productivity improvements that private industry has realized from IT (The United States Government, White House). The 25-Point Plan was released in 2010 soon after the financial crisis in 2008, which led the United States into a deep recession and refocused the attention to cost saving measures rather than addressing the real problem of user-uptake and promotion of e-government services.

The 25-point plan's focus is primarily around infrastructure changes and cost saving measures. There is no mention of new channels to promote e-government to citizens and businesses even though it has been stated that it is of the US government's main concerns, considering the potential of the e-government to revolutionize the way the U.S. government interacts with its citizens and businesses. It is important that the U.S. government focus on the level of usage as a top priority due to the tremendous costs e-government has burdened

the taxpayer. If the results of various programs in the future do not successfully attract citizens to use the services online, then it could jeopardize further transitions of government services to the e-government platform.

The United States government's approach to the e-government has been a model that many countries around the world have noticed and have modeled their own e-government platforms after. As stated in the introduction, the United States has spent well over \$600 billion dollars just in the past decade developing the e-government system. Yet the country has not seen the transformation that should have happened with the amount of money spent. The success of e-government in the United States is at a critical point in its existence. With the country facing a massive debt crisis, voices in Congress now only speak about what can be cut, rather than what can be improved or created. E-government can provide the country with both of these outlets in order to enable traditional services to be reduced from the large bureaucratic infrastructure that currently exists to the cost and time saving mechanism e-government could incorporate.

5. Analysis

Authors Charles R Shipan and Craig Volden have developed *The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion* (Shipan and Volden, 2007) which will be my starting point in the further analysis. By using three mechanisms of policy diffusion: *learning*, *imitation* and *competition*, the authors analyzed antismoking policy choices by the 675 largest U.S cities in order to disentangle policy diffusion between cities. Clearly, the case is about public-to-public sector policy diffusion, but I will still use the premises of the mechanisms to layout private-to-public sector policy diffusion while respecting differences abovementioned sectors. The reasoning behind looking into and analyzing private to public sphere policy diffusion is that governments lag behind economics and private companies in utilizing their resources for the

increased profit or benefit. The internet seems to have influenced less upon government's ability to know citizens (Shipan and Volden, 2007). The usage of e-government lags behind that of e-commerce, according to the UN data, 90 percent of internet users had used the internet to get information about a product or service; only 46 percent had used it to undertake any kind of interaction with government, including information seeking.

Governmental organizations and political parties have been far slower to use data to improve their service offerings and device innovative policy interventions (Escher and Margetts, 2007). Hence, the need to look up the possibilities of private to public sphere policy diffusion because the public sphere de facto is delayed after the private sector in new on-line relationships between citizens and government. Shipan and Volden warn that policy formulation in the American federal system is challenging and faces a relative disadvantage. They state that they appear to be less capable of learning from the policy choices of others, more susceptible to economic competition, more like to engage in simple imitation, and strongly at risk of coercion from their state government (Shipan and Volden, 2007). I have decided to look across the three mechanism of policy diffusion separately, offer three rejuvenation options and finally, analyze it with previously mentioned mechanisms.

5.1 Three Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion

Shipan and Volden argue that policy adoption based on *learning* about effective policies elsewhere leads to good outcomes. By observing the politics of policy adoption and the impact of those policies, policymakers can learn from the experiences of other governments (Shipan and Volden, 2007). For example, the Norwegians are on track developing a personalized one-stop self-services portal. This innovation in e-government allows citizens to customize and give priority to information that affects them directly. They are focused on identifying the citizens needs, the success of Norwegian's in e-government is apparent as the percentage of citizens using the internet to interact with public authorities

jumped from 52% in 2005 to 64% in 2010 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development-OECD). The United States can learn from this user-centric focus for citizens as a means to increase its user-uptake. The Norwegians have proved that their focus on user-centricity is a means to increase uptake and if the United States can learn from this example let it be that citizens much like the customer in the private sector, comes first.

The second mechanism is *economic competition*, which by its definition, policymakers consider economic effects of adoption or lack of adoption by other governments. If there are negative economic spillovers, governments are less likely to adopt any policy and vice versa, if there are positive economic spillovers governments are more likely to adopt it. Many examples show that when governments around the world accept some of the pillars of private business respecting limitations and being citizen rather than profit oriented it brings positive economic spillovers. Even in developing countries (e.g. Nepal) embrace of an active engagement by government agencies in social media, and citizen positive response, can help increase citizen take-up of e-services, which helps to create the critical mass required to generate momentum (Bimal, 2010). This in core means that Nepalese government increased take-up by using social media and more people began using their services. With less turning to traditional services, economically it means more savings and cost reductions of the governmental budget in terms of costs to providing traditional services (buildings, operations, pensions, etc.)

Imitation is the third mechanism which involves copying the action of another in order to look like the other. Difference between learning and imitation is that learning focuses on the action (policy being adopted), while imitating focuses on the actor (the other government that is adopting the policy). The United States government cannot fully take on board everything from the private sector because it is concerned about its citizens more than about anything else. For obvious reasons it cannot also just copy another government's

actions for the reasoning of different priorities and circumstances. Imitations can be useful in looking at some government's action by taking up something from the private sector and for that not to be successful in order to see what not to attempt to copy or apply.

5.2 Three Pillars to Rejuvenate E-Government in the United States

The United Nations 2012 E-Government survey provides interesting policy recommendations that are laid out to help examine a country like the U.S. and offer recommendations as to what are the areas in which an improvement is needed in order to increase e-service usage or where the trends in e-government are going worldwide and for what reasons. Three Pillars: mobile application, social networking enhancements, and citizen profile will be covered in the proceeding section and will be analyzed using three mechanisms of policy diffusion in order to determine whether each one is capable of being implemented within e-government in the United States.

5.2.1 Mobile Application

Mobile government can be extremely helpful in reaching new markets of people who are not able to access e-government services on a more convenient platform or reaching the population, which has flocked to smart phones as a major portal to their online world. Smart phones allows citizens to access government information and services anytime anywhere and as mobile devices grown in number each year, it is quickly becoming the dominant form of technology that citizens all around the United States will be in possession of, if not already. As existing technology becomes cheaper with each year, the number of citizens that will have smart phones will rise.

The United States according the UN Survey Data is currently utilizing four specific channels regarding smart phones that they find crucial to mobile-based multiservice delivery. SMS Notification service, separate m-government site, mobile applications, payment using

mobile phones are the areas in which the United Nations indicates that the U.S. has some form of development. The United States is struggling to find a practical structure to serve its citizens in the implementation of government applications in the smart phone app markets for Apple, Android, and Blackberry. As of May 2012, there are 61 government sponsored/developed apps for Android, 145 for Apple, 9 for Blackberry (The United States Government). These applications are spread over eight sections: reference, education, medical, travel, utilities, health and fitness, news, and business. What researchers have learned over the past decade is the value "one-stop-shops" have been in transforming the traditional web-based computer browser approach to e-government. It is so crucial that it is a major measurement indicator for the UN Survey and e-governments are graded based on the integration of their online presence into a single portal. The same indicator and standards need to be applied to the mobile application sector of e-government not only in the United States but the rest of the world. The U.S. Government must provide a single app that can be used as a mobile-based portal for all e-government services and information in the app market. The private sector has long followed this approach; they predicted it success and utilized it in the most successful way. Retailers would never offer individual categories for clothing and electronic services in different applications. It is not practical to have 61 applications for Android. If one application is made that serves as a categorical base for the e-government structure, more users will be inclined to install a single application for all their government needs, as opposed to 61.

The United States integrated "one-stop-shop" portal Usa.gov is a strong example of how an integrated application on all mobile platforms regardless if it is Apple, Android, or Blackberry can function as. The three major developers in mobile platform operating systems should be the focus of any future development as the private sector has clearly abided by their dominance on the mobile smart phone market. Although it must be stated that Blackberry is

slowing down, losing its hold on the market and has been declining significantly. It may be more beneficial to support it and judging in the next few years whether or not support should continue for the operating system. Another viable candidate for support is the Windows mobile operating system that has made a comeback recently. New Windows 8 operating system for personal computers could increase the number of mobile users on their windows phone. More research must be done in this area to determine the appropriate support of lower uptake of certain mobile operating systems.

Usa.gov (The United States Government) allows users to access all the functions of government online and provides a helpful search bar where users can simply enter in what they are looking for. The development of an easy to use and clutter-less application is key to user-uptake. As mobile apps grow in numbers, so do the reviews and critical reception of these applications. It is important to have an application that is fully developed and secure in order to receive positive feedback from users in order to encourage hesitant users to the application. This is a market that will be expanding rapidly in the coming years and it would be wise to devise the platform early on in the transition period in order to root out possible problems or lack of features that the majority of citizens would expect from a government application on their smart phone. Analysis of the integration of a "one-stop-shop" app will be further examined in the analysis as the application will have similarities to tested methods of the private sector and it should be determined whether this type of app can function for e-government as it has function in the private sector.

5.2.1.1 Applicability of the three mechanisms of policy diffusion to the unified mobile app

First mechanism of policy diffusion that was announced to be used in analysis is a concept of *Learning*. A mechanism of learning means not only do you learn what the success is of one policy applied elsewhere but also what are the pitfalls. According to the three

mechanisms of policy diffusion the public sector can effectively learn all there is to know about mobile applications from the private sector. The experience of the private sector is crucial to the public sector in mobile application because the government can avoid any potential problems that might arise from joining the apps together from their time-tested examples and experience in the market. A "one-stop-shop" smart phone application is not a revolutionary concept. The trends in the private sector have served to help project what this concept could one day look like. It has been tested and proven to be as secure as a web based desktop or laptop. The conglomeration of applications into one easy to use application to serve citizens is ideal.

Second mechanism of policy diffusion *The Economic Competition* looks at the economic spillovers whether it is positive or negative in the determination of whether or not to adopt the policy. One-stop-shop mobile app is economically sound in that it reduces waste that is spent on generating numerous applications that can be joint into one. The costs of updating and managing the information could be significantly reduced. More people will be inclined to install one application, which in turn could expose them to services otherwise not known. This could help to increase the usage of services online and help reduce the need for traditional services elsewhere. As far as the *mechanism of Imitation of policy option*, it is undeniably impossible to do it from private to public sphere. In the imitation mechanism it has been defined that the imitation means complete copying not only of the actions but of the actors and for the public sector it is unacceptable to simply imitate what for example Facebook is doing considering their differences.

5.2.2 Social Networking Enhancements

The United Nations report specifies that a new way to increase expansion of usage is through social media. The United States has begun to venture into the social media sphere but the veture has been limited, simple, and somewhat timid. They have created Facebook "like-

pages" and Twitter pages, which have done little to nothing to increase the usage of e-government services. As the popularity of social networking sites rise, the importance to have a viable platform to incorporate e-government with features that include social networking is evident. Two-thirds of adult internet users (65%) now say they use a social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn, up from 61% one year ago. That's more than double the percentage that reported social networking site usage in 2008 (29%) (Madden and Zickuhr, under "Sixty-Five Percent of Online Adults Use Social Networking Site", 2007). Facebook which is the undisputed leader of social networking sites, having around 900 million users, is also the number one visited website (Google, Top 1000 sites) on the web and should be the focus of the United States primarily due to the potential to reach citizens on a mass scale.

According to data from the World Bank in 2010, 79.34% (almost 80%) of the United States population are internet users (World Bank, Data Google public data). It has grown constantly over the years with no sign of decreasing in the near future. As many e-governments face low user uptake due to the lack of internet penetration in their individual country, or because of the digital divide, the United States does not. As more and more discover social networking, the rise of information gathering and trends have developed within social networking websites. Pew Internet surveys recently reported that half of all adults (50%) are using social networking sites, which has dramatically increased from just 8% of internet users in 2005 or 5% of all adults (Madden and Zickuhr, under "Sixty-Five Percent of Online Adults Use Social Networking Site", 2007).

As more and more of these internet users are using social networking, statistics show that nearly one third (31%) of online adults use online platforms such as blogs, social networking sites, email, online video or text messaging to get government information (Smith, 2010). Information about the government has become a common facet on online

platforms, which will help any transformative features of e-government on social media platforms. The question that arises in what ways can the United States e-government use social networking sites? Since the most talked about and visited social networking sites is Facebook, the focus will be narrowed to that individual website.

The maneuverability and flexibility of Facebook allows for an easier integration of e-government features. Within Facebook there are ways to help promote e-government services which have not been adopted by the United States government. The way to help increase usage and marketing of e-government services is to allow users to post the ways in which they have used e-government services. For example, if John Doe used the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) website and renewed his driver's license online it would be followed with an integration of Facebook and e-government. The DMV website can provide a button after the application is completed that will allow John Doe to post a message on his Facebook wall that states something along the lines of "Tired of waiting in line at the DMV. John Doe just renewed his driver's license online via www.dmv.com, click here to see how you can do it too." This would expose all of John Doe's friends on Facebook to e-government services and people who were not informed previously about DMV services online will now be aware. This is a cost effective way to increase exposure to e-government services and information. The interesting thing about this feature is that it does not rely or need every user to adopt the option to post on their individual wall. For this feature to successfully market e-government to the people on Facebook one individual only needs to use the function to post the message to their wall and expose it to all their friends and family. Incorporating a feature such as this into e-government services could expose and increase user-uptake so long as the information posted is not sensitive information and does not reveal or try to trick any citizen into anything unwanted as many private websites do. Further protection of data for users, would need to be reinforced, but with this possibility, users/citizens would give away nothing more than they

already do within the agreement of the contract with the social networking site. The promotion of the e-government services would bloom and will not be hindered by approval of social networking website because this is already a common practice and many private businesses employ this feature.

5.2.2.1 Applicability of the three mechanisms of policy diffusion to social networking enhancement

Policy diffusion of private sector social networking enhancements into the public sector is challenging due to the protection of data for the citizen. A working balance must be tested and tested again to ensure that no data is released into the participants social media platform that is not intended to be. Restrictions must be placed on the side of the e-government platform which enables this feature to prevent any instance of personal data that is disclosed. If these issues are addressed the enhancement of this feature into Facebook could be enabled.

To address the mechanisms of policy diffusion *the aspect of learning* from the private sector is possible as much of the data released is censored or adjusted to prevent any disclosure of sensitive information such as a users address or credit card information. By observing the private sector's methods on social networking sites the public sector can learn formats and determine levels of disclosure they are willing to provide the user to post on their individual wall. Many other governments have taken the same approach the United States has for the level of presence on Facebook. They are limited to "like" pages, which serve little to promote the services of government online.

It is beyond the scope of the thesis to fully and comprehensively assess the economic competition mechanism of maneuvering more features of e-government to social media websites, however, the possibilities of exposing more and more users through the

enhancement described earlier is more user-uptake due to free marketing possibilities. For example Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, (Bimal, 2010) is one of the developing countries that experienced an increase in user-uptake through its social networking attempts and due to the overwhelming number of American citizens on Facebook increases the likelihood that it will provide similar results.

As far as the third mechanism goes, *imitating* of the private sector's role in social media is not recommended, but the structure in which they allow their customers to project what they purchased or attended is a start to develop a secure meaningful way the e-government can be projected into Facebook walls.

5.2.3 Citizen Profile

To address the multifaceted challenges of e-service usage, the United Nations informs countries about the importance of focusing on user-centricity. They state that convenience is the dominating factor and is often found to be as a stronger incentive than mere cost saving features (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, E-Government Survey 2012). Many other facets to increase e-service usage is to address the usability of e-services. When features are easier to use the citizen will be more likely to use the service again or recommend it to a friend or family member to use. The ability to create a system in which personalized features and customization can be developed for the citizen, a more centered and clear path to services can be created. According to a comprehensive study and statistics on United States e-government satisfaction, citizen-centric focused services will improve citizen satisfaction. Satisfaction then increases the likelihood that the citizen will return to the website (by 51 percent), use it as a primary resource as opposed to utilizing more costly channels (by 79 percent), or recommend the site to others (by 81 per cent), (Campbell et al. under, "Federal Social Usage and Citizen Satisfaction Update Foresee ACIS E-Government Satisfaction Index Q3", 2011).

The private sector, have used the profile system for years for its online businesses. The conglomeration of all their services into one website was virtually a no brainer for online businesses. E-commerce in the online business sector are easy to use with their version of "one-stop-shop" profiles for customers to access all their products and complete all their transactions in one location. For example, a largest convenient chain in the United States, Wal-Mart, allows its customers to purchase from any of its departments online from one website and one profile. The benefit of this is the customer does not have to make a specific profile and multiple user names for each department or in our case each government department individually to access the information and services they provide. As the take up of e-commerce has continued to rise rapidly in the United States over the years and although e-transactions are becoming a common activity, citizens still use the government websites much more for information than for transactions (Smith, 2010). The way to alter this trend from simple information gathering is to offer services side by side with the information. If the best information for the citizen is found easily while logged in, the option to use services provided by the government can be easily linked up to increase the likelihood that the citizen will use the service provided online rather than for just information and continue on with traditional services.

To have one location for the citizen to log in and have access to all departments is very beneficial and convenient. The more citizen-centric online and mobile services are, the higher the level of uptake (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, E-Government Survey 2012). The profile system similar to private sector examples such as Facebook and Amazon with access to all departments and services will generate a sense of familiarity for the citizen. Less passwords and user names will have to be created and remembered. Each citizen will not have to search for services on individual government websites, which can sometimes be confusing and have many different user setups that can

discourage citizens from using additional services due to the burden and confusion. As it stated earlier, convenience is at the top of the list for generating a strong incentive to encourage citizens to use e-government.

The U.S. has the resources to develop this type of joint network for all services delivered. It could stand to serve as a security risk if this type of system is avoided and not implemented. As privacy and security concerns are very important to citizens and the government, they potentially work as barriers impeding service usage as they prevent users from trusting and therefore using e-government services (Euripidis and Charalabidis, under "Greek Public Sector: An International Comparison" 2011: 12). Internet users are facing several obstacles when searching for e-government services and information. When a user is searching for information or services, they type in keywords into search engines such as Google and Bing with the hopes of finding official government information. However, results can be skewed and might show private websites appearing to be government sites or simply misinformed websites offering information the citizen is searching for but stands as outdated and incorrect which could mislead the citizen and further complicate matters. This could stand as a major source of frustration and a security risk for the citizen who might interpret this as poor government services online and further avoid the e-government structure and revert to traditional methods. The profile structure in e-government could help to alleviate these complications and security risks by offering one location for everything the citizen needs with the guarantee that once logged into the e-government network the citizen will have all available information and services secured without the risk of exposure to fraudulent websites seeking citizens who might provide information they should not. With a e-government citizen profile, the user will be able to access all e-government services online and will not have to create additional user names and passwords to access different e-government services. The government can adopt the profile structure of sites such as

Facebook as a means to allow the citizen to be comfortable and knowledgeable of the format. Features such as bright red notifications alerting the citizen of areas of concern, such as their taxes will be due soon. The opportunities are vast as to where e-government provide features on a citizen focused profile and it could stand as a real "one-stop-shop" platform that many governments are trying to attain.

5.2.3.1 Applicability of the three mechanisms of policy diffusion to citizen profile

Citizen profiles for e-government is possible if the numerous government agencies providing services online are able to work together and combine their efforts into one platform. *Learning* from the private sector's ability to provide all the services they provide into one joint platform is the key due to the inexperience of other governments "one-stop-shop" atmospheres. Other governments have begun to transition to portals which provide information and help lead to services but the real advantage is one user name and one password for each citizen. The private sector is highly developed in this field and the public sector would be wise to learn from and to derive their examples in order to develop the platform.

To apply the second mechanism of *economic competition* is to determine the benefits of adopting this sort of citizen profile. The benefits that the government will be able to acquire is a less complicated system, allowing for a more centralized location of user information in the event a problem occurs. This will allow mistakes to be solved quickly as the conglomeration of services will be merged into one location. The majority of successful private sector companies have adopted this type of single user profile to access all their services and it is likely that the benefits they have gain will be transferred to the public sector.

Applying the *imitation mechanism* to private sector profiles and transferring the basic fundamentals to provide all services under one room will not be identical to the private sector

because government agencies are all different and their methods of providing services could stand to be extremely different from each other.

6. Conclusion

This study has shown that the private sector can contribute to new innovations in the public sector. Learning from the private sector is crucial due to their experience online, while policy diffusion with other governments in online innovations is limited due to their inexperience in successful online platforms and the inability to attract users on a scale that would reflect its position in the market, which in this case is a monopoly. This paper examined the ways in which the United States e-government platform can improve in order to provide better services and offer improved multi-channel service delivery options for citizens.

Over the course of the research, three areas were determined to be lacking in which the government was not providing the best methods of delivery and promotions of its services. The United Nations E-government Survey was used to determine areas governments from around the world were lacking in enhancements and improvements to their e-government platform. Mobile apps, social networking enhancements, and citizen profiles were the three areas in which the U.S government can develop the e-government platform and this paper proves that there is much to be learned by using private sectors examples as a basis for their construction and implementation.

In this paper I presented three recommendations for improvements to United States e-government platform that I analyzed using three mechanisms of policy diffusion from private to public sector to clarify whether or not adoption of these recommendations is in fact possible in e-government. Looking across the three mechanisms of policy diffusion from public to private sector, one can conclude that two mechanisms, *learning* and *economic competition* fit entirely well into the pillars to rejuvenate e-government in the United States,

while the third mechanism, *imitation*, is not compatible due to the fundamental differences between government and private sector. There will always be some differences between the public and private sector because while the private sector works to generate profit, the government has other responsibilities such as to provide a secure, reliable, and inclusive environment for all citizens instead of those simply targeted for profit by the private sector. Aside from the differences, it was proven that there are features that the government would be wise to learn from when adopting new features for the e-government platform. The private sector undoubtedly has more experience attracting and serving more of the population online than the government. Also, considering the speed in which government creates new features, it would be very beneficial for the citizen if the government gets it correct the first time in order to create trust and security, rather through countless revisions. To do so the public sector must take into account the successes and failures of the private sector to avoid unnecessary work in future projects. Using the mechanisms of policy diffusion usually used for public to public, e-government developers can use the mechanisms to analyze private sector innovations that can be adopted into the public sector.

The importance of the research of this thesis is that e-government stands to be the future of many government operations and will most likely be the primary source of government to citizen interaction. This paper cannot stress enough the scope of work that still needs to be done in order to bring the e-government of the United States to a level that offers more practical alternatives to traditional services and increase the quality of the services provided. Whether that be the services itself or the manner in which an individual citizen interacts and connects to the e-government platform in the future. The way to use this paper in the real world is to take a second look at the entire e-government platform in the United States and think how the suggestions provided in this thesis would fundamentally effect the platform as a whole. If the United States joins together their smart phone applications into a

"one-stop-shop-app" the likelihood of that a citizen will install that individual app increase and other services are now exposed to the citizen via a single application as opposed to dozens. Through the integration of Facebook and e-government the United States can through a single participant reach hundreds of their friends and expose them to the advantages of e-government through a free feature of the social networking site. This is a cost effective way to market e-government not only to the younger generation, but older generations as well as their presence on social networking sites has increased substantially over the years. Through a properly developed citizen profile users will be able to access all their services in one easy to use location. This will encourage the citizen to use new services by removing the burden of creating new profiles in different websites for each government service. The advantages based of these three simple yet transformative recommendations shows that e-government is not broken or fundamentally designed incorrectly. It is the failure of the United States government to see the potential that the private sector has discovered, which the purpose of this paper is to highlight that it is indeed possible to learn from the private sector online and apply it to e-government.

The limitations of my research are primarily the numbers on how much the government would stand to save if more individuals switched from traditional services to e-government services. Given what I know now it would have been beneficial to know exactly how much each citizen throughout the course of their life would cost the government in terms of providing traditional services in order to convey the amount of savings that could occur due to the increase of citizens using e-government. If a researcher was to expand the research, the future recommendation would be to look across a quantitative data in regard to how much of the budget would be saved for the US e-government combined with qualitative research if these three rejuvenation recommendations were to be implemented in order to determine user approval and expand on the next level of innovation.

It seems fair to conclude that the research overall has proven that the United States e-government platform is undoubtedly advanced but still has a long way to go. Regardless of the fact that some authors, such as previously mentioned Christopher C. Hood and Helen Margetts, (Hood and Margetts, 2007), who are reluctant to fully accept and recognize the benefits of the digital age, it is undisputable that governments as well as private business can utilize the contributions of the digital age if they carefully plan the future steps of their services online. The future development and growth of e-government has the potential to offer citizens plenty of new services and create a better atmosphere that will increase the range and effectiveness of the platform. My recommendation based on the findings of the thesis is that the United States e-government developers search the private sector continuously to find the best means to simplify the services for citizens using e-government services. The United States government must not fall too far behind from the private sector, but must allow the new innovations to be tested properly through their implementation. There will always be new innovative features developed for the online world and it is the duty of the government who has chosen to enter the field of e-government to keep up with the standards and norms citizens are accustomed to on the private sector side of the web.

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