
ELECTRONIC SERVICES, A REAL SUPPORT FOR CITIZENS AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Armenia ANDRONICEANU

Academy of Economic Studies, Piata Romana, 6, Bucharest, Romania
armenia.androniceanu@man.ase.ro

Abstract

Electronic services represent an integrated and indispensable component in a modern society, strongly characterised by a continuous process of transformation. From this perspective, the paper presents a fraction of the research results conducted by the author in order to identify some particular aspects related to the electronic services, the users and the main encountered difficulties. Using a specific research methodology, the obtained data, was analyzed based on direct and indirect correlations. The sample is composed of 75 subjects mainly citizens and the business environment representatives, that are electronic services users. The results obtained are showing the fact that the electronic services users should be approached by the providers differently, mainly because their perceptions and attitudes related to such services are not similar at all. Also, the research results, underlined the fact that there is a significant difference between the quality of the electronic services provided by the public administration and the other electronic delivered by different private organizations. According to our results, both the citizens and the business community representatives are unsatisfied by the electronic services and this paper is analyzing the main causes of such situations. The last part of the paper is containing the main conclusions and a few recommendations for increasing the accessibility of the citizens and the business environment, to the electronic services and the ways in which the public services networking can be improved for a sustainable development of the Romanian business environment and for a better citizen's satisfaction.

Keywords: electronic services, business environment, customer satisfaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 21st century is characterised by many challenges that are coming from the Information and Communication Technologies area (IT&C). However, low access to the electronic services can become a challenge for the people living in a modern society. As a result of not considering electronic services development a priority in their countries, the national governments are sometimes responsible for the escalation of regional differences between the states, particularly because some countries are investing huge amounts of money in the development of the online services and others don't. Supporting the electronic services development is becoming increasingly important for every country, both for their citizens and the business communities, mainly because it's offering a real support for their further development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The United Nations vision that is promoted by the publication " From E-Government to Connected Governance" is proving the fact that a progressive approach of electronic services is necessary (Chang, 2006). This new approach involves a shift from the traditional model of electronic services. It focuses on

providing e-Government, e-Services in an integrated concept (Cortada, 2001) which is labelled as "second-generation" of e-Government Services using IT&C to improve and to foster an effective communication between generations, in a modern society, based on knowledge and information (Colesca, 2003). The contribution of the development of IT&C foreign economies is associated with increased achievement and internal efficiency (Cunningham, 1999).

Therefore, the UN report underlines the need to transform the current services system into a new one, that is interconnected and integrated within an European electronic services system.

Different scholars have attracted attention on the impact of electronic services and proved the fact that it can be measured and evaluated in order to argue why such important investments in extending the electronic services platforms along the Europe should be supported.

As Richard Heeks argued in the e-Government Working Paper, the need for change in approaching services for the citizens and for the business environment, mainly by focusing on electronic services oriented on the customers needs and expectations, was also recognized by the European Commission (Heeks, 2006). Referring to the public services, Smith explained the fact, that there are two main ways for improving the role and the functions of the electronic public services nowadays. (Smith, 2006).

One of the options is by integrating the concept of "customer-centricity" and the another would be by reducing the administrative burden, the financial and the non-financial costs of the public services. As part of the electronic services, e-Government services should be well interconnected in order to provide the citizens and the business environment community the best and most reliable information, mainly because they are the consumers of the e-Government services.

The European Commission representatives underlined many times the fact that it's a real need to modify both the content and the orientation of the electronic services provided by the national governments. All of them must be centred on the customer needs and expectations (Ciocoiu, 2011).

These subjects are still on the top agenda of the European Commission and must be strongly supported both by the European institutions and the national governments. The member states are encouraged to conduct research and to set up policies for the electronic services development centring the customers satisfaction at the core of the changing process.

The following points are recommended by the European Commission: increasing the quality of electronic services and focusing on users satisfaction and the inclusion of electronic public services in the urban structures (Colesca, 2004; Abăluță, 2006). In 2008, the European Commissioner Siim Kallas recommended to all European states to invest in offering a large diversification of electronic services for the public and private customers and mentioned the following electronic services alternatives:

- eGep (eGovernment Economics Project) framework (2006); •eUSER, support for the design and delivery of costumer electronic services online, Conceptual and Analytical Framework eUSER - eGovernment (2004)
- Top-of-the-Web, User Satisfaction and Usage Survey of eGovernment Services (2004)

Other suggestions taken by the EC, that are highly relevant for the development of measurement instruments include projects such as Sibis and Church (Burlacu, 2011).

Although not converted into reference values from year to year, the EU-sponsored projects provide basic methodological approaches and relevant indicators to be considered for measuring customer satisfaction in using electronic services, mainly e-Government services provided for the citizens and the business environment.

Starting from this perspective, the next section is presenting the results of one of the authors research studies about electronic services delivered by public and private organizations to the citizens and the business environment from Bucharest.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main objective of the research was to measure the degree of using the electronic services by the citizens and the private organizations employees.

The specific objective was to measure the satisfaction of the business environment representatives and the citizens related to the quality of the electronic services provided by different public and private organizations.

The survey was structured in two modules using two questioners. Each module was focused on a crucial issue, and consisted in a set of 17 related questions.

The sample was composed of citizens and people working in private companies, located in Bucharest. The total number of the subjects was 75, aged between 16 and 54, that are living in Bucharest for more then a year.

The structure of the sample is presented in Table 1. As we can see there, the sample structure is balanced on each category in order to get us the possibility to find out the particular aspects of each of them, in terms of accessing electronic services.

All of them declared that they are using electronic services, in general and e-Government services, especially, in different ways for different needs or reasons.

TABLE 1 - THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF THE SAMPLE

Sample (N = 75)		
Gender	▪ Female	40 %
	▪ Male	60%
Age	▪ 16-24 years	52 %
	▪ 25-34 years	30.7%
	▪ 35-44 years	12 %
	▪ 44-54 years	5,3 %
Education	▪ Primary	17,3 %
	▪ Secondary	30.7 %
	▪ Higher education	52 %
Occupation	▪ Students	41.3 %
	▪ Housewife / husband	2.7%
	▪ Employee or self-employed	53.3%
	▪ Retired	2.7 %

The data presented in this paper are the result of using some qualitative research methods in order to measure the customers satisfaction and the impact of both electronic services and Internet Services. For example, the Internet profile of the users was approached from three perspectives: experience in using Internet services; intensity of the Internet usage measured by the frequency of respondents using the Internet and the average number of hours per day, while the respondents are online; the purposes of using the Internet Services; (eg e-Banking, e-Commerce, etc).

4. ANALYSIS AND MAIN FINDINGS

In order to analyze the usage intensity of electronic services and mainly Internet Services, the users were asked how often he/she used the Internet in the last 3 months and how many minutes or hours they are using it every day. As we can see in Table 2, more than 65% are using Internet Services almost every day.

TABLE 2 - THE FREQUENCY OF USING ELECTRONIC SERVICES

Frequency	Number and Percent	
Every day or almost every day	49	65.3
At least once a week	17	22.7
At least once a month	9	12.0
Total	75	100.0

Regarding the time spent by respondents on the internet for using different electronic services, the research results are presented in Figure 1.

The people included in the sample mentioned that they are using Internet Services for personal reasons, namely: social networks, check the e-mail, e-Banking services.

Therefore, respondents were asked how often, they have used other electronic services provided by the Internet, in the past 12 months, and for what purpose. They mentioned several purposes, such as: (1) to

purchase different goods and services, books, CDs, tickets to concerts, trips; (2) to manage their bank accounts; (3) to access the social networks (Facebook, Google Plus, Tweeter, LinkedIn, Hi5); (4) to pay their taxes to the local public administration or (5) to get information about public or private organizations, etc.

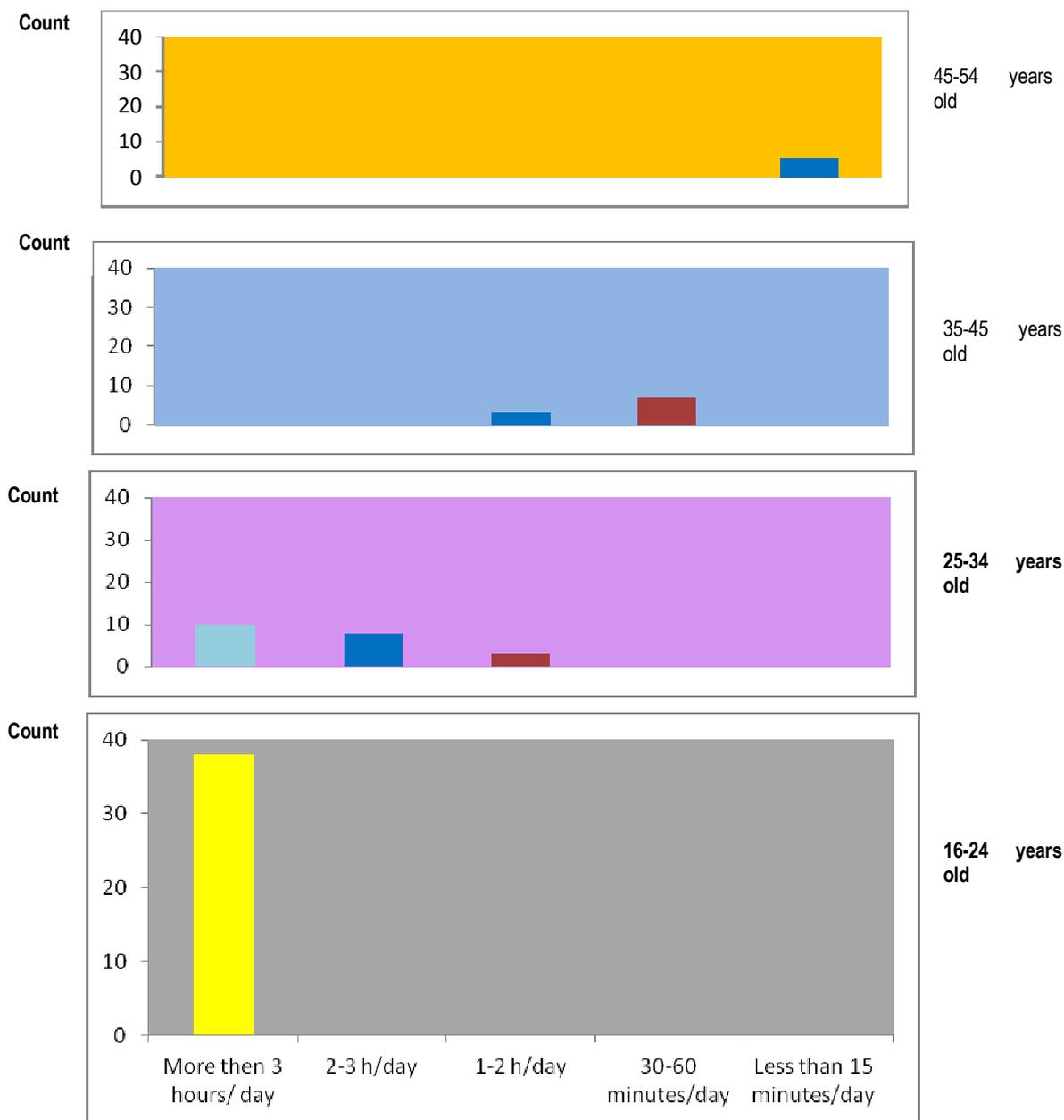


FIGURE 1 - TIME SPENT FOR ACCESSING THE ELECTRONIC SERVICES THROUGH THE INTERNET

We found out that a high proportion of business environment representatives (48%) regularly used electronic services in the last 12 months, at least for e-Commerce, e-Banking and e-Government services.

Approximately 42.7% used online platforms and social network every day. Only 10.7% of respondents do not use the above at all. It is true that participants in this study are younger.

Obviously, there are respondents who do not engage in such online conduct. People with higher education from the business segment, professionally active, are typical users of the e-Commerce or e-Banking. They noted that e-Banking has become a common activity.

On the other hand, the research highlighted some differences between the opinions and the satisfaction of both groups of subjects involved in our survey in terms of electronic services provided through the Internet platforms.

As we can see in Tables 3, the users have different needs, perceptions and expectations and they are convinced that electronic services are indispensable to their daily life and should be developed and diversified. We can also notice, the fact that there is a high number of users in our sample that are not using the electronic services, mainly because they don't have enough trust in them.

So, the providers have to invest more in convincing the customers that the electronic services can offer them several advantages and to motivate them for that.

TABLE 3 - THE FRAME OF USING ELECTRONIC SERVICES BY THE CITIZENS INCLUDED IN THE SAMPLE

Electronic services	The use of electronic services by the citizens				Total
	Never	At least once but not every month	At least once but not every week	At least once a week but not every day	
Buying electronic tickets	57	15	3	-	75
Buying personal goods	39	18	8	10	75
Buying other electronic services	46	23	6	-	75

On the other hand the subjects coming from business environment appreciated that they are using electronic services for their professional interest: advertising, recruitment, selection, information, communication, financial operations, taxes payments, other services.

As we can see in Table 4 the frequency of the electronic services usage by the business people differs in comparison with the younger users.

Table 4 is showing some examples about how much the business community from Bucharest is appreciating the electronic services and applications for their information and business communication processes. As we can see, they are using electronic services very often and that means that many of them are at the level of their expectations and satisfy their business needs. Many of them identify the electronic services like a part of their business processes, with an important impact on their business costs. We have noticed that the subjects

are satisfied with these electronic services, provided by the Internet platforms in use and by online applications, which means that they really meet their needs. More than 69 % are really satisfied and only 29.3% said that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

TABLE 4 - THE ELECTRONIC SERVICES USED BY THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

Electronic services	Number of the business environment representatives using electronic services							Total
	Every day	At least once a month but not every week	At least once but not every month	At least once a week but not every week	At least once a week, but not every day	Every day, almost every day	Never	
Recruitment, advertising, selection, tenders, taxes payments	67	8	-	-	-	-	-	75
Administration of the bank account	52	-	23	-	-	-	-	75
Business communication	69	-	5	1	-	-	-	75
Business information	16	-	-	-	29	25	5	75

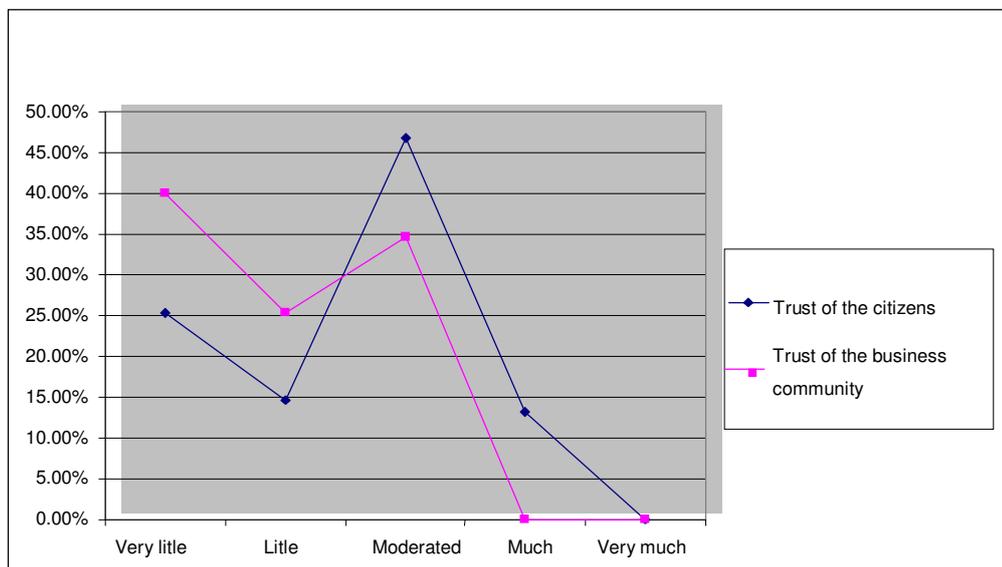


FIGURE 2 - DEGREE OF TRUST IN ELECTRONIC SERVICES

We also studied the trust that the users have in electronic services. We measured the trust degree on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "very little" and 5 "very much". As we can see in Figure 2, 35% of the business community and 46.7% of the citizens included in the sample, are saying that they have moderate confidence in electronic services. Between 25% and 40% of the questioned subjects do not have trust in the electronic

services at all. Both groups appreciated the electronic services and are using them many times a months. However, they still have low confidence.

The analysis was extended to the electronic services provided by the public administration. The subjects were asked about the extent to which they are satisfied with the quality of services provided by public administration. Figure 3 is presenting the results obtained.

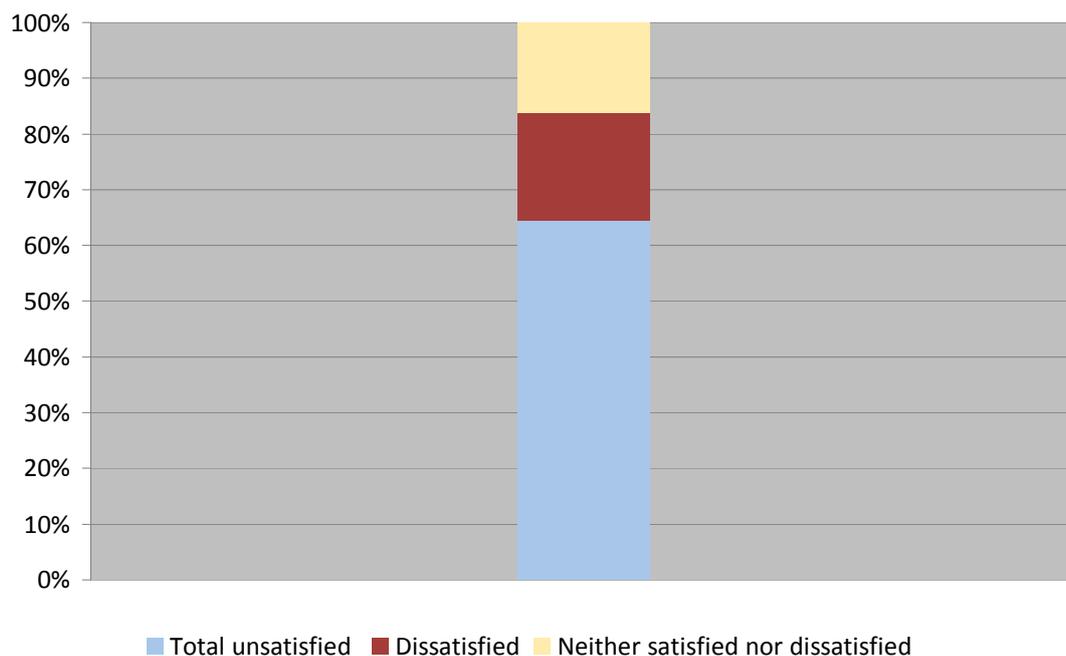


FIGURE 3 - DEGREE OF SATISFACTION CONCERNING ELECTRONIC PUBLIC SERVICES

Respondents perceived quality of the electronic services provided by the public administration like a problematic issue. More than 80% are unsatisfied and the rest of the subjects are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. This percent (84%) is discouraging and is showing a real need for reforming the entire electronic public services system.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion of this survey, the electronic services provided by the Internet are becoming an useful tool used daily by a growing number of people, even if they don't have enough trust in them. A comparative analysis is underlining the fact that it is a huge difference between the commercial electronic services and the e-Government services, meaning that the second category is not enough oriented to the public and private customers needs and expectations. The general satisfaction with e-Government is quite modest to very low. As the researchers argued, the electronic services users differ in attitudes and experiences. However, based on accumulated data, it appears that traditional demographic factors such as age, education, gender and

occupation are influencing the frequency of using electronic services. But even for these categories an issue related to their trust in such services still exists. Most of them are convinced by the fact that electronic services will become more and more part of their life, but they are expecting to receive more safety and quality electronic services. Respondents are not satisfied with the lack of easy access to information online. They would like to get things as quickly, easily and efficiently as possible. They want both to solve problems as quickly as possible using electronic services and to save time and money.

As our research demonstrated, there is a huge space for improvements and the business community from Bucharest is expecting to have more diversified electronic services included in an interoperable networking. There is also a strong need to develop the trust of the Romanian customers in electronic services which is one of the key factors for increasing the number of the electronic services users. That could be possible if public and private providers will cooperate in designing their electronic services solutions like part of an integrated electronic services system, centred on the public and private users interests and expectations.

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