

The purpose of this project is to improve the understanding of how catastrophic events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, impact the availability of e-government (electronic government) services and/or the participation or non-participation of citizens in these services. In other words, this project endeavors to determine whether or not a catastrophic event like the Covid-19 pandemic will affect the government services offered and/or change citizen preferences to use these public services provided over the Internet, or rather make personal visits to public agencies or use traditional mail to conclude their business.

The specific goal of this project is to develop a model to better understand the impact of wide-ranging catastrophic events on the supply for and demand of e-government services and to provide a framework and guidelines for public decision makers for managing and responding to such events so as to help maintain and perhaps improve the e-government services that are most needed and demanded by the affected populace.

E-government initiatives are important for a country or locality in supporting its mission to serve citizens in a transparent, efficient, and fair manner, and in times of life-threatening crisis provide guidance and support. However, there has always been a problem of non-participation, as a substantial number of citizens or other residents in a country or geographical area do not avail themselves of the e-government services being offered. This leads to higher public expenses because of personnel and time requirements to provide in-person services. This may be of particular consequence during and following catastrophic events that disrupt the social system and the normal functioning of government services, and create an environment where decision makers must make and implement consequential decisions under enormous time pressure.

To attain our goal it is necessary to identify the particular features of catastrophic events that may lead to changes in the needs for e-government services, and that may affect the participation or non-participation of citizens in these services. Achieving our goal also requires identifying factors in catastrophic events that affect the delivery of e-government services and possible means of overcoming negative bearings of such factors.

In order to accomplish our goal both qualitative and quantitative methodology will be used. The case study, conducted in four local government organizations, will use semi-structured interviews and serve to identify the most important issues arising from a catastrophic event and how they affect acceptance, demand, and delivery of specific e-government services, and will also be used to construct a preliminary conceptual framework. This framework will then be validated and refined by data collected via the survey. The results will also be used in developing a high-level theoretical model to provide direction for future research projects in this area.

Currently, the preponderance of research related to e-government focuses on factors supporting acceptance of e-government services, while there is a scarcity of research on the limitations of e-government and why it does not always produce the expected results. In particular, the effects of wide-ranging catastrophic events with a global reach, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, on participation or non-participation of citizens or other residents in e-government have not been researched. Also delivery of e-government services during and after catastrophic events has not been suitably addressed. To provide effective e-government services in the aftermath of catastrophic events, both the supply side and the demand side need to be better understood. On the supply side, it is important to recognize the factors that may have a negative bearing on maintaining essential services, and what means are available to deal with these issues. On the demand side, it is important to identify the specific services most needed under the changed circumstances, as well as understand what may induce people to make adequate use of the services available to them, i.e. participate in e-government.

The primary outcomes of this project include a framework that explains how specific factors resulting from catastrophic events impact the need for, the delivery of, and the citizen acceptance of e-government services. Primary outcomes also include specific guidelines to public decision makers for managing e-government services during and in the aftermath of catastrophic events to help maintain and improve the services most needed and demanded. Primary outcomes furthermore include a high-level theoretical model explaining the impact of catastrophic events on e-government services, which may serve as guidance for future research. These outcomes will be published in academic papers in high-quality international journals. Preliminary results will be presented at international conferences. It is expected that at least four academic papers will be published in high-quality international journals. Thus, this project will expand the repository of knowledge and provide foundation and inspiration for future research projects.