

Revisiting Citizen Attitudes in Digital Governance: The Interplay of Trust and Satisfaction

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Abstract

Smart government services have emerged as a cornerstone of digital transformation, aiming to enhance efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement. This study investigates the relationship between citizen trust and satisfaction in the context of smart government services in Malaysia. Data were collected from 251 Malaysians who engaged with government services via Facebook, and the results were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis. Findings reveal a significant and positive relationship between trust and citizen satisfaction, suggesting that higher levels of trust lead to greater satisfaction with smart services. The study underscores the importance of transparency, accountability, and security in shaping trust, which in turn drives satisfaction and adoption. These insights are particularly relevant for policymakers and government agencies seeking to increase citizen participation in digital governance.

Keywords: smart government, citizen trust, citizen satisfaction, Malaysia, e-government adoption

1. Introduction

The rapid diffusion of digital technologies has reshaped governance models worldwide, giving rise to smart government services designed to improve efficiency, accountability, and citizen-centric service delivery (Bannister & Connolly, 2020). Such services rely on digital platforms to reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies while fostering transparency and public trust. However, despite their potential, the success of smart government services depends heavily on citizen trust, as distrust can undermine adoption and long-term sustainability (Susanti et al., 2023).

Malaysia, aligned with its digital transformation agenda under the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL), has been proactive in rolling out smart services such as MyEG and ePerolehan to enhance accessibility and reduce administrative burden (MDEC, 2022). These services have transformed access to government functions by enabling online transactions, procurement, and licensing renewals, particularly via mobile



and web platforms. Despite these developments, challenges remain in ensuring citizens' sustained trust and satisfaction, as issues related to security, privacy, and transparency continue to influence perceptions of digital governance (Hassan et al., 2020).

This study addresses this gap by empirically examining the relationship between trust and satisfaction in smart government services in Malaysia. It highlights the factors shaping citizen trust, such as transparency, accountability, and data security, and evaluates their influence on satisfaction. The findings provide crucial insights for strengthening smart service adoption in Malaysia and other emerging digital economies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Citizen Trust in Smart Government

Citizen trust is foundational for the success of smart government initiatives. Trust reflects confidence in government reliability, integrity, and competence in managing digital platforms (Hartanti et al., 2021). Concerns over cybersecurity, data privacy, and the potential misuse of information have been identified as barriers to adoption (Albashrawi & Motiwalla, 2021). Governments that implement transparent policies, ensure accountability, and provide clear communication are more likely to gain citizen trust (Guenduez et al., 2020).

2.2 Citizen Satisfaction in Smart Government

Satisfaction reflects citizens' evaluation of the quality, accessibility, and usability of digital services. Studies highlight usability and accessibility as critical determinants of satisfaction, particularly in contexts where citizens expect seamless interfaces and reliable access across devices (Almuraqab et al., 2021). Service quality, including timeliness and accuracy, also strongly influences satisfaction (Chohan & Hu, 2020). Research indicates that higher satisfaction enhances not only continued use but also trust in digital governance platforms (Mensah et al., 2021).

2.3 Relationship Between Trust and Satisfaction

The interplay between trust and satisfaction has been widely documented, with evidence suggesting that trust acts as both a precursor and outcome of satisfaction. Citizens who trust government platforms are more likely to feel satisfied with the services provided, while satisfaction with service quality reinforces trust (Leroux & Pupion, 2022). Transparency, privacy, and accountability strengthen this virtuous cycle by enhancing both constructs simultaneously (Jaradat et al., 2018; Ma, 2021). This reciprocal relationship highlights the importance of managing trust to secure satisfaction and adoption.

3. Methodology

This study employed a web-based survey to collect responses from Malaysians who had used smart government services via Facebook. Official government Facebook pages were

selected to host the survey, ensuring accessibility and representation. A total of 251 usable responses were obtained.

The instrument was divided into two sections: demographics and measures of trust and satisfaction. Established scales from prior studies were adapted, and content validity was assured through a pre-test with expert reviewers. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values exceeding the threshold of 0.70 for both constructs (trust $\alpha = 0.812$; satisfaction $\alpha = 0.842$).

The analysis involved descriptive statistics to profile respondents, Pearson correlation to test associations, and regression analysis to examine the predictive effect of trust on satisfaction.

4. Findings

4.1 Demographics

Table 1: Respondent profile

Category	Items	Per cent (%)
Gender	Male	71%
	Female	29%
Age	20-29	11%
	30-39	34%
	40-49	43%
	50 and above	12%
	Total	100%
Education	High School	10%
	Diploma	19%
	Bachelor's degree	62%
	Postgraduate	9%
Technologies used for Smart Government Services	Smart Phone	68%
	Tablets	12%
	Computers	20%

The sample was 71% male and 29% female, with the majority aged 30–49 years (77%). Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (62%) and accessed smart government services primarily via smartphones (68%), underscoring the importance of mobile optimisation in service delivery.

4.2 Measurement Reliability

Table 2: Reliability Results

Variable	No of Item	Cronbach's Alpha
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Trust	5	0.812
Citizen Satisfaction	4	0.842

Cronbach's alpha values for trust (0.812) and satisfaction (0.842) indicated high internal consistency, confirming that the measures were reliable.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3: Variables Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Trust	1.00	5.00	4.107	0.551
Citizen Satisfaction	1.00	5.00	4.227	0.702

Mean scores revealed relatively high levels of trust ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.55$) and satisfaction ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.70$) on a 5-point Likert scale, suggesting broadly positive perceptions of smart services.

4.4 Correlation and Regression Analysis

Table 4: Correlation and Regression Analysis

Variables	Correlation (r)	Trust → Citizen Satisfaction (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Trust – Citizen Satisfaction	0.474**	0.621	0.097	6.247	0.002

Note: $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed) indicates significance

Correlation results indicated a significant positive relationship between trust and satisfaction ($r = 0.474$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis further confirmed that trust significantly predicted satisfaction ($\beta = 0.621$, $t = 6.25$, $p < 0.01$), accounting for a substantial proportion of variance. These findings provide empirical evidence that citizen trust is a key determinant of satisfaction in smart government services.

5. Discussion

The findings affirm the central role of trust in shaping citizen satisfaction with smart government services. Consistent with prior studies (Mensah et al., 2021; Susanti et al., 2023), the results suggest that when citizens perceive services as transparent, secure, and

reliable, they report higher satisfaction. The prominence of mobile technology in accessing services highlights the need for mobile-first strategies in digital governance.

The study also reinforces the reciprocal nature of trust and satisfaction. While trust enhances satisfaction, satisfaction derived from high-quality and accessible services reinforces trust, creating a cycle that strengthens adoption and long-term engagement (Leroux & Pupion, 2022). This dynamic underscores the importance of governments investing not only in secure and transparent systems but also in continuous user experience improvements.

In the Malaysian context, where digital literacy varies across demographics, strategies to increase inclusivity, such as multilingual interfaces, simplified navigation, and digital literacy campaigns, could further strengthen both trust and satisfaction.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between citizen trust and satisfaction in Malaysia's smart government services. The results confirm that trust significantly enhances satisfaction, underscoring the need for governments to prioritise transparency, accountability, and security in service design.

The key takeaway for policymakers is that trust is the foundation of satisfaction. Efforts to safeguard personal data, communicate transparently, and provide responsive feedback mechanisms will not only build trust but also elevate satisfaction and adoption. From a practical standpoint, mobile optimisation should be a priority given the heavy reliance on smartphones for accessing services.

For future research, expanding the scope to include other variables such as perceived usefulness, digital literacy, and cultural values could provide deeper insights into citizen attitudes towards digital governance.

By reinforcing trust and ensuring satisfaction, smart government services can achieve their full potential in enhancing citizen engagement, transparency, and public sector efficiency.

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