Conceptual paper

Omnichannel strategy and the distribution of public services in Spain

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ABSTRACT

There are numerous benefits linked to application of e-Government, both for public organizations (greater efficiency, costs savings, etc.) and for citizens (accessibility, availability, etc.). These have brought about a generalized commitment of most governments to its implementation.

Although the population usually tends to be very satisfied with these new technological products, their adoption rates have stabilized. At the same time, the levels of use of traditional interaction channels have remained the same or, depending on the aim, have even increased. The main reason for this is, perhaps, to be found in citizens seeing these new channels as a supplement to traditional channels and not as an alternative, which can substitute them.

In order to achieve a generalized acceptation and use of e-Government, it is necessary to start out from knowing the citizens' needs. The marketing field has proposed different strategies to respond to this challenge. These range from multichannel management to multichannel marketing and an omnichannel experience.

This work presents the current situation of the development of e-Government in Spain, showing the real applicability and degree of efficacy of the previously mentioned strategies to increase the citizens' rate of use of e-Government, compared to traditional management channels.

Estrategia multicanal y distribución de servicios públicos en España

RESUMEN

Hay numerosos beneficios ligados a la aplicación del e-gobierno, tanto para organizaciones de carácter público (mejora en la eficiencia, ahorro de costes, etc.) como para la ciudadanía (accesibilidad, disponibilidad, etc.). Ello ha supuesto un generalizado compromiso de la mayoría de los gobiernos en su implantación.

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Aunque la población habitualmente está satisfecha con estos nuevos productos tecnológicos, sus ratios de adopción parecen estabilizarse. Al mismo tiempo, los niveles de uso de los canales de interacción tradicionales han permanecido o, dependiendo del objetivo, incluso han aumentado. La principal razón para esto último es, quizá, que los ciudadanos encuentran los nuevos canales como complementarios de los tradicionales y no como una alternativa que los sustituye.

Para alcanzar una aceptación generalizada y uso del e-gobierno, es necesario comenzar conociendo las necesidades de los ciudadanos. Desde la disciplina del marketing se han propuesto diferentes estrategias para responder a este reto. Las opciones propuestas van desde la gestión de un marketing multicanal para finalizar con una experiencia multicanal.

Este trabajo presenta la actual situación de desarrollo del e-gobierno en España, mostrando la aplicabilidad real y el grado de eficacia de las estrategias previamente mencionadas para incrementar el ratio de uso de la ciudadanía del e-gobierno, en comparación con los canales tradicionales de gestión.

Introduction

Business literature accepts that there are two basic strategies to improve the services stemming from incorporating Information and Communications Technology (ICT): back-end and front-end. While the former refers to the degree to which the service is submitted to reengineering from an offline conception to an e-service, the latter concerns improvement strategies in the communication and distribution of the service provision (Germanakos, Samaras, & Christodoulou, 2005).

Back-end was developed a few years ago when studying the redesigning and redefining of public services. Currently, most strategies are centered on the channels used; that is to say, front-end. To do so, Public Administrations have a wide variety of channels, which enable interaction with citizens (Germanakos et al., 2005; Teerling & Pieterson, 2010; Van de Wijngaert, Pieterson, & Teerling, 2011).

In the middle of the 1990s, government agencies began to have high hopes about the potential of developing electronic channels, fostering their use both to inform and to provide services (Ebbers, Pieterson, & Noordman, 2008; Teerling & Pieterson, 2010). The consolidation of ICTs at most levels of society, along with the fact that those who use them frequently are more inclined to use e-Government services (Gauld, Goldfinch, & Horsburgh, 2010), brought about a forecast that the initiatives linked to its development would be successful.

Among the reasons put forward to defend digital channels as a formula for improving the provision of public services is the cost-efficiency relation, their speed, storage capacity and selectivity (Ebbers et al., 2008; Van de Wijngaert et al., 2011). According to the Secretary of State of Public Adminstrations (2013), in the Spanish case, these advantages coalesce in economic benefits by reducing administrative costs (in the period 2006–2012, this meant a saving of 19,099 million €), the transformation resulting from the application of e-Government, as well as a decrease in the environmental footprint (administration bodies account for around 18% of the paper used in Spain).

In 2012, more than 500 million procedures were registered with the General Administration of the State (AGE). Approximately, 365 were registered electronically, with an estimated saving of 28,500 millions € (Fundación Telefónica, 2014). All this has brought about Spain's commitment to developing e-Government. Its aim is to offer 100% of public services online and even reduce the use of classic distribution channels.

It is assumed that benefits linked to e-Government will be automatically generated once the technology has been developed and an appropriate access has been made possible for citizens. The possible reality-linked limitations of this approach are unknown. Although the use of online channels has grown in recent years, on certain occasions, citizens continue opting for traditional distribution channels to satisfy their needs (Van de Wijngaert et al., 2011).

Governments need to provide multiple channels of contact with citizens depending on the task, while ensuring the consistency of the information and service response among the channels (Reddick & Turner, 2012). The existence of multiple channels is a challenge for organizations. They have to integrate them and manage them (Dalla Pozza, 2014).

The difference between how governments wish citizens to use electronic channels and their actual use of them means that there is a gap between the preferences of the two agents related to the management of distribution channels (Ebbers et al., 2008). This gap is produced, to a certain extent, by managers' lack of understanding concerning the citizens' intentions and behaviors when faced with multiple channels.

Citizens simply seem to add digital channels to the service channels instead of substituting the traditional channels by electronic services. This is why it is proposed that the Administration must continue supporting in-person channels while strengthening the electronic channel, as both ways of dealing with Public Administration are supplementary and substitutable (Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas & la Calidad de los Servicios, 2014; Observatorio de la Calidad de los Servicios Públicos, 2012).

Faced with this scenario, the challenge of the governments is to effectively satisfy the needs of citizens, both in costs and

in a complex context with multiple distribution channels. This requires government agencies to align the design and implementation of needs to their multichannel strategy (Van de Wijngaert et al., 2011).

It is highly probable that their multichannel strategies will be guided by rational arguments linked to cost-efficiency, without bearing in mind the problems, preferences and characters, which guide people's decisions when they are faced with the possibility of choosing at a specific moment (Ebbers et al., 2008). An appropriate design and implementation of the channels based on the citizens' behaviors is more likely to result in greater satisfaction. This would effectively mean that Public Administrations could benefit from the reductions of costs and the rest of the benefits linked to services provision, which are associated with them (Pieterson & Van Dijk, 2007).

Van de Wijngaert et al. (2011) show that socio-psychological factors are much more crucial in the management of distribution channels than the technology itself, as they are able to direct citizens toward online channels. These authors identify four categories of instruments which government agencies can use to influence the choice of the channel: (1) communication instruments characterized by the transfer of information from governments to citizens, (2) legal or restrictive instruments, which seek to change the citizen's behavior through rules, regulations and restrictions, (3) economic instruments aimed at changing the citizens' behavior through financial incentives, and (4) service or product instruments, which include the service's physical evidence and its reliability.

Other works suggest that adopting digital channels could be increased by: (1) the good functioning of the web services, (2) the citizen's recognition of the web services' possibilities, (3) support for the experience of the Internet as a crucial factor in the online channel being chosen, (4) continually showing that e-services provide more value than services offered through traditional channels and, finally, (5) the generation of trust in its use (Teerling & Pieterson, 2009, 2010).

The citizens' continued preference for traditional channels is unwanted from the perspective of government agencies. They continue seeking a shift of citizens to e-Government. Given the significant sums of money invested in the distribution of public services in general and of e-Government in particular, it is extremely important to go more thoroughly into knowing what determines its effectiveness. This is especially the case considering that many e-Government projects have failed (Reddick & Turner, 2012).

As Public Administrations have realized that citizens still prefer traditional distribution channels for specific services, governments must rethink their multichannel marketing strategy (Teerling & Pieterson, 2009). Now that the services are already offered online, this is centered on at least partly moving citizens to the websites and on synchronizing their use of different channels (Teerling & Pieterson, 2010; Van de Wijngaert et al., 2011). It is because of all this that this current work's aim is, setting out from secondary data, to go thoroughly into the knowledge of the elements, which are behind the citizens' preference for the public services'distribution channels in Spain.

Multichannel management and access to public services

Nowadays, studies from numerous countries show how government agencies still offer many of their services through traditional channels. This is problematic for them, as the cost-efficiency relation means that electronic channels are ideal (Ebbers et al., 2008).

Multichannel management, multichannel marketing and the omnichannel experience

Citizens use different contact channels, depending on the usefulness and the gratification that they receive (Reddick & Turner, 2012). Developing different channels separately for the same service (*multichannel provision*) can lead to inconsistencies in formats and interfaces. To overcome this situation, the different channels should be coordinated and integrated (Germanakos et al., 2005). The management of marketing channels can be used effectively to increase the use of e-Government without negatively affecting the current level of satisfaction with the service provided (Teerling & Pieterson, 2010).

In this sense, multichannel management refers to the integrated and coordinated development of the channels, which organizations use for contacts and exchanges with citizens with a view to increase their level of acquisition, development and retention (Dalla Pozza, 2014). Government agencies must pay special attention to an integration of the different channels and a consistent response, ensuring that this is the same for citizens irrespective of the channel selected (Reddick & Turner, 2012).

Multichannel marketing is centered on influencing the consumer's choice of channel

Through this approach, Government agencies develop strategies to guide citizens to the most cost-efficient channels (Van de Wijngaert et al., 2011). A multichannel and multidevice service provision will increase the level of inclusion and access to the services offered, as these will be available at any moment and in any place (Germanakos et al., 2005). Government agencies have different instruments at their disposal, which can be used to change multichannel behavior (Teerling & Pieterson, 2009).

An omnichannel experience can be defined as that in which consumers meet a retailer in a physical store, online and through the social media. The integration of online and traditional channels is a vital component of any effective omnichannel model. The real competitive advantage, which arises from the development of this kind of strategy, depends on the distributor's skill in developing the consumer's genuine and integrated experience among all the channels and contact points (IBM, 2014).

Consumers will reward retail distributors, which offer a genuine omnichannel experience with loyalty, a greater "portfolio share" and by making positive references through the social media. 85% of purchasers expect to have a faultless

experience in all the channels, 86% want to use technology when they buy and 50% want to use multidevices.

A genuine omnichannel experience is made up of three vital elements (IBM, 2014):

- "Faultless" integration between all the channels, enabling the consumer to move fluidly between the different contact points.
- Transparent data visibility, which allows a really personalized offer to satisfy each of the consumers' purchase preferences.
- An operative model centered on the consumers to ensure that each of them has an easy and comfortable shopping experience, which reflects their lifestyles and their technological capability.

The multichannel strategy in public services provision

The studies centered on analyzing the channel's characteristics, which determine the user's preference, and identify quality, convenience, cost and perceived risk as the relevant factors. Nevertheless, these works do not jointly analyze the channels' attributes at the different stages of the shopping process (Gensler, Verhoef, & Böhm, 2012).

The literature, which studies why citizens begin contacts with the Government through different channels, identify four factors (Reddick & Turner, 2012): (1) the digital gap, (2) the nature of the interaction, (3) the value of the public service, and (4) satisfaction with the service provided. This is why, in accordance with Reddick and Turner (2012), choosing the channel is not a matter of a binary preference. Now that an interaction with the Government, involving at least two or three channels, has become routine, it is perhaps a question of the sequence of channels. This is the reason why different models have been opted for in order to jointly analyze the different Public Administration distribution channels.

The Media Richness theory describes the different characteristics of the means and tasks to be carried out, as well as the supposed adjustment between them. It proposes that the means are differentiated in their capability of offering immediate feedback, language variety, personalization and multiple channels or tasks. This theory establishes that the different tasks require different means in order for the communication to be more effective. The result of this is that personal contact is the richest, followed by the phone, emails and the web (Pieterson & Van Dijk, 2007). Web pages can be considered moderately rich. They offer the possibility of linking up different elements, and have language variety and personalization but lack the possibility of immediate feedback (Ebbers et al., 2008).

In the area of Public Administrations, a channel can be defined as the formula employed by users to contact them, or for Public Administrations to contact their users, with the aim of acquiring or providing public services (Germanakos et al., 2005). This difference about who takes the intiative is a fundamental variable in the control of the interaction, as is the fact that the interaction can have two directions.

In this line, Ebbers et al. (2008) develop a model based on two axes to analyze the interaction: (1) the initiation of the relation (by the user and/or by the Government), and (2) the

Table 1 – Relation between the characteristics of the problem and the channel used.		
Level of complexity	Low equivocality	High equivocality
Low	Prefers the Internet	Prefers phone
Moderate	Trusts Internet use	Prefers face-to-face or phone
High	Low Internet use (willingness to do if explained how)	Prefers face-to-face

Source: Ebbers et al. (2008).

interaction (one-directional when information is transmitted to another party, or two-directional). According to these axes, the following types of services can be identified: (1) speech, in which the organization sends information to the citizens, (2) register, in which the citizens send information to the organization, (3) consultation, in which the user seeking data connects with an information source and although the organization offers the information, the users can utilize the data that they require, (4) conversation, in which the users require information, which is supplied to them according to their needs, and (5) transaction that are exchanges in which the financial aspect plays a relevant role. Depending on these axes, the channel that the citizens will prefer in each case can be established (Table 1).

Van de Wijngaert et al. (2011) propose that citizens first determine their choice of channel, this being a specific decision of people to employ a particular channel. Second, the citizens have a general guideline of channel use behavior over time. Thirdly, the citizens unconsciously evaluate their channel use.

Gensler et al. (2012) use a model based on usefulness to explain the consumers' channel choice during the different stages of the shopping process. The channel's usefulness in the end determines the likelihood of a consumer selecting a channel. The greater the usefulness, the greater the likelihood of the channel being chosen. The usefulness of the channel reflects the channel's attributes: experience and the spillover effect. The experience effect takes place when the use of the channel increases the likelihood of the consumer using it next time.

On the other hand, the spillover effect occurs when the likelihood of choosing a channel during a stage of the shopping process affects the probability of selecting it during the next stage. If we bear in mind the experience and spillover effects, convenience ceases to have a significant effect on the consumer's choice of channel. Gensler et al. (2012) verify how the experience effect and the spillover effect influence the consumer's intention of choosing a channel over and above its attributes. Though the experience effect could be identified as a type of loyalty, this effect does not require a higher result of specific attributes (Gensler et al., 2012).

Finally, Neslin et al. (2014) develop a framework, which combines three major elements according to their usefulness. This takes into account the decisions of the firms (it combines elements typical of the location of establishments and the range presented), the consumer's search behavior (managing

complexity compared to convenience), the consumer's choice decisions (the sequence of the process of choosing brands and channels) and the consumer's learning (the evolution of the decision processes of the brand and channel).

Behavior of citizens accessing public services

Though citizens generally support e-Government, research shows that many are reluctant to the transactional use of some of the most sophisticated e-Government applications (Gauld et al., 2010). Numerous works indicate that although Internet use for public services provision has increased, the use of traditional methods (phone, personal contact, etc.) remains high (Ebbers et al., 2008).

Different research has established how users prefer to utilize the Internet for problems that are not very complex and equivocal, such as consulting, information searching and registering (Ebbers et al., 2008; Pieterson & Van Dijk, 2007; Reddick & Turner, 2012). Citizens still have a strong preference for using traditional channels (phone and personal interaction) in their interactions, especially for the purpose of conversation and solving complex problems. Due to this, it is likely that these kinds of traditional channels will continue being popular in the future, as no change in the trend has yet been noted.

Diverse factors explain this persisting preference of citizens for traditional channels:(1) they have different characteristics and appropriateness for specific tasks, (2) they may not need the services offered online, (3) they are often unable to find the services, (4) they are frequently guided in their choice of channels by other factors, such as ease of use, habits and emotions, (5) the design of electronic channels might not satisfy their needs (Teerling & Pieterson, 2010; Van de Wijngaert et al., 2011).

Citizens seem to have adopted a behavior guideline in which they use electronic services as an initial preference, but if the information or transaction required is not routine, they opt for in-person contact, the phone or emails, even though these channels have lower levels of satisfaction (Reddick & Turner, 2012).

The multichannel management of public services. The case of Spain

Information sources used

Different reports and series issued by various sources, which monitor the use of Electronic Administration in Spain, have been used to find out about the citizens' behavior. These include the Center for Sociological Research (CIS), the Observatory of the Electronic Administration of the General Administration of the State, the State Agency for the Evaluation of Public Policies and Quality of Services, the National Observatory of Telecommunications and the Information Society, Fundación Telefónica, Eurostat and the National Institute of Statistics. Those data that enable us to explain perception, satisfaction, shortcomings or problems, and the preference and use of the different public services' distribution channels will be extracted from these reports.

Current situation in Spain

In Spain, Internet is one of the most used ways by citizens to interact with Public Administrations, especially to get appointments for different administrative procedures. 65.2% have obtained information from the web pages of Public Administrations in the last year and 42.2% have carried out procedures with the Administration via a web page (Observatorio Nacional de las Telecomunicaciones & de la Sociedad de la Información, 2013).

Eurostat presents a similar situation, in which the main reason for interacting with e-Government is to get information (41% of the total of people and 56% of those who used the Internet last year) (Tables 2 and 3). Sending filled out forms has very high rates.

The Electronic Administration services are perceived by the citizens positively or very positively, with a satisfaction level greater than that of traditional services (Observatorio Nacional de lasTelecomunicaciones & de la Sociedad de la Información, 2013) (Table 4). The efforts of the Public Administrations to

Table 2 – Reasons for interaction with e-Government (percentage of people).											
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Public Administration interaction	–	–	–	24	26	28	31	34	38	44	44
Get information	19	22	22	23	30	33	28	37	36	42	41
Download forms	10	12	13	13	14	19	20	24	24	28	29
Send filled out forms	6	7	6	7	8	12	11	16	17	22	24

Source: Eurostat.

Table 3 – Reasons for interaction with e-Government (percentage of people who used Internet last year).						
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Interaction with Public Administration	53	55	58	56	61	59
Get information	52	53	56	53	58	56
Download forms	32	32	36	35	40	40
Send filled out forms	20	18	25	25	31	32

Source: Eurostat.

Table 4 – Satisfaction with the use of the e-Government's websites.

	Ease of finding information (satisfaction)	Ease of finding information (dissatisfaction)	Usefulness of the information (satisfaction)	Usefulness of the information (dissatisfaction)
Percentage of people	35	8	37	5
Percentage of e-Government users	80	18	85	12
Percentage of Internet users	47	11	51	7

Source: Eurostat.

Table 5 – Satisfaction of Internet users.

	2006	2007	2008	2010	2012	2013
Very satisfied	16.4	17.9	20.9	14.7	n.d.	16.9
Quite satisfied	56.0	54.1	56.5	63.8	n.d.	59.2
Indifferent	4.4	6.4	4.4	5.5	n.d.	5.5
Somewhat dissatisfied	12.0	12.3	9.5	10.0	n.d.	10.8
Not at all satisfied	8.8	8.1	8.0	4.5	n.d.	5.6

Source: CIS (2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013).

Table 6 – People who suffer from problems in interaction with e-Government (percentage users).

	2013
People who experience some problem	42
Experience technical failures in the web	27
Find information which is insufficient, unclear or outdated	28
Experience a lack of support	19
Experience some other problem	11

Source: Eurostat.

Table 8 – Satisfaction with the channels of interaction with the Administration in 2014.

Internet	75%
In person	73%
Mail or fax	63%
Phone	69%

Source: Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas y la Calidad de los Servicios (2014).

improve and adapt their websites and electronic headquarters are well valued by the users. 86% of Spanish citizens trust institutional websites, while 71% perceive that they are quite or very easy to use (Fundación Telefónica, 2014).

If we center on the degree of satisfaction with the Electronic Administration, we find that this is high (very satisfied or quite satisfied in a 75%), two points above that of the in-person channel (73%) (Table 5). The characteristics that most influence the satisfaction level with this type of administration are its straightforward handling and an easy understanding of the content (Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas y la Calidad de los Servicios, 2014).

As can be seen in the table above, the figures of those users who are quite or very satisfied with e-Government have

stabilized at around 75% and about 15% are quite dissatisfied or not at all satisfied.

Nonetheless, certain shortcomings or problems detected by the citizens may condition the consolidation of the Electronic Administration (Observatorio Nacional de las Telecomunicaciones & de la Sociedad de la Información, 2013): the lack of information about the services available (58.6%), distrust of the information or of the services available (49.0%), the information that can be consulted being insufficient (29.8%) and the lack of online procedures (23.7%).

In addition, areas which need to be improved have been detected: (1) the necessity to broaden the cover and scope of the e-administration; (2) the citizens continue preferring in-person contact; (3) the inconveniences which are found in the web, which is considered to be not helpful enough when carrying out procedures; (4) suspicions about insecurity;

Table 7 – If you had to carry out a procedure with the Administration and could choose, how would you prefer the contact to be?

	2006	2007	2008	2010	2012	2013
In person	72.6	72.2	72.8	72.9	71.3	71.4
By phone	10.9	12.4	10.2	10.5	7.0	7.4
By letter or fax	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.2	0.2	0.4
By Internet	12.8	12.9	14.8	14.7	16.7	17.3
By email	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	2.5	2.3

Source: CIS (2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013).

Table 9 – Rate of use of the Public Administration's different channels.						
	2006	2007	2008	2010	2012	2013
In person	40.8	75.5	85.1	55.2	62.9	66.3
By paper	14.9	28.3	32.0	10.0	11.3	10.7
Phone	17.6	36.4	48.2	31.2	35.4	36.6
Internet	10.1	26.9	26.5	56.0	n.d.	65.3

Source: CIS (2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013).

(5) and the need to have electronic identification (Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas & la Calidad de los Servicios, 2014).

According to the data of Eurostat, in 2013, 42% of the people who interacted with e-Government platforms experienced a problem, the most common one being that the information was insufficient, unclear or outdated (Table 6). Next, we present technical failures in the web and the lack of support.

In 2014, the in-person channel continues being that which is preferred by citizens to carry out procedures with the different Public Administrations (74% of the respondents, 71.4% in 2013), while 18% opt for the Internet as the channel which they prefer (17.3% in 2013). Contact by phone was the channel chosen by 6% of the respondents (7.4% in 2013) and, finally, contact by letter or fax is a residual category (0.2% in 2014) (Table 7) (Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas y la Calidad de los Servicios, 2015).

In 2013, 77% of citizens went to an office of the Public Administration. This is higher than the percentage registered in 2012 (74%) and 2010 (67%). Of these, 75% declare that they were quite or very satisfied with their last visit, the attributes most valued being the installations, the way that they were dealt with and the staff's professionalism (Table 8) (Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas & la Calidad de los Servicios, 2014). In 2015, the telematic channel has become the second way in which citizens contact the Administration (47%), behind in-person contact (77%). If we bear in mind the rate of use, the in-person services provision is similar to that of the Internet. Service provision by phone is likewise significant (Table 9).

Though Internet is the channel whose use has most increased since 2010, going from 32% to 47% (Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas y la Calidad de los Servicios, 2015), this increase has not taken place at the expense of the in-person channel (which has increased by 10 percentage points), or the phone channel (an increase of 6 points), or even contact by mail (this has remained constant) (Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas & la Calidad de los Servicios, 2014).

In-person contact is the main means by which citizens get in touch with the Administration. Furthermore, since 2006, its evolution has been on the up (except for the decrease in 2007), going from 34% in 2007 to 77% in 2014. The other two channels that have noted an upward evolution in their use have been the phone (going from 18% in 2009 to 37% in 2014) and Internet (going from 15% in 2008 to 47% in 2014) – though from 2009 the latter has begun to experience a greater increase than the former. The use of mail or fax as a means of contact has fallen into disuse, as is shown by its most recent evolution (going

Table 10 – Contact with public authorities by means other than the web (percentage of people who used the Internet in the last year).	
	2013
Contact with the Administration by means other than the web	63
Contact with the Administration by phone	36
Contact with the Administration by email	18
Contact with the Administration in person	51
Contact with the Administration by other means (SMS, post, fax, etc.)	7

Source: Eurostat, INE.

from 18% to 10% in 2014) (Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas & la Calidad de los Servicios, 2015).

In the case of analyzing contact with the Public Administrations by means other than the institutional web, 63% of citizens stated that they used different means. 51% also opted for in-person contact and another 36% for contact by phone (Table 10).

Analysis of the results

These data show us a scenario in which the in-person channel has the greatest number of contacts of citizens with the Public Administration: 77% compared to 47% by Internet. These figures reflect a stronger preference of citizens for the in-person channel (74%) than for the Internet (17%).

What can the Public Administration do about this situation? Can some mistakes in carrying out its actions be called into question? It does not seem that this last question can be answered affirmatively, as citizens have a very good perception of their interaction with e-Government and 86% of them trust the web. In addition, 75% of citizens are satisfied with their interaction with public webs.

Work can perhaps be centered on the lack of information, as this is the aspect that citizens declare to be the main shortcoming. The real reason for the telematic channel not outperforming the in-person channel may be that citizens use it for non-complex actions, considering the Internet to be a supplementary channel to the in-person channel.

Conclusions

Public Administrations are carrying out notable efforts in developing their respective e-Government projects, on many occasions moved by criteria of efficacy and efficiency. This strategy has led them to propose a shift from offline services

to an online environment. But it seems that this process is not taking into account citizens' perceptions and preferences.

This is why, as we have just seen, the in-person channel remains not only the one that is most used but also that which is preferred by citizens when interacting with the Public Administration. There is here a significant difference when compared to the Internet. It therefore appears that, contrary to what Gauld et al. (2010) suggested, ICT consolidation has not served for the percentage of the population which uses Internet as a channel to access public services to even reach 50%. This reflects what Van de Wijngaert et al. (2011) had already predicted: citizens continue opting for traditional distribution channels to satisfy their needs.

All this reflects the gap already pointed out by Ebbers et al. (2008). This is produced by the lack of managers' understanding about citizens' intentions and behaviors when they face multichannels. This is the current situation, as in addition to physical distribution and the Internet, citizens have phones, faxes and the mail in order to contact Public Administrations.

Must this reality mean abandoning the commitment to e-Government? We do not believe so. It should mean the development of a multichannel strategy which, setting out from the citizens' preferences and the different channels' complementarity, will enable an increase of the rate of use of online Public Administration services. The response can be found in a real strategy of multichannel marketing through which, bearing in mind the citizens' preferences, their decisions can be influenced.

As was commented on in the Introduction, this work does not mean to be more than an approach to the possible application of multichannel public sector strategies. This is why the aim of future works should be the identifying of what may influence citizens' decisions. The limitations of this current work are those inherent in an exploratory study concerning the problem addressed.

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