

# Effectiveness of Egyptian Governorate Portals in Supporting Digital Government Communication and E-Service Quality: A Dual-Method Applied Study

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## Abstract

*This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Egyptian governorate portals as tools of digital government communication at the local level, by examining the gap between the institutional performance of these portals—as reflected by objective analytical indicators—and the level of public usage and perceived satisfaction. The study adopted a dual-method research design combining an evaluative content analysis of four governorate portals (Cairo, Alexandria, Sharqia, and Beni Suef) using a validated assessment rubric measuring four principal dimensions: content quality, e-service efficiency, usability, and digital interactivity, alongside a field survey of a purposive sample of 254 respondents drawn from users of these portals. The study drew upon an integrative theoretical framework combining the digital government communication approach as the governing framework, Kent and Taylor’s dialogic communication theory as an auxiliary framework for portal analysis, and uses and gratifications theory as an interpretive framework for user behavior.*

*Results revealed high institutional evaluation scores: content quality and credibility achieved a total implementation rate of 100%, service-related functions scored 100%, news services reached 82.14%, and usability attained 84%, reflecting clear institutional readiness. Conversely, field results showed that regular usage (“always”) did not exceed 22%, while occasional usage (“sometimes”) dominated at 56%. High satisfaction (“very satisfied”) reached only 21.7% against a dominant neutral stance of 69.2%. Moreover, actual service utilization did not surpass 44.4% despite full institutional availability.*

*These findings confirm a substantial gap between institutional effectiveness and perceived effectiveness, necessitating a shift beyond the technical dimension toward fostering interactive and participatory dimensions and improving user experience to build trust and deepen actual utilization. The study establishes a baseline*

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*documenting local digital government communication status in early 2019—prior to the rapid transformations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic—thereby enabling future longitudinal comparisons to measure actual developmental trajectories.*

*Keywords: Digital Government Communication, Egyptian Governorate Portals, E-Service Quality, Perceived Effectiveness, Institutional-Public Gap, Local E-Government.*

## **Introduction**

The communicative relationship between government institutions and the public has undergone a profound structural transformation over the past two decades, driven by rapid developments in information and communication technologies and the adoption by an increasing number of governments of digital transformation policies within the framework of modernizing governance systems and enhancing public service delivery efficiency. Government communication is no longer confined to transmitting official information through traditional media in a unidirectional pattern; rather, it is now practiced through multiple digital platforms that enable interaction, participation, and the building of institutional trust (Coleman, 2020; Valentini, 2020). Within this evolving context, the concept of digital government communication has emerged as a contemporary framework that transcends the mere electronic availability of information toward building a sustainable dialogic space linking government and citizens on the basis of transparency, responsiveness, and accountability.

At the Egyptian level, digital transformation has constituted one of the strategic pillars in public administration development plans, particularly at the local administration level, where electronic portals for governorates were launched as official platforms for disseminating information, providing electronic services, and receiving citizen complaints and suggestions. These portals have evolved from mere informational tools into digital spaces that are expected to embody a model of modern government communication characterized by speed, clarity, ease of access, and service availability (Abdelsalam, 2012).

However, the evaluation of these portals' effectiveness has often been limited to assessing service availability or design quality, without an in-depth examination of how this is reflected in user behavior, satisfaction, and actual utilization. The success of digital government communication is not achieved merely through the existence of organized content or available electronic services, but rather through the degree to which the public interacts with, relies upon, and perceives the utility of such services in meeting their needs. Herein lies the problematic of this study, which seeks to examine the extent to which Egyptian governorate portals are effective as tools of digital government communication, by combining an objective evaluative analysis of portal components with a field study measuring usage patterns, satisfaction, and actual utilization among the public.

This study acquires heightened significance by virtue of its timing, having been conducted in the first quarter of 2019—that is, prior to the transformative wave imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic on the government sector globally and locally. It thus establishes a baseline that documents the state of local digital government communication in the pre-pandemic phase, enabling subsequent studies to measure the extent of actual change through controlled longitudinal comparisons. It also seeks to provide a focused analytical reading that contributes to broadening the academic discourse on the effectiveness of government electronic platforms, proposing a critical framework for their development that transcends the technical dimension toward the communicative and participatory dimensions.

## **Exploratory Study**

The exploratory study was conducted within the framework of identifying the features of the digital government communication phenomenon at the local level and exploring the nature of Egyptian governorate portals' deployment as communication tools with citizens, prior to embarking on the expanded methodological application. It originated from two pivotal observations: the institutional expansion in launching electronic portals for governorates as part of digital transformation efforts on one hand, and the limited number of studies addressing the effectiveness of these portals from a communicative perspective on the other.

The exploratory study was implemented in two sequential phases: an initial analysis phase of several governorate portals aimed at mapping the nature of content, service patterns, and the level of available interactivity, followed by a limited opinion survey of a sample of users aimed at exploring usage motivations, difficulties encountered, and the degree of satisfaction with the services provided.

The exploratory findings yielded a set of important indicators that formed the basis for defining the current study's problem, formulating its questions, and constructing its instruments. The dominance of the informational character in portal content was evident compared to the interactive dimension, along with the availability of several electronic services whose procedural clarity varied. A clear discrepancy also appeared between the evaluation of the portal in terms of formal organization and the degree of actual benefit from services, in addition to users' tendency to treat the portals as a source of local news rather than as a tool for completing transactions. These indicators contributed to crystallizing the central hypothesis regarding the existence of a gap between institutional performance and perceived effectiveness among the public.

## **Literature Review and Positioning of the Current Study**

### *First Axis: Effectiveness of Government Portals and Their Usage*

Recent years have witnessed a qualitative shift in the research treatment of government portals, as the focus has moved from technical infrastructure and service

availability to analyzing usage patterns and communicative effectiveness outcomes. Within this framework, Coleman (2020) affirmed that the evaluation of digital government platforms should transcend the criterion of information availability to measure their capacity to enhance participation and build public trust, noting that effective digital government communication requires a transition from the unidirectional informational mode to an interactive mode based on dialogue. Valentini (2020) demonstrated that local governments represent the most sensitive domain for digital communication effectiveness due to their direct proximity to citizens, and that the level of interactivity available through platforms directly influences the public's evaluation of institutional performance.

In the context of measuring user experience, Wirtz and Daiser (2015) demonstrated that usability exerts a direct positive effect on the satisfaction of local government portal users, while Sachan and Ali (2018) showed that satisfaction is linked to the efficiency of digital processes and the speed of service delivery rather than mere availability. On the Egyptian front specifically, Abdelsalam (2012) revealed variation in the maturity level of local portals according to human development indicators. Aya Eyad's study (2017) indicated a relative increase in the use of the Egyptian government portal with a dominance of the occasional pattern, while Dina Al-Khattat's study (2013) recorded a clear weakness in overall engagement. Asmaa Salah's study (2017) revealed service delivery efficiency through the central portal alongside the absence of certain tools such as the archive service.

This body of literature reveals a growing interest in linking portal quality with user behavior and perception; however, most of this work has focused on national or central portals, while the local level—particularly in the Arab context—has received limited research attention in terms of both actual usage analysis and communicative effectiveness measurement.

### *Second Axis: Uses and Gratifications in the Context of Digital Government Platforms*

Uses and gratifications theory constitutes a well-established theoretical framework in the study of communicative behavior in the digital environment (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973; Ruggiero, 2000), proceeding from the assumption of audience agency and selectivity in dealing with communication media. This approach has undergone continuous development in three principal directions: the first examines the interrelationships between usage motivations and gratification patterns, where Kim and Rubin (1997) identified direct links between utilitarian motivations and media effects, and LaRose and Eastin (2004) contributed to developing a social cognitive model for explaining media attendance. The second direction seeks to understand how differences in cognitive background and motivations affect outcomes such as satisfaction, participation, and political knowledge (Carolyn, 1999). The third direction focuses on studying specific audience segments and their use of various media (Ferguson & Perse, 2000).

Multiple comparative studies have confirmed that cultural contexts influence the nature of achieved gratifications (Karimi et al., 2014), and the literature has pointed to a positive relationship between cognitive gratifications and the level of trust in the source. The emergence and spread of the internet renewed interest in this theory, with Morris and Ogan (1996) affirming that it provides a comprehensive framework for studying the electronic communication environment, and Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) observing that the internet combines elements of interpersonal and mass communication. Despite the abundance of applications of this theory to social media networks, its deployment in the context of local government portals remains limited, particularly in measuring citizens' motivations for using official service platforms and linking them to the level of satisfaction and perceived effectiveness.

### *Positioning of the Current Study Within the Previous Literature*

This study intersects with both aforementioned directions but distinguishes itself in four qualitative respects. First, it combines objective institutional analysis of governorate portals with field analysis of user behavior within a dual research design. Second, it focuses on the local level of digital government communication rather than solely on national or central portals. Third, it employs systematic statistical testing of the gap between institutional and perceived effectiveness through specific operational hypotheses. Fourth, it establishes a baseline documenting portal status prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling future longitudinal comparisons.

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

### *Digital Government Communication: Concept and Evolution*

The concept of government communication has undergone a fundamental transformation in tandem with the technological shifts that have reshaped the relationship between the state and the citizen. While this concept was traditionally associated with the process of transmitting official information through traditional media within a unidirectional framework, the digital environment has led to its redefinition in more interactive and participatory terms. Digital government communication—operationally defined in this study—refers to the totality of communicative activities practiced by the governorate through its electronic portal with the aim of making information available, providing services, enhancing interaction with citizens, managing the institutional image, and supporting transparency and accountability.

The digital transformation has led to a shift in government communication from the “government media” model based on broadcasting to a “communicative governance” model based on reciprocal interaction and citizen engagement in the communication process. However, this transformation is not measured merely by the availability of electronic platforms, but by their capacity to achieve genuine commu-

nicative effectiveness manifested in content quality, ease of access, speed of response, the level of interactivity, and the extent of public reliance on them (Coleman, 2020).

The local level assumes particular importance in this context, as governorates are considered the closest link to citizens and the most directly connected to their daily service and organizational needs. Consequently, analyzing governorate portals does not merely reflect technical performance but reveals the nature of the communicative relationship between local administration and the public and the degree of its responsiveness to the requirements of the contemporary digital environment.

### *E-Government and Local Administration*

The concept of e-government refers to the deployment of information and communication technologies in performing government functions in a manner that contributes to simplifying procedures, accelerating service delivery, enhancing transparency, and reducing costs. This concept has gradually evolved from the technical dimension toward reshaping the relationship between the state and society, through a transition from the traditional service model to the interactive digital service model.

Local administration acquires heightened importance in this context due to its close connection with the daily services that directly affect citizens' lives, such as utilities, licensing, urban planning, and complaints. Governorate electronic portals are considered among the most prominent applications of e-government at the local level, as they are expected to perform an integrative role combining the informational, service, and communicative functions. However, their success depends on their capacity to deliver quality services with ease of access, procedural clarity, and speed of response; the mere existence of an electronic portal does not signify the realization of digital transformation—effectiveness is linked to the extent of its usage and the public's reliance upon it.

### *E-Service Quality as an Entry Point for Measuring Effectiveness*

E-service quality—operationally defined—represents the set of characteristics reflecting the portal's efficiency in delivering a clear, reliable, and accessible service, measured across four interrelated dimensions: informational content quality, usability, service availability and procedural clarity, and the level of available support and interactivity. In the context of digital government communication, quality does not represent merely an administrative or technical criterion but reflects the nature of the communicative relationship between the institution and the public; the more organized and accessible the services, the greater the public's trust in the platform and the higher the likelihood of repeated usage (Liao, To & Chuang, 2011).

### *Perceived Effectiveness and Its Relationship with Government Platforms*

Perceived effectiveness—operationally defined—refers to the degree of user conviction that the portal achieves genuine benefit in terms of saving time and effort,

ease of transaction completion, clarity of information, and speed of response. It is a subjective reflection of the usage experience that may correspond to or diverge from the objective institutional evaluation. The literature has demonstrated that a rise in service quality does not necessarily guarantee an increase in usage or satisfaction, as perceived effectiveness is influenced by multiple factors such as ease of access, trust, habituation, procedural clarity, and the degree of interactivity (Sachan & Ali, 2018).

Herein lies the foundation of the central hypothesis of this study, which posits the possible existence of a gap between institutional effectiveness—as reflected in the results of the objective analysis—and perceived effectiveness among the public. This gap constitutes an analytical entry point for understanding whether the digital government communication of governorate portals has succeeded in transitioning from mere digital availability to building an effective and satisfying usage experience.

## **Integrative Theoretical Framework**

*The study adopts an integrative theoretical approach that combines three strands:*

The **first strand**—the digital government communication approach (the governing framework)—is concerned with analyzing the nature of the communicative relationship between the government institution and the public in the digital environment in terms of its informational, service, and interactive dimensions. Coleman (2020) noted that government communication in the digital environment is based on creating a dialogic space that enables citizens to interact and hold institutions accountable. This approach serves the study in analyzing whether communication through the portals is informationally unidirectional or interactively participatory.

The **second strand**—Kent and Taylor’s dialogic communication theory (an auxiliary framework for portal analysis)—was developed by Kent and Taylor (1998; 2002) in the context of digital public relations, and is based on the principles of providing useful information, encouraging return visits, providing clear interaction channels, and responding to public feedback. It posits that communication acquires greater effectiveness when it shifts from the unidirectional informational mode to the participatory dialogic mode. Its principles were operationalized as subsidiary criteria within the digital interactivity dimension of the analysis rubric.

The **third strand**—uses and gratifications theory (an interpretive framework for user behavior)—was deployed in the field component specifically to interpret the public’s motivations for using the portals, the level of achieved gratifications, and their relationship with satisfaction and reliance. It was not employed as a governing framework but as a supportive interpretive tool for understanding the behavioral and perceptual dimension.

The theoretical framework thus combines two complementary dimensions: an institutional analytical dimension pertaining to the nature of digital government

communication as reflected in portal structure, and a behavioral-perceptual dimension pertaining to perceived effectiveness among the public. The gap between these two dimensions constitutes the central analytical variable.

## Research Problem, Questions, Hypotheses, and Objectives

### *Research Problem*

Despite the notable expansion in the Egyptian state's adoption of digital transformation policies and development of the e-government service infrastructure, the measurement of digital government communication effectiveness at the local level has often been limited to technical or formal aspects such as service availability or design quality, without verifying the reflection of these on user behavior, satisfaction, and actual utilization. The problem crystallizes in the central question: **To what extent do Egyptian governorate portals achieve digital government communication effectiveness in terms of e-service quality, usability, and interactivity, and to what degree is this reflected in usage patterns and perceived satisfaction among the public?** A subsidiary problematic emerges concerning the nature of communication: does it remain informationally unidirectional or does it evolve toward an interactive mode that enhances participation and strengthens the communicative relationship?

### *Research Questions*

- 1- What is the level of availability of content quality and e-service criteria in the portals under study?
- 2- To what extent are these portals characterized by usability and design clarity?
- 3- What is the nature of the available digital interaction tools and the extent of their effectiveness?
- 4- What is the level of public usage of these portals and what are the motivations for this usage?
- 5- What is the degree of user satisfaction and the extent of their actual utilization of the services provided?
- 6- Is there a statistically significant gap between the institutional analytical evaluation and the field-based public evaluation?

### *Research Hypotheses*

- **Hypothesis 1 (H1):** There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the level of institutional performance quality of the portal and the rate of public usage.
- **Hypothesis 2 (H2):** There is a statistically significant positive correlation between users' perception of usability and service quality on one hand and their satisfaction level on the other.

- **Hypothesis 3 (H3):** There is a statistically significant gap between the level of institutional effectiveness (as reflected by the objective analysis) and the level of perceived effectiveness among the public (as reflected by field survey results).

### *Research Objectives*

The study seeks to achieve six integrated objectives: evaluating the effectiveness of the portals as digital government communication tools; analyzing content quality, services, and usability; measuring usage patterns and motivations; assessing satisfaction and actual utilization; statistically testing the relationship between institutional performance and perceived effectiveness; and establishing a pre-pandemic baseline.

## **Methodology**

### *Study Type and Approach*

The study belongs to descriptive-analytical research and employed a dual-design survey method combining evaluative content analysis to assess portal components using an evaluative analysis rubric, and a field survey to measure user responses through an electronic questionnaire.

### *Study Population and Sample*

**Analytical sample:** Four governorates were selected according to criteria of geographic diversity, population density, and service characteristics: Cairo (the capital, highest population density), Alexandria (second largest governorate, northern urban), Sharqia (high density, mixed urban-rural character), and Beni Suef (Upper Egypt, different developmental context). This selection ensures coverage of geographic, demographic, and developmental variation, allowing for a representative picture of local digital government communication.

**Field survey sample:** The sample consisted of 254 respondents drawn from users of the selected governorate portals, selected through purposive sampling from among individuals who had previously used the electronic portals, with the aim of measuring their actual experience and evaluation of the services provided. The questionnaire was distributed electronically through digital groups linked to the four governorates. The sample was distributed as follows: Cairo (65), Alexandria (57), Sharqia (66), and Beni Suef (66).

### *Data Collection Instruments*

- **First – The Evaluative Analysis Rubric:** Designed to measure four principal dimensions: (1) content quality and credibility (two indicators: content reliability and linguistic accuracy); (2) news service quality (7 indicators in-

cluding: scrolling news ticker, mobile news delivery, locality and directorate news, archive service, monthly newsletters, governor visit coverage, and newspaper links); (3) functional service quality (12 indicators including: activation of electronic services, traffic services, emergency numbers, document requirements, school certificates, educational databases, employment portal, price and weather data, bill payment, commodity outlets, “Your Right” service, and other services); (4) usability (5 indicators: ease of use and comprehension, URL simplicity, construction completeness, visual clarity features, and software requirement notices). A five-point rating scale was adopted for each indicator (5=excellent to 1=poor), and percentage scores were calculated for each dimension and each governorate.

- **Second – The Field Survey Questionnaire:** Aimed at measuring: portal usage rate (three-level: always/sometimes/never), usage motivations (8 multiple-choice items), satisfaction level (three-level: very satisfied/neutral/dissatisfied), degree of actual utilization of 11 services (utilize/do not utilize), as well as perceived service quality and usability.

#### *Validity and Reliability*

- **Content validity:** Both instruments were reviewed by a group of specialists in digital media, government communication, and public administration, and suggested modifications were implemented to ensure item clarity, suitability for measuring the variables, and comprehensiveness of service quality and interactive communication dimensions.
- **Construct validity:** Correlation coefficients were calculated between each item and the total score of the dimension to which it belongs (content quality, usability, digital interaction, satisfaction, utilization), and all were statistically significant, indicating instrument validity.
- **Reliability:** Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was calculated to measure the internal consistency of questionnaire items, and the values were high and statistically acceptable, indicating instrument stability and dependability.

#### *Statistical Analysis Methods*

SPSS was used to perform: frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations, Chi-square tests for significance of differences between categories, correlation coefficients for measuring relationships between variables, and analysis of differences between governorates. Significance levels of 0.05 and 0.01 were adopted for determining statistical significance.

#### *Study Delimitations*

**Thematic scope:** Evaluating the effectiveness of governorate portals across dimensions of quality, interactivity, and perceived effectiveness. **Spatial scope:** Por-

tals of Cairo, Alexandria, Sharqia, and Beni Suef. **Human scope:** 254 respondents. **Temporal scope:** January–March 2019.

## Results

### *Results of the Analytical Study (Institutional Evaluation)*

#### 1- Content Quality and Credibility

The four portals achieved the maximum score in the accuracy and credibility criterion at a 100% implementation rate. This adherence is manifested in two areas: content reliability, where the information presented was fully trustworthy—consistent with Lee (2011) in that information trustworthiness is a critical condition for e-government success—and linguistic and typographic accuracy, which achieved an excellent rating, supporting the findings of Omnia Al-Deeb's study (2016) regarding the necessity of linguistic precision for enhancing institutional image. However, achieving this perfect score represents the necessary condition for the communicative process, not the sufficient condition for its effectiveness, as it remains but one dimension requiring examination of the interactive and service dimensions.

#### 2- News Service Quality

The overall average reached 82.14% with an “excellent” rating. Five indicators achieved 100% across all portals, while monthly newsletters scored 75% due to their absence from the Sharqia portal. The most prominent gap was the complete absence of mobile news delivery across all portals, reflecting a deficiency in the transition toward multi-platform communication. The results align with Wesam Al-Wakeel's study (2017) regarding the importance of news as a primary motivation, and with Abdelsalam (2012) in the role of portals in disseminating government information, while distinguishing themselves from Asmaa Salah's study (2017) by the availability of the archive service.

#### 3- Functional Service Quality

The four portals achieved a complete implementation rate of 100% across all twelve service indicators without exception, including: activation of direct electronic services or through links to relevant agencies, traffic services, emergency numbers and hotlines, official document requirements, school certificates, educational databases, the employment and government jobs portal, price, weather, and stock exchange data, bill payment and outage notices, commodity outlets and markets, the “Your Right” service, and other miscellaneous services such as train reservations, tenders, and Takaful and Karama programs. This reflects the integrated service character of these platforms, which are not limited to disseminating information but provide procedural guides, ready-made forms, and integrative links with various state institutions. The results concur with Adel Saleh (2010) and Asmaa Salah (2017) regarding the efficiency of service portals. However, full institutional availability

does not necessarily mean high actual utilization, which is examined in the field section.

#### 4- Usability and Design Structure

The overall average was 84% with an “excellent” rating. Alexandria led with 100% for providing all indicators, followed by Sharqia and Beni Suef (80% each), then Cairo (76%). The software requirement notice indicator represents the most prominent point of divergence, scoring only 25% overall. The results concur with Wirtz and Daiser (2015) regarding the positive impact of usability on satisfaction.

#### 5- Summary of Institutional Evaluation

The analytical results collectively reveal a high level of institutional readiness, with evaluation scores exceeding 80% in most criteria and reaching 100% in several. This reflects tangible progress in deploying digital government communication tools within local administrations. However, this elevated institutional picture raises a fundamental question: is it matched by a corresponding level of actual usage and public satisfaction? Herein lies the importance of transitioning to the public evaluation to uncover the potential gap.

### *Results of the Field Study (Public Evaluation)*

#### 1- Portal Usage Level

The “sometimes” pattern dominated with an overall proportion of 56%, reflecting a functional usage tied to need rather than a regular periodic reliance. The total users (always + sometimes) reached 78%, representing a notable improvement compared to Dina Al-Khattat’s study (2013), which recorded only 5.25% for regular usage. The results approximate Aya Eyad’s study (2017), which showed 76% overall. Sharqia led in occasional usage (63.6%) while Beni Suef led in regular usage (30.3%). Chi-square tests showed statistically significant differences across all governorates, confirming that the “sometimes” pattern is the statistically dominant trend.

From the uses and gratifications perspective, this is interpreted as indicating that cognitive and service motivations are the primary drivers while interactive gratifications remain limited in influence. From the digital government communication perspective, high structural performance is insufficient to guarantee sustained reliance unless accompanied by enhanced interactivity and the building of a more sustainable communicative relationship.

#### 2- Usage Motivations

Informational-utilitarian motivations clearly dominate: topic quality (22.6%) and geographic coverage (19.1%) rank first and second, while the aesthetic dimension recedes to last place (5.2%). This is consistent with AL Athmay (2013) in that information quality is among the most important determinants of usage intent, and with Philip (2003) in the importance of local portals for strengthening the relation-

ship between community services and individuals. It differs from Ali Hamouda (2015), who placed attractiveness first—a difference attributable to the official service character of government portals.

Alexandria led in total frequency (27.1%) due to the diversity of its users' motivations, while Cairo came last (22.4%) despite its lead in credibility and geographic coverage. The results reveal that the public still views the portals as official news outlets rather than interactive tools for completing transactions.

### 3- Satisfaction Level

The neutral orientation dominated at 69.2%, far exceeding what was recorded in Aya Eyad's study (2017), where the neutral proportion was only 27%. Cairo led this orientation at a high rate of 87.5%. Although the overall positive direction (neutral + satisfied) reached 90.9% compared to only 9.1% for the dissatisfied, the overwhelming majority fell in the "neutral" rather than "very satisfied" category, reflecting a state of "cautious acceptance": users do not reject the services but do not grant them a high rating, expecting a higher level of speed, responsiveness, and continuous development.

This is consistent with Sachan and Ali (2018) in that satisfaction is linked to the efficiency of digital processes and delivery speed rather than mere availability. From the uses and gratifications perspective, the achieved gratifications appear partial and functional, not having transformed into deep gratifications that drive sustained reliance.

### 4- Actual Service Utilization Level

This result represents a pivotal analytical paradox: the proportion of non-beneficiaries (55.6%) exceeds that of beneficiaries (44.4%) despite the full institutional availability (100%) in the evaluative analysis. Services exclusively related to local administration (tenders) topped the utilization list due to their unavailability through alternatives, while services available through multiple channels (national campaigns, electoral committees) receded.

This can be explained by several factors: the existence of stronger media alternatives for some services, independent specialized platforms, limited trust in electronic financial transactions, and the seasonal nature of certain services. The results align with Dina Al-Khattat (2013) in the decline of overall engagement, while differing from Aya Eyad (2017), who recorded increases in some services.

At the governorate level, Cairo led in utilization (53% versus 47% non-utilization), while Beni Suef recorded the highest non-utilization rate (64.5%), indicating a larger gap between availability and usage in less urban governorates. Chi-square tests showed statistically significant differences in most services, confirming that the utilization pattern is linked to the local context of each governorate.

## Hypothesis Testing

*Testing Hypothesis 1 (H1): The relationship between institutional performance and usage rate*

Descriptive indicators suggest that the relationship between institutional performance and usage rate is not straightforwardly linear: Alexandria, ranked highest in usability evaluation (100%), is not the highest in regular usage (24.6% versus 30.3% for Beni Suef), and Cairo, with the lowest analytical evaluation for usability (76%), is not necessarily the lowest in usage. This confirms that technical availability is a necessary but insufficient condition, and that other factors such as platform awareness and the nature of local needs mediate this relationship.

*Testing Hypothesis 2 (H2): The relationship between quality perception and satisfaction*

Descriptive indicators point to a positive direction: governorates with the most evident service diversity recorded higher satisfaction rates (Sharqia 27.5% very satisfied versus 8.3% for Cairo). However, the dominance of neutrality across all governorates confirms that quality perception alone is insufficient for achieving high satisfaction unless coupled with elements of responsiveness and interactivity.

*Testing Hypothesis 3 (H3): The central gap*

The systematic comparison between institutional analysis results and field survey results confirms the existence of a clear and fundamental gap:

Indicator	Institutional Effectiveness	Perceived Effectiveness
Content quality and credibility	100%	—
News service quality	82.14%	—
Functional service quality (availability)	100%	—
Usability	84%	—
Approximate institutional average	~91.5%	—
Usage rate (always + sometimes)	—	78%
High satisfaction rate (very satisfied)	—	21.7%
Actual utilization rate	—	44.4%

While the institutional average approximated 91.5%, actual utilization did not exceed 44.4%, and high satisfaction reached only 21.7%. This substantial disparity confirms the validity of the third hypothesis and reveals a structural gap between what the portals offer institutionally and what the public perceives and actually utilizes.

## General Discussion

The integrative approach adopted in this study reveals a fundamental analytical paradox: high institutional performance exceeding 80% in most criteria that is

not reflected to the expected degree in user behavior and evaluation. This gap can be explained through three complementary analytical approaches.

- **The first approach—dominance of the unidirectional informational mode:** Despite technical advancement, the portals practice a form of communication closer to the unidirectional informational mode than to the dialogic mode as classified by Kent and Taylor (1998). The primary motivations are linked to information quality (22.6%) and news coverage (19.1%), while interactive motivations recede. This means the portals have not yet succeeded in transitioning from a “digital display front” to a “dialogic space” in the sense proposed by Coleman (2020). The exploratory study supported this finding, revealing users’ tendency to use the portals as news sources rather than transaction tools.
- **The second approach—the gap between digital availability and administrative execution:** The elevated proportion of non-beneficiaries (55.6%) despite full availability points to a possible disconnect between what the portal announces and what can actually be accomplished. Some services may require in-person visits or supplementary paper procedures, diminishing the value of the digital service. This is a structural challenge that extends beyond portal design to encompass the traditional administrative infrastructure. From the uses and gratifications perspective, gratification is achieved when the medium provides added value unavailable to the user through an alternative, and the weak differentiation of some services from their alternatives has led to reduced utilization rates.
- **The third approach—limited digital trust and cautious acceptance:** The dominance of neutrality (69.2%) does not signify failure but reflects a state of “cautious acceptance”: the user acknowledges the existence of the service but has not felt sufficient utility to drive them to high satisfaction. This is consistent with Coombs (2015) in that institutional trust is built through transparency, consistency, and speed of response—elements that may not be achieved merely by launching an electronic portal. The absence of high satisfaction despite service availability indicates that the digital experience lacks elements of immediate responsiveness, procedural clarity, and integration between the digital platform and actual administrative execution.

In summation, the portals stand at a transitional stage that can be described as institutionally advanced, moderate in usage, neutral in satisfaction, and partial in utilization. These results lead to a reassessment of digital government communication evaluation criteria so that they are not limited to technical indicators but encompass perceptual and behavioral dimensions reflecting the user experience comprehensively. It can also be said that the governorate portals represent a model of institutionally advanced digital government communication that has not yet been

completed at the interactive communicative level; the analytical indicators reflect technical and organizational readiness while the field indicators point to a greater need for enhancing interactivity, improving user experience, and linking digital services with more efficient execution mechanisms.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### *Summary*

The study concluded that Egyptian governorate portals represent an advanced step in the trajectory toward local digital government communication, as the institutional analysis showed high scores in content quality (100%), service diversity (100% availability), and usability (84%). However, the field results revealed moderate usage (56% sometimes), satisfaction tending toward neutrality (69.2% neutral), and actual utilization not exceeding 44.4%. This confirms the existence of a fundamental gap between institutional and perceived effectiveness—the central hypothesis of the study.

This gap indicates that the development of digital government communication should not be confined to enhancing technical aspects or increasing available services, but requires focusing on improving the user experience, simplifying procedures, ensuring actual integration between the digital platform and administrative execution, and activating participatory and interactive tools in a manner that strengthens public trust and sustained reliance. The study also establishes—by virtue of its timing in 2019—a baseline enabling subsequent studies to measure actual post-pandemic change.

### *Recommendations*

- **First:** Strengthen the interactive dimension in governorate portals through activating digital participation channels, periodic opinion polls, and rapid feedback mechanisms, thereby achieving the transition from the unidirectional informational mode to the participatory dialogic mode.
- **Second:** Simplify the procedures for completing electronic services and ensure the possibility of their full digital completion without the need for in-person visits, reducing bureaucratic steps that limit actual utilization and undermine user trust.
- **Third:** Develop targeted digital communication strategies to raise citizen awareness of available services and how to use them, through complementary channels such as social media networks and text messaging.
- **Fourth:** Design mobile applications for governorate portals to bridge the communication gap in smartphone channels that the evaluative analysis revealed through the complete absence of this service.

- **Fifth:** Adopt periodic evaluation indicators that combine objective institutional criteria with perceptual and behavioral indicators to ensure comprehensive measurement reflecting the actual user experience.
- **Sixth:** Enhance integration between the electronic portal and the executive administrative structure to ensure that what the digital platform announces can actually be accomplished, thereby transforming satisfaction from a state of “cautious acceptance” to “high satisfaction” and institutional loyalty.

### *Suggestions for Future Studies*

Conducting a longitudinal study using the 2019 results as a baseline to measure actual post-COVID-19 change. Implementing a comparative study between the local and central levels of digital government communication. Conducting in-depth qualitative research (interviews and focus groups) to understand the underlying reasons for the dominance of neutrality in satisfaction. Studying the impact of demographic variables (age, gender, education, and place of residence) on usage and perceived effectiveness. Analyzing actual log data (Log Analysis) of the portals to supplement the self-reported evaluation results with objective browsing behavior data.

### *Study Limitations*

The study acknowledges several limitations that should be considered when interpreting or generalizing results. First, the temporal boundaries: data were collected in January–March 2019, prior to COVID-19 transformations, and the results do not reflect the current situation but rather document the pre-pandemic state—this limitation has been addressed through explicit framing as a baseline study. Second, the sample type: it is purposive (254 respondents), limiting the possibility of statistical generalization to all portal users, and electronic distribution may exclude segments less familiar with technology. Third, the number of governorates: four governorates do not represent all twenty-seven, despite the consideration of diversity in selection. Fourth, the reliance on self-report: satisfaction and utilization were measured through respondent self-reports, which could have been supplemented with actual usage data analysis had access been available.

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