

E-GOVERNMENT BRANDING: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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Abstrak

Sektor publik telah menyediakan layanan berbasis teknologi yang berdampak besar pada perilaku masyarakat sebagai kliennya. Layanan publik telah banyak menggunakan teknologi informasi dan komunikasi, yang dikenal sebagai e-government untuk berinteraksi dengan kliennya. Untuk mengkomunikasikan e-government, organisasi sektor publik menerapkan pendekatan pemasaran seperti branding. Tujuan dari makalah konseptual ini adalah untuk menganalisis branding e-government. Dengan menggunakan konsep branding sektor publik dan branding layanan, makalah ini mengusulkan definisi branding e-government, termasuk manfaat dan tipologinya.

Kata kunci: e-government, branding, e-government branding.

Abstract

The public sector has provided technology-based service which has profound impact on public behavior as its clients. The public service has widely used information and communication technology, which is known as e-government to interact with its clients. To communicate the e-government, public sector organizations apply marketing approaches such as branding. The purpose of this conceptual paper was to analyze the branding of e-government. Utilizing the concept of public sector branding and service branding, this paper proposes the definition of e-government branding, including its benefits and typologies.

Keywords: e-government, branding, e-government branding.

1. Introduction

The government organization, in line with technological advancements and the process of digitization, has implemented various public services electronically, known as e-government [1]. E-government has various definitions, but generally, it can be understood as the provision of information services and transaction services by public sector organizations using information and communication technology such as the internet and digital devices, provided to citizens, businesses, government organizations, and other stakeholders [2, 3].

There are several reasons that drive public sector organizations to implement e-government. It is expected to establish a direct relationship between the government and the general public as customers [4]. E-government is organized to either complement or replace traditional face-to-face public services [3]. E-government is anticipated to meet citizen needs for improved services and enhance service accountability [5]. It is assumed to be more cost-effective, efficient, faster, and of higher quality [6].

From a citizen perspective, e-government offers several benefits. Citizens can access electronic services using their mobile phones or computers from their homes without the need to visit government offices, which often entails long waiting hours or multiple visits to various locations for different transactions [7]. Citizens can interact more easily with

public organizations as providers of electronic services [8]. Citizens can obtain information about various available public services [9].

In the implementation of e-government, several challenges arise, including the following. The provision of electronic services by public sector organizations often neglects the needs and desires of citizens [10]. Electronic public services frequently fail to meet citizen expectations, such as being unresponsive and lacking clear information [4]. The adoption rate of electronic public services remains low in developing countries due to insufficient digital literacy among citizens [11]. The design of electronic public services is often deemed inadequate in terms of functionality and interactivity for citizens [3]. Citizen concerns include inadequate security systems and privacy assurances associated with electronic public services, which may entail risks such as unauthorized access to sensitive personal information, online fraud, or identity theft [10].

This paper centers its focus on the discussion of electronic public services or e-government, as it constitutes a form of interaction between the government and citizens, wherein such e-government holds value for service users [1, 12]. The concept of value is an integral component of the marketing field, which is also employed by public sector organizations [13]. The ability of public services to deliver value to clients is one of the strategies for achieving success. Value is defined as the comparison between the benefits received and the sacrifices made [14]. Public sector marketing encompasses activities, a series of institutions, and processes aimed at identifying, anticipating, creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging valuable offerings that satisfy clients, communities, collaborators, and the general public [15]. A customer-oriented marketing approach yields benefits for public sector organizations, including but not limited to increased public service utilization, enhanced compliance with regulations, improved public health and safety, heightened citizen protection, reduced service delivery costs, increased customer satisfaction, and elevated citizen support [16].

Marketing research conducted by the public sector includes topics such as branding to cultivate organizational reputation [17]. Hall [18] further asserts that although publications regarding public sector branding in public administration journals are relatively recent, these articles offer significant contributions, particularly to governmental communication with stakeholders. For example, branding processes employed by governments, such as place branding or country branding, serve as a means to differentiate one location from others perceived as competitors. [19]. The public sector is increasingly engaging in branding through initiatives aimed at enhancing identity and messages for service users [20].

Leijerholt et al. [21] state that despite similarities with branding undertaken by private companies, government organization branding exhibits several differences. The commitment of civil servants can influence the success of branding efforts undertaken. Public sector employees might not necessarily favor the presence of branding activities conducted by governmental organizations. Therefore, while private sector organizational branding models can be emulated by government entities, they still require adaptations that are related to the personality, identity, and reputation of the government organization's brand.

This paper aims to analyze how government organizations conduct e-government branding. Branding by government organizations has often been carried out to create a positive image of public services, organizations, government officials, or policies [22]. Fundamentally, every aspect of government organizations can be branded [23], including e-government. Government branding is a series of activities conducted by government

organizations, ranging from nation branding to policy and service branding. Branding in the public sector is an intriguing research field, given that various government organizations strive to utilize branding principles to promote various products and services with a clear brand [24]. In the past decade, branding by government organizations has frequently taken place, closely intertwined with the advancement of digital technology [25]. Research on branding by government organizations is necessary to provide an understanding of the reputation-building process and government communication [17]. However, based on a literature search through Google Scholar, articles discussing e-government branding are still limited. While the research on branding in the public sector remains extremely restricted, the existing investigations tend to either overly emphasize the economic merits of branding or concentrate on the external perceptions and images constructed by customers and diverse stakeholders [20]. Nevertheless, this paper draws insights from articles discussing branding by government organizations to understand how e-government branding can be approached. The questions to be addressed are: (1) what is the definition of e-government branding; (2) what are the benefits of e-government branding? and (3) what are the types of e-government branding?

2. Method

This paper employs a qualitative approach, particularly a literature review. Given the limited availability of research articles specifically addressing e-government branding, this paper selects a number of articles discussing various branding topics undertaken by government organizations. The keywords used to search for articles on Google Scholar include public branding, public sector branding, government branding, policy branding, and public service branding. Furthermore, this paper assumes that e-government constitutes a form of services provided by the government to the public. Therefore, an exploration of articles on the topic of service branding from a business context is also conducted to comprehend how service branding is carried out. The obtained articles are then categorized based on information about the definition of branding by government organizations, branding benefits, and types of branding conducted. Based on these articles, this paper subsequently proposes the definition of e-government branding, the benefits of e-government branding, and the types of e-government branding.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Definition of E-government Branding

Generally, branding by government organizations involves the activity of generating outputs in the form of product and service identities, with the aim of communicating with the public [26]. Branding is a fundamental element for governmental organizations that seek to ensure quality and consistency in their services [27]. The government's ability to influence citizens' attitudes through symbolic communication or branding can be perceived positively, reducing public distrust and negative evaluations of government performance [25]. In the literature obtained, the discourse on government branding is frequently associated with public branding. Therefore, this article defines e-government branding based on the concept of branding conducted by government organizations.

This paper employs the concept of a brand as a symbol, whether in the form of a name, term, sign, design, or a combination of these, to be identifiable as a distinct phenomenon from other phenomena [22]. Branding is symbolic communication to the public designed to evoke positive emotions [25]. Branding by government organizations

is a communication strategy and image formation aimed at specific segments of the community [22]. Branding by the government is defined as a strategy to influence public perceptions [22].

Some other definitions of government branding are as follows. Government branding involves active and coordinated efforts by all stakeholders to manage communication elements in a specific field [28]. Government branding employs marketing and branding approaches to enhance the government's image [29]. Branding constitutes a process of organizational representation through practices aimed at conceiving, employing, and disseminating a government brand [30]. This process is undertaken by the government to reach the public as consumers of governmental services.

Furthermore, the definition of government branding in various contexts can also be summarized as follows. Branding is a process of establishing differentiating factors for an organization from others, followed by communicating these factors to both internal and external stakeholders [31]. Branding involves naming organizational products and services, defining target audiences for these products and services, positioning the value of the products and services, as well as communicating the benefits inherent in the products and services [31].

Branding is a process aimed at creating an organizational identity, encompassing concepts, strategies, or paradigms [32]. This process consists of three stages, namely, developing the brand, communicating the brand, and maintaining the brand. The first stage involves creating an organizational brand that is easily understood by stakeholders. The second stage is to convey the message embedded in the brand to stakeholders. The third stage entails an iterative process of maintaining the brand in accordance with changes in the governmental environment and audience.

E-government branding is a component of service branding; thus, it is essential to understand how previous literature defines service branding. Service branding entails a series of efforts to develop and integrate branding and services [33]. Service branding focuses on the creation and maintenance of users' perceptions regarding the provided services [34].

From various definitions inherent to the concept of government branding and service branding, this paper defines e-government branding as a range of decisions that can influence the relationship between the government and stakeholders, aimed at achieving organizational goals. E-government branding centers on the branding of electronic services organized by the government. The stages traversed by e-government branding encompass the journey starting from brand creation, communicating the brand, and persistently undertaking efforts to maintain the brand's relevance with stakeholders. E-government branding necessitates various efforts to provide the finest electronic public services for citizens.

3.2 Advantages of E-government Branding

Literature from before has indicated that the advantages of government organization branding [21]. Branding can mobilize the community to serve as advocates for government services [35]. Branding can strengthen the government's relationship with the community in order to develop public service priorities, influence citizens' behavior, and shape stakeholders' perceptions [36]. Branding can foster public trust and government organization accountability [36]. Government branding is an effort to build and maintain relationships with stakeholders, including citizens, employees, and government partner organizations [36]. In summary, prior literature highlights that government organization

branding offers benefits such as community mobilization, advocacy, strengthened relationships, influence on behavior, and enhanced public trust and accountability through efforts directed at stakeholders like citizens, employees, and partner organizations.

Unlike private organizations, government organizations engage in branding to create a positive perception among the public and enhance the appeal of the government organization [24]. Government branding has the potential to influence citizens' perceptions and guide their behavior [25]. The elements of branding in government communication positively impact public emotions, motivating them to support the government organization along with its services and policies [25]. A robust organizational brand identity enables service recipients to distinguish between one government organization and another [30]. When a government organization undertakes branding for its products and services, it not only adds value to the society but also contributes value to the government organization implementing such branding [31]. Public service branding will create a sense of camaraderie between service providers and recipients, which, in turn, will result in public loyalty towards the service branding [33]. Public service branding has the potential to establish diverse emotional bonds that can enhance the image of public services [33].

In the context of government, branding confers several benefits [37], including the following. Branding simplifies the task of introducing government products and services, concurrently stimulating collaboration with external entities. Branding imparts a comprehensive comprehension of the products and services generated by the government. Furthermore, branding incentivizes the public to adopt these services, as they are perceived to possess greater appeal compared to alternative services.

In the context of services, branding not only strengthens communication with service users but also internal communication with organizational employees [34]. Service branding supports public service organizations and their employees in making adequate service promises. The branding initiatives undertaken by public service provider organizations serve as a communicative mechanism that imparts information to citizens regarding the quality of services rendered. This, in turn, establishes the organization's credibility within the perspective of service recipients [38]. When a public service organization is perceived as credible by the public, the conveyed messages are effectively received.

The above exposition demonstrates that branding offers various benefits to government organizations. For the purpose of this paper, e-government branding is assumed to provide benefits in the form of enhancing public support for government electronic public services, as well as influencing the behavior and perception of the public towards the provided electronic public services.

3.3 Types of E-government Branding

E-government branding is a form of public service branding, specifically within the realm of digital government branding. Government services conducted electronically or digitally are categorized based on internet-based publication or communication, interaction between the government and citizens, and transactions to obtain public services [39]. The communication channels used to facilitate electronic public services include websites, mobile applications, including social media and the implementation of smart city technologies [40]. This underscores the need for distinct types of branding, emphasizing that while public service branding encompasses various aspects, e-

government branding specifically addresses the evolving landscape of digital government services and the unique communication channels they rely on.

The distinctions between branding for government organizations and private enterprises necessitate that government entities engage in branding activities that are tailored accordingly [21]. Government organization branding is conducted in various ways targeting both internal and external audiences. External branding is directed towards the public through channels such as websites or other media [24]. Internal branding is directed towards government organization employees [24]. When an organization engages in internal branding, employees provide support for the organization's values when it interacts with stakeholders [41].

External branding is aimed at shaping the public's perception of the government organization [27]. Given the intangible nature of public services, when conducting branding, tangible products such as brochures and printed information are utilized to depict the process of public services [34]. In essence, external branding endeavors to influence how the public views the government organization, and in light of the abstract nature of public services, it employs tangible materials like brochures and printed content to effectively illustrate the service processes.

Government-led branding initiatives are directed towards employees, inviting them to engage in the development of culture and strategies so that they comprehend the government brand, embody brand values, and exhibit commitment to its support [27]. Internal branding for employees aims to connect them with the organization's vision and values [27]. Internal branding is employed to construct the organizational brand identity that primarily centers on the individuals functioning within the organization [27]. This paragraph highlights that government-led branding includes engaging employees to build a cohesive culture, fostering their understanding of the brand, values, and commitment.

This paper illuminates the dynamic strategies employed by governmental organizations in the realm of e-government branding. The distinction between external branding, which engages the public, and internal branding, which targets employees, underscores the multifaceted nature of building a comprehensive brand presence. Leveraging diverse media channels further enhances the reach and impact of these branding initiatives, facilitating not only the dissemination of information about e-government services but also fostering a sense of unity and commitment among different stakeholders. By adopting these strategies, governmental organizations can holistically shape perceptions, drive engagement, and ensure the successful delivery of e-government services in an increasingly digital landscape.

4. Conclusion

The exposition in the preceding section can be summarized as follows. The implementation of e-government branding can be defined as an endeavor to achieve organizational objectives through a variety of decisions aimed at influencing the government's relationships with stakeholders. Among various benefits, e-government branding can foster a favorable perception of the government within society. Furthermore, e-government branding can be directed towards both the public and employees of governmental organizations through diverse communication channels.

The discussion within this paper is expected to contribute to the field of management, particularly in the public sector. This paper proposes a conceptualization of e-government branding that aids in comprehending the boundaries of branding in the context of electronic public services. It elucidates several benefits of e-government

branding that can inspire public managers to engage in branding efforts for the provided electronic services. Moreover, the paper expounds upon the types of branding, both directed externally and internally within governmental organizations.

This paper contributes to e-government research and its potential to encourage the public to have positive perceptions of electronic public services. This paper is not exempt from limitations. The constrained quantity of articles concerning e-government branding research results in the utilization of references from public sector branding articles across various contexts, which diverge from the context of electronic public services. For future research endeavors, there is a need for empirical data to ascertain the evolution of e-government branding in Indonesia, both from the government's perspective as a service provider and from the society's perspective as service users.

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