

Want To Make Citizens Happy? Put Experience First

Not long ago, the typical measures for successful governments were a set of macro standards in which economic growth and national security took center stage. However, governments are currently facing new challenges based on the changing expectations of more connected and informed citizens.

The UN General Assembly, back in 2011, unanimously adopted a resolution for “a holistic approach to development” with the aim of encouraging sustainable happiness and wellbeing in member nations.

More recently, the concept of happiness was adopted by the U.A.E., which launched the National Program for Happiness and Positivity in 2016, as part of its commitment to nurture a happier society and instill positivity as a core value in its citizens.

Despite more governments around the world focusing on such initiatives, they are still stopping short of taking a truly holistic view of citizen experience. In most instances, governments are proactively focusing on improving citizen experience within the services that governments deliver. Looking at citizen experience from a broader perspective can leverage the full power of digital and disruptive technologies, such as digital services and channels, the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, and virtual and augmented reality.

This perspective should not only include every interaction a citizen has with a government while accessing and receiving government services, but also include elements that affect citizens more frequently in their day-to-day lives. The total citizen experience comprises service, living and regulatory environments.

Service environment

This refers to services directly controlled and delivered by the government such as passports, driving licenses, national IDs, business licenses and more. In the last 10 years or so, there has been a significant shift in the way the public sector delivers its services, owing to massive digitization efforts that increased the accessibility of services to 24/7 through portals and mobile apps.

However, the initial transformations primarily focused on making services available online and missed on the experience element. For example, in countries like the UK, it was noticed that there is a considerable proportion of the population, such as elder people, who are not comfortable with technology. They found themselves worse off as they did not know how to access e-services. With issues such as these, experience-led transformations have emerged as the new priority.

Living environment

These are the aspects that touch a citizen’s daily life daily and tend to be directly controlled

by governments, but which are not implicitly always seen by citizens as government services. These can include roads, parks, transport, recreational facilities and security.

The living environment has a much bigger impact in shaping the experiences of citizens due to its continued exposure, unlike a specific service, and therefore it plays a significant role in how satisfied people feel at the end of a day.

Regulatory environment

This refers to policies, regulations and legislations that provide and create the umbrella environment under which private and third sector organizations operate to deliver services to individuals and organizations. This element, like the living environment element, has a stronger impact on shaping the experiences of citizens due to its scope and scale.

It is critical for governments to keep citizen experience in mind and proactively integrate it into policies, regulations and legislations. This will help ensure that private and third sector organizations deliver better citizen experiences, not only to survive the market competition but as a sense of responsibility.

One way to do this is for governments to co-create policies with citizens that are going to be affected by them. While public consultation is not a new concept, the development of idea sharing as well as e-collaboration platforms have made it easier to engage with citizens.

Governments are currently standing at an important crossroads as they consider continuing with the status quo or re-aligning themselves to fulfill their original purpose of serving citizens. A new citizen-centric framework to deliver stronger experiences could increase the number of satisfied and happy citizens.

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