Inclusion in Digital Government: Narrowing the Divides

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1. Introduction to Minitrack

Governments at all levels continue to promote, grow, and augment their digital engagement with the citizens they serve. Through social media, mobile applications, online services, and other forms of digital services, governments are increasingly expecting that individuals will interact with them through a range of digital media and technologies. This includes public policy-making (e.g. governance), government operations (e.g. emergency management), citizen engagement (e.g. transparency), and government services (e.g. information provision). As they promote these digital pathways, it is critical for governments to ensure that all citizens are able to realize their needs through inclusive design, availability, and ability. Many digital divides remain – from access to sufficient technologies (e.g. broadband, devices, costs), the ability to use technologies, and the design of digital government services.

This minitrack hopes to increase the attention on digital inclusion within electronic government services. The minitrack potentially includes (but is not limited to) topics such as:
- Longitudinal analyses of inclusion in digital government
- The role of digital literacy in use/non-use of online government services
- The use of digital government by immigrant and migrant populations
- The use of digital government by indigenous populations
- The use of digital government by low-literacy populations
- The role of socio-economic status on the use of digital government
- Accessibility of digital government for people with perceptual, motor, or cognitive disabilities
- The role of government in the development of international technical standards for digital accessibility
- Development and/or implementation of statutes, regulations or policies related to digital inclusion
- Trends in case law related to digital inclusion
- Trends in comparative or international law related to digital inclusion
- The relationship between trust of institutions and use of digital government by diverse populations
- How digital-based voting impacts involvement of citizens in elections
- LGBTQ interactions with digital government
- Usability evaluation methods for testing digital government services with diverse user populations
- Research methods for understanding why diverse individuals avoid using digital government
- Inclusive design methods to involve diverse populations in the actual development of digital government

2. Papers in Minitrack

2021 is the first year of the minitrack on inclusion in digital government, and we are excited to have two excellent papers. The first paper, "Activating Older Unemployed Individuals: A Case Study of Online Job Search Peer Groups" focuses on the use of online peer groups by the Federal Employment Agency in Germany. Participants in the online peer groups wrote 2,390 messages over a three month period, and showed a statistically significant increase in the number of job applications submitted compared to the control group who did not take part in the peer groups. Given the current economic situation around the world, this approach of having governmental agencies use online peer support groups to encourage older individuals who are searching for employment, has great potential to have an impact on the lives of older workers. The second paper, "Digital Inclusion in a Disadvantaged Swedish Suburb –Trust and Participation to Form Quality of Government" focuses on how government can better serve people with low socioeconomic status in Sweden. In the paper, the authors had a total of 323 survey responses related to Internet usage and provided analysis and many interesting implications for how government can help bridge digital divides related to socio-economic status.

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