

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Digital Government: Narrowing the Divides

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1. Introduction to the Minitrack

Governments at all levels continue to promote, grow, and augment their digital engagement with the citizens that they serve. As governments closed their physical locations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, digital services and resources were the primary, if not only, means through which individuals could engage with their governments. The pandemic highlighted the disparities that various populations, groups, and governments face in achieving a vision of digital government for all.

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. However, many digital divides remain – access to sufficient technologies (e.g., broadband, devices, costs), the ability to use existing technologies, and the design of digital government services.

This minitrack hopes to increase the attention on diversity, equity, and inclusion within digital government services. The minitrack includes topics such as:

- Impacts of the COVID-19 on the ability of marginalized groups to engage with digital government;
- The development of inclusive digital government;
- 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;
- The role of community-based organizations (e.g., public libraries, non-government organizations) in fostering digital inclusion;
- 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;
- LGBTQIA+ 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; and
- Inclusive design methods to involve diverse populations in the actual development of digital government.

2. Papers in the Minitrack

Celebrating our minitrack's third year in 2023, we are excited to have three excellent papers.

The first paper, "Evaluating the Accessibility of Digital Government Services for Family Law in the U.S. during the COVID-19 Pandemic", investigates the impact of the wide adoption of electronic filing, access to forms, and remote hearings that was imposed on us because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper reports on a study on the accessibility of PDF divorce forms used in 10 states in the U.S., which revealed that none of the forms was completely accessible, raising concerns about "accessibility to justice".

The other two papers focus on digital inclusion of the elderly. The second paper, "Information Technology Adoption by Senior Citizens: Why Seniors Use IT", reports on a comparative analysis of two countries, Denmark and Japan, regarding the elderly's technology

acceptance. Although the countries are similar with respect to IT infrastructure, they differ strongly in the reasons why their senior citizens do not use IT. The authors identified three essential drivers of IT use – advanced usability, informal supporters, and external mandate –, and discuss implications for designing inclusion strategies for the elderly.

Finally, the third paper, "Methods and (Lack of) Theory in Digital Inclusion, Digital Divide, and Digital Equity Research on Older Adults", reports on a literature review on methodologies, theories, and topics concerning the digital inclusion, digital divide, and digital equity focusing on the elderly. As they built and evaluated a theory that contributes to the understanding and conceptualization of research on the digital inclusion of older adults, the authors identified trends, deficits, and gaps that may guide future research efforts.