

Exploring the Feasibility of a Digital Government Journal

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The last seven to ten years has been a time of growth and formalization for digital government (DG) research, spurred especially in the past five years by the existence of the NSF Digital Government Research Program. A community of DG researchers appears to be emerging that comprises both computer and information sciences and social and behavioral sciences. The community appeals to both academics and practitioners. Given the emergence of this diverse community of interest, this project explores the need for and feasibility of a new journal dedicated to digital government research. The main goals are to understand the experiences of DG researchers with regard to publishing their work and to gather their opinions about the desirability and focus of a dedicated journal or other publishing strategies.

While there is no one generally accepted definition of DG research, the area encompasses the “intersections of computer and information sciences, related social, political, and behavioral sciences, and the problems and missions of government agencies and a democratic society” (Dawes, et al, 2004). Digital government or E-government has also been characterized as “the use of IT within government to achieve more efficient operations, better quality of service and easy public access to government information and services”(Kraemer and King, 2003 p.3)

The questions being addressed by DG researchers cut across almost every domain of public service and every aspect of information management, technology, and infrastructure. Therefore, the two distinguishing features of many digital government research projects are their multidisciplinary and the incorporation of partnerships between researchers and practitioners. These unique features of DG research are demonstrated by the rising number of collaborative projects, cross-disciplinary initiatives, multi-method approaches, appeal to multiple audiences.

The amount and variety of digital government research is clearly growing. However, the question remains whether traditional academic journals welcome submissions that depart from conventional disciplinary treatment of research findings. As a result, the DG research community has begun to discuss the need for a new journal or other publication strategies devoted to DG research questions, methods, and results.

Research Design and Preliminary Findings

This study used a multi-method research design. The first stage of research compiled a purposive sample of digital government researchers. The sample was constructed from lists of NSF DG grantees (PIs and co-PIs), proposers to the e-government cluster at the annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, and authors and co-authors of papers published in the top five journals in public administration, public policy, and management information systems over the last five years (1999 – 2003). These disciplines were selected because they tend to be important outlets for interdisciplinary research.

An on-line survey with closed and open-ended questions was administered to elicit the experiences, opinions, preferences and professional characteristics of these individuals. A total of 458 participants were sent the online survey. We achieved a 41% response rate (n=188). About 57 percent associated themselves with computer and information science and about 38 percent with the social and behavioral sciences. About half had been conducting DG research for at least five years. About one-fifth of the respondents are conducting DG research outside the US, mostly in Europe.

While the detailed data analysis is still underway, several important findings are clear. First, survey respondents are very interested in a journal dedicated to digital government research. About 87 percent said they would submit articles, 80 percent would act as reviewers, and 72 percent would serve on an editorial board. Most had had some difficulty publishing DG research in traditional journals, noting difficulty in identifying suitable journals and the need to disaggregate multi-disciplinary results in order to be published in disciplinary journals.

Respondents favored two strategies for increasing both the amount and impact of digital government research: a dedicated journal was most favored for increasing the visibility and legitimacy of DG research. In addition respondents strongly endorsed a dedicated publication that would appeal to both researchers and practitioners. The second strategy focused on research symposia in existing journals as most likely to promote the influence of DG research in the wider academic community.

Remaining work

The literature review that helped us identify the survey sample is continuing and being expanded to include information science and specialized journals to obtain a more complete picture of DG publishing trends to date. Detailed data analysis of the survey data will be completed shortly.

References

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