

Chapter XI

A Comparative Study of Municipal Adoption of Internet-Based Citizen Participation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines whether the form of local government, population size, and city officials' beliefs influence city adoption and deployment of resources to support Internet-based citizen participation. The Internet is said to have an interactive potential to bring citizens closer to their government. Empirical evidence however, indicates many governments have not taken advantage of this potential, and studies of e-government have made little attempt to investigate the factors that influence city adoption of Internet-based citizen participation. Beginning with the premise that the form of government, population size, and officials' attitude drive actions, the researcher posits that these will be important factors affecting resource deployment and the use of the Internet to facilitate citizen participation. A mail survey was sent to Chief Administrative Officers of municipalities with Web sites, and the responses were audited against the deliberative features on the Web sites. The findings reveal that in general, city population size and officials' beliefs in traditional and Internet-based citizen participation do influence deployment of resources and the use of the Internet for citizen participation.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates whether the form of municipal government, city officials' beliefs and city population size influence local governments' use of the Internet to bring citizens close to their governments. The Internet is said to have poten-

tial to increase citizen-government interaction by fostering political community and online citizen participation. However, empirical evidence indicates that many e-government initiatives focus on efficiency, service delivery and online transaction processing, and have not taken full advantage of the Internet's interactive potential to enhance

Internet-based citizen participation (Chadwick and May 2001; Kearns, Bend & Stern 2002; West 2001, 2004; Global e-Policy and e-Government Institute and Rutgers e-Governance Institute 2003, 2005, Jensen & Venkatesh 2007). In addition, most research on e-government focus on stages of adoption, efficient delivery of service, transparency, good governance, and customer satisfaction with little attempt to investigate the reasons behind the relatively low deliberative features on local government web sites. Beginning with the premise that the form of government, population size and officials' attitude drive actions, the researcher posits that these will be important factors affecting resource deployment and the use of the Internet to facilitate citizen participation.

Background

The mayor-council form of government is typically associated with larger industrialized heterogeneous cities, is said to be more adaptable and responsive to community needs, and the mayors in this form of government tend to work more with external constituencies. The council-manager form of government is most frequently found in medium-sized cities, and is said to emphasize professional expertise and administrative accountability (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2006). It follows therefore that, in theory, the Chief Administrative Officers of the mayor-council form of government would be more likely to believe in citizen participation, and more interested in involving citizens in public decision making, and in using the Internet to facilitate citizen participation, than would the Chief Administrative Officers of the council-manager form of government. In a study that examined the impact of form of government on citizen participation, Foutz (1993) concluded that cities with mayor-council form of government are more likely to utilize citizen participation in public decision making. However, other studies have shown that cities with council-manager form of government are more likely to encour-

age and utilize citizen participation (Kweit & Kweit, 1981; Nalbandian, 1991; Ebdon, 2002). It is therefore unclear as to whether either form of government has more influence on citizen participation, particularly on local governments' use of the Internet to facilitate citizen participation. In addition, although studies show that cities with large populations are more likely to encourage citizen participation in decision making due to the heterogeneous nature of those communities (Wang, 2001; O'Toole, Marshall & Grewe, 1996; Ebdon, 2000a) few studies are yet to be performed to determine the influence of population size on Internet-based citizen participation. Therefore, the need for empirical investigation into the influence of local form of government and population size on officials' beliefs in citizen participation, and their use of the Internet to support citizen participation is greater than ever before.

TRADITIONAL CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Citizen participation is defined as citizen involvement in decisions making pertaining to the management of public affairs and service delivery (Langton, 1978). Participation occurs when citizens and public officials have participation needs and when participation mechanisms exist (King, Feltey & Susel, 1998). Traditional citizen participation occurs through mechanisms such as hearing, citizen forums, community or neighborhood meetings, community outreaches, citizen advisory groups, individual citizen representation, etc.

The argument over involving citizens directly in government dates back to the early days of the American government, as expressed in the federalist and Jeffersonian views of democracy. In the federalist papers, Hamilton and his federalist colleagues argued that direct citizen participation would not be necessary and that a sound administrative system would keep people's allegiance

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