



Guarding Digital Government Publication Channels – Mission, Practice, Insights

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ABSTRACT

The digital government research community has developed several publication channels, including journals and conference series to evaluate, refine, and present the outcomes of its work to fellow researchers and the world. Developing and sustaining such channels requires institutional backing with sufficient financial, organizational, and communication capacity. Existing publication channels implement diverse institutional arrangements from commercial publishers and universities to international and non-profit organizations. However, besides institutional support, a key role in operating such channels are journal editors-in-chief and conference program chairs, who link the channels to the research community that supplies them with steady streams of research, and ensure that the channels maintain their relevance to the changing digital government field, ensure the quality of accepted publications, and contribute to the advancement of the field. This paper examines the evolving landscape of publication channels for digital government research, institutional arrangements for developing and sustaining such channels, and the role of the guardians of such channels – editors-in-chief and program chairs. The paper provides the context for a discussion among such guardians on the insights for publishing digital government research.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Applied computing**; • **Computers in other domains**; • **Computing in government**; • **E-government**; • **Social and professional topics**; • **Computing / technology policy**; • **Government technology policy**;

KEYWORDS

digital government research, publication channels for digital government research, guardians of publication channels for digital government research, publication insights from the guardians

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1 DIGITAL GOVERNMENT PUBLICATION CHANNELS

The digital government research community has over the years grown in size, diversity and influence. Its main outcomes, i.e. journal articles, books, book chapters, and conference papers are captured by the Digital Government Reference Library (DGRL) [1]. DGRL version 1.5 contains 19,390 references to “predominantly English-language, peer-reviewed work in the study domains of digital government, digital governance, and digital democracy”.

This number comprises papers presented and published in several long-running conference series specializing in digital government research. Among them are: Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research (DG.O) with 647 paper in DGRL [2], Hawaii International Conference on Systems Research (HICSS) with 802 papers in DGRL [3], International Conference on Electronic Governance (IFIP EGOV-CeDEM-EPART) with 740 papers in DGRL [4] and International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (ICEGOV) with 711 papers in DGRL [5].

A large contributor to the number of references in DGRL are journals specializing in digital government research. Among them are: Government Information Quarterly (GIQ) with 972 articles in DGRL and 2022 Impact Factor of 7,8 [6], Information Polity published by IOS Press with 396 articles in DGRL and 2022 Impact Factor of 2,0 [7], Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy published by Emerald with 336 articles in DGRL and 2022 Impact Factor of 2,6 [8], eJournal of eDemocracy and Open Government published by the Department for E-Governance and Administration (JeDEM), University for Continuing Education Krems, Austria with 161 articles in DGRL [9], and Digital Government: Research and Practice published by ACM with 74 articles in DGRL [10].

2 MANAGING DIGITAL GOVERNMENT PUBLICATION CHANNELS

Developing and managing digital government publication channels, including conferences, journals and book series, and guarding their relevance, quality and sustainability is a major operation involving

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teams of professional editors working with thousands of authors and reviewers who are spread across disciplines, affiliations and countries around the world. The operation relies on the enthusiasm of individual researchers willing to work in multiple roles (editor, reviewer and author) and join multiple research teams, and their insight and dedication to the development of their fields of expertise. One measure of the size and diversity of the digital government research community, is 16 annual editions of the ICEGOV conferences which presented and published 1464 papers written by 2097 authors from 96 countries [11].

While the enthusiasm and dedication of individual researchers to the development of digital government as a field of enquiry, problem domain, and a branch of applied science is necessary, it is also insufficient. In order to finance, manage and sustain individual publication channels, we also need professional organizations with formal status, capacity and stability matching the long-term needs of such channels. These organizations range from big commercial publishing houses like Elsevier publishing Government Information Quarterly, individual universities like University for Continuing Education Krems publishing JeDEM, international organizations like United Nations University organizing ICEGOV conferences, or non-profit organizations like Digital Government Society organizing DG.O conferences.

However, in order to develop and sustain specific digital government publication channels, the organizations that own, finance and manage such channels need to connect with the digital government research community. The point of connection is the appointment of editors-in-chief in the case of journals and program chairs in the case of conferences. In both cases, the appointees to such roles must be experts in the field, able to judge the relevance and quality of any work done in the field, supported by other experts, make reliable decisions, and resolve disputes when they arise. The appointees must be also sufficiently known in the field to project reliability, objectivity, confidence and trust in the process. Their reputation in the community, earned over the years, assure the researchers that their work is in good hands.

3 GUARDING DIGITAL GOVERNMENT PUBLICATION CHANNELS – MISSION AND PRACTICE

The journal editors-in-chief or conference program chairs are responsible for securing a sufficient numbers of submissions of adequate quality and relevance to the journal/conference to fill successive journal issues to be published regularly 2, 3 or 4 times a year or to populate conference programs to be organized annually or biannually in a series. Securing such numbers, relevance and quality require keeping the scope and aims of journals as well as conference themes up-to-date, evaluating proposals for journal special issues, formulating and disseminating calls for papers, and even soliciting carefully identified researchers to submit papers to cover particularly demanded themes.

The digital government field is affected by the fast-changing nature of digital technology, new areas for digital innovation, and public sector policy and practice that utilize such innovations to respond to evolving societal demands and new international developments. Keeping the digital government publication channels

current in such circumstances requires editors-in-chief and program chairs to possess expert knowledge and keep track of the developments in the digital government field. Both need to inform their strategic decisions, particularly on updates to the journal aims and scope, the development of the special issues, on the selection of the conference themes, on the appointments of the associate and guest editors, and on updates to the membership of the journal editorial boards and conference program committees.

The editors-in-chief and program chairs are the first recipients of the submitted manuscripts to the corresponding journals or conferences. They determine if such manuscripts are suitable to the journal concerning their relevance, contribution, quality, or a combination thereof. If not, they decide to desk-reject them. Otherwise, they assign the handling editor, who can be an editor-in-chief, associate editor or guest editor. In turn, the handling editor identifies relevant researchers, invites them to review the manuscript and advice about its prospects for publication in GIQ and what revisions should be made before such publication. Once a sufficient number of reviews are received, the handling editor decides to accept or reject the manuscript, or to send it again to authors for correction. In the latter case, the editor will decide if to engage the reviewers again to check if the changes were done to their satisfaction.

4 GUARDING DIGITAL GOVERNMENT PUBLICATION CHANNELS – INSIGHTS

Given the volume and variety of digital government submissions, many from outside their own areas of specialization, the editors-in-chief and program chairs, particularly those who assume such roles for several successive conference editions, collect a lot of experience and expertise about the content, style and process of publishing digital government research.

Editors-in-chief and program chairs also tend to actively look for researchers with profiles matching the profiles of the submissions, engaging them in conversations about the merits and limitations of the submissions, and how to build on the former and overcome the latter. The process is carried out systematically, in rounds, spread over time, and simultaneously with at least two independent reviewers. The process is meant to produce substantive improvements in the quality of the submissions, raising this quality to the level required by the journal or conference by the series of “major revision” or “minor revision” decisions. When the expected improvements are not produced, according to the reviewers, rejection decisions follow or, on occasion, additional reviewers are invited. Rejection is common in the first rounds of reviews, particularly for the journals like GIQ, and increasingly uncommon in subsequent rounds.

The process, repeated for many submissions, involving several available publication channels and repeated over time, has an aggregate impact on the advancement of the digital government field. One mechanism is engaging reviewers from outside the core digital government field, as often happens to overcome the scarcity of reviewers with availability and expertise exactly matching the submissions. Such outsiders are then exposed to the topics and methods used in the digital government field, which can potentially introduce them to the digital government research community. Another mechanism is relating the methods and insights used in the

reviewers' own fields to digital government research. This methodological enhancement gets reflected in the revised versions of the submitted work, thus enriching the digital government field.

The editors-in-chief and program chairs of digital government journals and conference series are actively shaping and participating in the processes described above. Along such processes, they develop valuable insights into the topics, methods, applications and trends that shape the landscape of the digital government field. They are also in the best position to track how the field evolves over time, predict what new opportunities, problems and trends appear around the corner, and react by promoting research that validates such predictions and prepares for them.

This paper prepares the ground for an open discussion between editors-in-chief and program chairs of the main digital government journals and conference series, joined by members of the digital government research community who participate as authors, reviewers and editors, and share such insights with the community on the occasion of the 25th Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research, to take place in Taipei, Taiwan from 11 to 14 June 2024.

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