

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS' ACCEPTANCE OF THE PRACTICES OF DIGITAL DEMOCRACY: A MODEL EXPLAINING THE UTILIZATION OF ONLINE POLICY FORUMS IN SOUTH KOREA

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The Internet provides a new digital opportunity for realizing democracy in public administration, but there are wide variations in adopting and implementing practices of digital democracy among government agencies. Thus, this study raises a question: What factors determine public officials' acceptance of practices of digital democracy on government Web sites?

To predict public officials' *behavioral intention to use* online policy forums on government Web sites, individual and organizational factors, as well as system characteristics, were examined. Individual factors include Internet attitudes, attitudes toward citizen participation, and knowledge about digital democracy. Organizational factors refer to supervisor support, information system (IS) department support, and innovation-supportive organizational culture. System characteristics of online policy forums include perceived ease of use, information quality, and perceived risk in online discussions. Between the independent and dependent variables, there is an intervening variable: public officials' *perceived usefulness* of online policy forums.

A survey questionnaire was administered to Korean public officials in central and

local governments, and a total of 895 responses were analyzed. Path analysis indicates that three causal variables are important in predicting public officials' intentions to use online policy forums: perceived usefulness, information quality, and attitudes toward citizen participation. Perceived usefulness plays a mediating role between some predictors and behavioral intention.

This study has defined four stages of digital democracy: (1) information disclosure, (2) listening/feedback, (3) online deliberation, and (4) online decision-making. In the survey, there are no differences in officials' support for practices of digital democracy between the third and fourth stages of digital democracy. This study finds that public administrators' perspectives on the future of online policy forums are affected by Internet attitudes, attitudes toward citizen participation, knowledge about digital democracy, and perceived usefulness of online policy forums. This study also finds that there are statistically significant differences in characteristics between previous users and non-users of online policy forums, and differences in perception of information quality between officials in central and local governments. Finally, content analysis of comments from respondents reveals that complementary measures are needed in introducing new practices of digital democracy.