

# **The Expanded Civic Space of E-Government: Where the State and Citizen Interact Digitally**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation explores both the evolving nature of the public encounter—where state and citizen meet—and the virtual civic space in which the meeting occurs through an examination of selected state and federal web sites. The examination uses multiple qualitative measures and an architectural perspective to bridge the gap between traditional physical-space based government and the virtual-space of e-government. The research focuses on identifying salient e-government issues and explicating their implications for public encounters, public administration practitioners and scholars, and traditional government institutions. The implications of e-government on the exercise of administrative discretion, the digital divide, and policy making are explored. Select prescriptions are offered for public administration education, practitioners and scholars.

E-government architecture is conceptualized along two dimensions: the normative and the aesthetic. The normative dimension refers to the extent to which certain key norms or values are fulfilled or emphasized in web site architecture while the aesthetic dimension refers to whether certain technical features of what is considered good message design or high message quality are present. The normative tradition of public administration in combination with prior e-government research is used to construct evaluation criteria for assessing latent public values contained in government web site features and content. Information architecture, information presentation, and instructional message design literature are used to construct aesthetic criteria for determining the message character of web sites. Focus groups and a survey questionnaire are used to both challenge and triangulate the web site data analysis.

An argument is made for eliminating the distinction or dichotomy between the two modes of government action—traditional and that of e-government. A unification of the two is proposed as part of an overall strategy for addressing the restructuring and reorganization of extant institutional arrangements necessary to support an integrated approach to e-government and traditional service delivery. Caution is urged with respect to proposals for embedding government services and information within existing commercial and entertainment web sites lest democratic values be subordinated to financial interests.