

Abstract

Thesis: The COVID-19 Pandemic's Effect on the Use of Digital Participation by Indiana Municipalities

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This thesis investigates the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the use of digital public participation by Indiana's municipalities. Indiana's "Open Door Law" requires that local governments make most government meetings open to the public. This has forced municipalities to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and still hold these meetings. The nexus of Indiana's "Open Door Law" and the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a policy window that gives a motivation to adopt innovative public participation practices through the use of digital platforms. It integrates existing literature on public participation, public participation evaluation, e-government, and the digital divide to understand the basis for previous research into the field. Public participation has largely been interested in citizen empowerment and control. There have been many models that attempt to explain how governments engage with digital platforms to facilitate public participation. In the following paper, these models have been utilized to help explain public participation in a digital context. The researcher utilized data obtained from two surveys to reach their findings. The first survey was administered slightly after the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the second survey was administered six months later. The researcher conducted a correlation analysis on the selected variable of population size and the percentage of the rural population. The findings of this research were largely confounding partially due to a small sample size but still indicated that Indiana municipalities in our sample had increased their use of digital public participation and they perceived an increase in the quality of public participation after the COVID-19 pandemic began.