

Editorial: Are they now finally listening to us?

For a number of years, scholars interested in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in government found it difficult to catch the attention of their colleagues in public administration and politics departments. Technology was broadly seen as dull and mechanical, part of the information systems scholarly community, and not as interesting or relevant as popular topics such as agenda-setting, accountability, network collaboration and new public governance. We were tolerated at conferences but it was generally quite difficult to get papers on ICT in government published in key public administration journals.

In 2007, Albert Meijer even published an essay in *Information Polity* with the title ‘Why don’t they listen to us? Reasserting the role of ICT in Public Administration’. The argument was that many important insights have been produced by the community of scholars studying ICTs in the public sector but that these insights were widely ignored by mainstream scholars in public administration. For this reason, several strategies were presented to enhance the impact of our work on academic debates and to disseminate knowledge as widely as possible.

If we leap forward 15 years and look at the current academic landscape, we see that this has drastically changed. In the mainstream journals such as *Public Administration Review*, the *Journal of Public Administration Theory and Practice*, *Public Administration* and *Public Management Review*, there is a surge in papers on big data, algorithms and e-government. We are also seeing that specialist conferences on e-government are becoming increasingly popular and are attracting large numbers of papers. We are also starting to see to see governance issues associated with new technology filtering into other academic disciplines and subject areas, such as data science and surveillance studies (Webster, 2012).

Does this mean we have applied the various strategies effectively to enhance our impact? As much as we would like to claim that our strategies have raised the profile of e-government scholarship, we feel that this is not what has happened. One explanation is that people have finally come to realise that technologies actually have a transformative potential and that information flows shape organisations and services. Technology is no longer regarded as ‘geeky’ but rather as something that is of interest to all of us since we all experience the power of technology in our daily lives.

Does this mean that they are finally listening to us? To be honest we are not sure. The sophisticated analyses that are presented in *Information Polity* emphasize that technology is not an artifact that exists outside our social structures but is shaped through social interactions and, in turn, shapes these social structures. These sophisticated insights (see also Meijer & Löfgren, 2015; Taylor & Webster, 1996) are too often ignored and many papers focus on studying the effects of an algorithm through an experimental research design in which the algorithm is conceptualized as an independent artifact.

Whilst we think that there is a strong interest in new technology at the moment, maybe following the rapid shift to online services during the global COVID-19 pandemic and the recognition of the importance of ‘platform capitalism’, there is still a need to get other scholars and practitioners interested in information flows and ICTs, and importantly to help them develop sophisticated understandings of

technology that have emerged over the last 20 years from the scholarly community that publish in *Information Polity*. This is exactly why we continue to be happy with the term ‘information polity’, as it emphasizes to array of vested interests in the polity that influence and shape ICTs, government and public services – and that is why we keep encouraging you to keep sending your sophisticated empirical and theoretical analyses to our journal to ensure that technology in government receives the nuanced understanding it deserves.

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References

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