

Scientific Review Report



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Peer Reviewer's Comments

Note from the Peer Reviewer

This is an interesting article. However, it is very brief and therefore is lacking an in-depth analysis and discussion of the topic of transparency and engagement of the public with municipality websites. The good news is that the author has wordcount space to elaborate on certain aspects and address the issues raised in the scientific review and editing report below.

Summary

- Is the paper ready for submission in its current form?

No; please check my comments in this report and in the manuscript.

- Major issues – Likely to cause journal rejection

There are three major issues the author should consider:

a) The research question is a little muddled. The author opens with the issue of transparency as the focus of the paper (how municipal websites respond to the need for transparency); however, the author then refers to the use of municipal websites, in both Romania and the broader global context, and highlights several reasons for poor usage.

These two issues need to be linked. Transparency can imply accountability – the author, if interested in transparency, would therefore be interested in the type of information shared on these websites, and the ease of accessibility to the public.

However, the use of these websites by the public (the fact that Romania has a low usage) does not necessarily reflect on the transparency of municipalities and could be a result of a range of factors.

The author later refers to an analysis of how municipalities respond to users' demands and complaints; however, this is not what is being looked at in the case study.

The above indicates a need for clarification of the research question and objective(s).

b) The second issue is the fact that the significance of the study is not sufficient. In presenting the radiograph of municipal website transparency, how is the author suggesting these findings be used? What are the recommendations for next steps, further research, and policy response?

c) The research methodology is lacking in this paper. The author gives no indication of how websites were reviewed, the process used to reach the percentages presented in the paper, the verification of these findings, and the analysis approach. The author needs to include a sub-section for methodology and explain this more clearly.

- **Minor issues – Likely to cause delays in journal acceptance**

The case study was conducted in 2015; this could be an issue, as it may be considered outdated and much of this information may no longer be accurate. The author should attempt to contextualize the case study within current context (2021) and consider whether events such as COVID may have impacted municipality transparency online.

- **Does the paper present novel ideas/a novel direction with regard to the field of research?**

The paper is analyzing something interesting; however, my concern is the fact that this case study was conducted in 2015 and therefore the novelty of the findings may be questionable.

I recommend the author review the following articles and consider reworking their paper:

Explaining the transparency of local government websites through a political market framework (2020). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0740624X17302617>

A logit model to assess the transparency of Italian public administration websites (2020). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0740624X20302987>

Do local government websites meet the minimum criteria to serve their purpose? (2019)
(This is a Romanian case study)
<https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=806513>

Large-scale accessibility evaluation of Romanian municipal websites (2019).
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Costin_Pribeanu/publication/341099622_Large-scale_accessibility_evaluation_of_Romanian_municipal_websites/links/5ead2c3445851592d6b217c8/Large-scale-accessibility-evaluation-of-Romanian-municipal-websites.pdf

Transparency and Responsibility in the Public Administration Institutions. The Case of Romania (2017). https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3082504

- **Is the research rationale sound? (is the reason for conducting the research explained clearly in the paper?)**

As mentioned above, the research question is a little muddled. The author opens with the issue of transparency as the focus of the paper (how municipal websites respond to the need for transparency); however, the author then refers to the use of municipal websites, in both Romania and the broader global context, and highlights several reasons for poor usage.

These two issues need to be linked. Transparency can imply accountability – the author, if interested in transparency, would therefore be interested in the type of information shared on these websites, and the ease of accessibility to the public. However, the use of these websites by the public (the fact that Romania has a low usage) does not necessarily reflect on the transparency of municipalities and could be a result of a range of factors.

The author later refers to an analysis of how municipalities respond to users demands and complaints; however, this is not what is being looked at in the case study.

- **Does the journal accept this article type?**

The journal accepts this article type; however, there is room for expanding the length of the paper and this may be recommended to improve on the global and current contextualization of the study, as well as clarify the research question and significance of findings.

- Does the research in this article lie within the target journal's scope?

The International Political Science Review (IPSR) is the journal of the International Political Science Association. It is committed to publishing peer-reviewed articles that make a significant contribution to international political science. It seeks to meet the needs of political scientists throughout the world who are interested in studying political phenomena in the context of global interdependence and change. The journal welcomes articles reporting research on substantive topics, concepts, and/or methodologies in all fields of political science. It is expected that authors will establish the significance of their research question, locate it within the relevant literature, and clearly set out the research design through which they intend addressing the question. **Single-country case studies should analyze the theoretical and comparative implications of the case.**

The above in bold is important. Although the author locates the study within a global context in the literature review, the findings and implications thereof are not reviewed in terms of comparative implications globally.

- Does the paper present novel ideas or build on the research published in the target journal?

Please see above.

Assessment by paper section

Title and Abstract

- Are the Title and Abstract representative of the study? How can they be made more compelling?

The title and abstract clearly reflect the contents of the paper and did not require many major changes.

- Can a wide readership understand the Title and Abstract independent of the main text? Can they be made more accessible to readers across disciplines?

Yes

Introduction

- Is the literature review complete and which other papers can the author cite?

As mentioned above, the case study was conducted in 2015; this could be an issue as it can be considered outdated and much of this information may no longer be accurate. The author should attempt to contextualize the case study within current context (2021) and consider whether events such as COVID may have impacted municipality transparency online.

- Are the study objectives clearly stated and do they align with the methods and results?

Yes; the aim and the methodology and discussion of results are strong, and they align with each other.

Methods

- Is the research design appropriate? What are the gaps, and what should be done to fill the gaps?
The research design is not clear, aside from the use of a case study approach, and the mention of a radiography in the paper's introduction. Both require further elaboration.

- Is the research methodology sound and relevant to the field? Are the methods detailed enough to be reproduced by a skilled researcher?

As mentioned previously, the research methodology is lacking in this paper. The author gives no indication of how websites were reviewed, the process used to reach the percentages presented in the paper, the verification of these findings, and the analysis approach. The author needs to include a sub-section for methodology and explain this more clearly.

- Has the manuscript been prepared in accordance with the [EQUATOR Network's](#) research reporting guidelines? What are the gaps, and what should be done to fill the gaps?

This is not relevant.

Results and Discussion

- Does the data appear accurate, and has it been interpreted appropriately? Flag cases of insufficient or insignificant data with the author.

Yes, no issues were noted here

- Do the tables and figures clearly present the data, and do they align with the description of key results in the text? Flag inconsistencies and inaccuracies with the author.

Yes.

- Should the author get their data verified by a statistician or submit analyzed datasets to the journal?

This is not required.

- Are the research implications clearly mentioned? If they are mentioned, are they sound? If they are not mentioned, what tips should the author follow?

As mentioned above, the significance of the study in terms of implications is not clear. In presenting the radiograph of municipal website transparency, how is the author suggesting these findings be used? What are the recommendations for next steps, further research, and policy response?

- Are the concluding statements clear, and do they mention the contributions, limitations, and next steps for other researchers in the field?

See above. The author needs to elaborate on next steps, further research recommendations, and the primary significance of the study findings.

Senior Science Editor's Comments on Language and Paper Structure

- How was the paper's overall language quality prior to editing?

(Discuss language quality across a 3-point scale: Needed Few Improvements, Needed Several Improvements, Needed Major Improvements)

The language needed several improvements, especially with respect to the flow and terminology. Some words appeared non-standard and seemed out of context; they were replaced with standard terms for clarity or were flagged with a comment in the manuscript.

- What were the top 3 recurring grammar and language issues found and edited for native tone? Disconnection in flow: The sentences seemed fragmented and disconnected in places and did not quite flow clearly.

Use of non-standard terminology (as clarified above): Particular words were not suited to the context and were replaced with standard terms for clarity or were flagged with a comment for more information in order to identify alternatives.

Inconsistency in tenses: While describing research that has already been completed, the text appeared to shift between past and present tense.

- Does the edited paper adhere to the target journal's language preference?

(American v British, formal/technical v accessible, use of tense, use of first person, etc.)

American language conventions for spelling and punctuation are used consistently in the document; the journal doesn't specify anything in this regard.

- What types of changes were made for improvements to paper flow and how has the paper's readability improved because of these?

The main arguments need some more work in terms of flow and culmination. At the moment, the discussion section and conclusion appear to present a disconnect. The discussion lists the results and does not analyze them as it is typically expected to. The conclusion appears to present new ideas rather than to summarize the key findings and present details of limitations and directions for future research.

Senior Science Editor's and Managing Editor's Comments on the Paper's Journal Readiness

- What details or documents are missing in the paper submission package based on the target journal's formatting and submission requirements?

1. The authors' details (placeholders provided in the title page)

2. The figures cited in the document

3. Accurate URLs and complete information on the references.

- List out the journal's author preferences and formatting instructions (including the right file formats) that could not be followed and why.

The manuscript has been submitted in standard MS Word format and no problems were encountered.

- Does the target journal have a word count limit, and does the paper adhere to this limit after editing?

IPSR welcomes the submission of research articles of no more than 8,000 words (including references, notes, tables and figures). In general, there should be a maximum of 45 references. The article falls well within this word limit at present. I recommend treating this as an opportunity to expand on the existing arguments in order to present a cogent and comprehensive paper. The journal has a clear expectation that authors will establish the significance of their research question, locate it within the relevant literature, and clearly set out the research design through which they intend to address the question. To this end, please follow my comments in the main document and in my notes below as well, to ensure that your paper delivers on these lines.

- Does the paper need to be split for submission?

This is not required.

- Does the paper need to be blinded for review, and has it been blinded?

The paper has been blinded for review. A separate title page has been prepared for the author's use.

- Have ethical and financial declarations been provided? If not, alert the author to do so and explain why.

International Political Science Review requires all authors to acknowledge their funding in a consistent fashion under a separate heading. Please visit the Funding Acknowledgements page on the SAGE Journal Author Gateway to confirm the format of the acknowledgment text in the event of funding, or state that: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

- Is a conflict-of-interest statement provided? If not, alert the author to do so and explain why.

International Political Science Review encourages authors to include a declaration of any conflicting interests and recommends you review the good practice guidelines on the SAGE Journal Author Gateway.

- Has a data availability statement been provided? If not, alert the author to do so and explain why.

IPSR encourages all authors to share their research data where appropriate. Authors can make data available as a supplementary data file, which will be hosted on FigShare. The data will be openly

available, either from the IPSR website where a link will be co-located with the article or directly from FigShare.

- Has the corresponding author been identified for journal interaction?

No authors have been named in the manuscript. Please use the title page alone to mention the author's details. If this is a multi-author article, please include details of the corresponding author.

- Are all the references, tables, and figures present?

Yes

- Are the references in the right format and the figures and tables labelled appropriately?

Yes