



Pathways to Digital Engagement in Policy Making across China

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Abstract

The pervasive adoption of information technology has profoundly reshaped the public sphere in the digital era, establishing various online platforms as innovative avenues for civic engagement. This study examines the dynamic and political implications of China's digital engagement in policy making through the lens of state-society interaction. Based on data gathered from extensive fieldwork conducted over a period of three years in multiple locations across China, the research identifies and compares three distinct models of e-participative policy making: disclosure, consultation, and deliberation. These models, initiated proactively by local governments in response to critical public demands, exhibit varying degrees of institutionalization and forms of interaction between the state and citizens. While enhancing citizens' political influence, these models have also enabled governments to solicit public opinions on local issues, improve decision-making quality, and effectively redirect increased civic activism towards constructive avenues. The findings underscore the intricate nature of China's digital political engagement and offer comprehensive insights into the evolving dynamics of state-society relations in the digital age.

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