

# Digital Transformation and Institutional Communication in Morocco: The Impact of E-Government Communication on Citizen Trust

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**Abstract:** This article presents a narrative literature review which examines the relationship between e-government communication and citizen trust, with Morocco as the primary empirical focus. Drawing on scholarship from public administration, communication studies, and critical discourse analysis (CDA), particularly the work of Fairclough (1992, 2003) and van Dijk (1993), the review synthesizes existing knowledge on how digital institutional communication shapes, and is shaped by, citizen trust. The review traces Morocco's e-government journey from its earliest national digital strategies through the OECD-supported reforms of the late 2010s which situates this evolution within the general international literature on e-government trust (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005) and the persistent tension between managerial and participatory communication models (Chadwick & May, 2003). It further considers the structural constraints, particularly the digital divide documented by the Arab Barometer (2020), those condition citizens' access to and experience of digital government communication in Morocco. Critical discourse perspectives, including Morozov's (2013) concept of technological solutionism, are introduced as analytical resources for understanding the ideological dimensions of official digital governance discourse. The review concludes by identifying significant gaps in the existing literature, most notably the absence of CDA-based empirical research on Moroccan e-government texts and proposes directions for future research.

**Keywords:** e-government, institutional communication, citizen trust, digital transformation, public administration.

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## Introduction

The digitization of public services has reshaped the communicative relationship between governments and citizens across the world. As states increasingly migrate administrative functions, information dissemination, and civic engagement to digital platforms, the question of whether and how these transformations shape citizen trust in public institutions has become a central concern for scholars in public administration, communication studies, and digital governance (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005). Morocco situated at the intersection of North African, Arab, and Mediterranean geopolitical contexts, offers a particularly instructive case for examining this relationship. Since the early 2000s, the Moroccan state has pursued a sustained digital transformation agenda, supported in part by international partners such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018) and the World Bank (World Bank, 2021), with the explicit aim of improving public sector performance, transparency, and the quality of citizen-state engagement.

Despite this sustained investment, the existing literature on Moroccan e-government has remained largely concentrated on administrative, infrastructural, and policy dimensions of digital transformation, which leaves the communicative and discursive dimensions of institutional trust comparatively underexplored. How does the Moroccan state communicate its digital governance agenda to citizens? What assumptions about

citizenship, transparency, and accountability are embedded in this communication? And how do structural realities, including a documented digital divide along lines of age, gender, education, and geography (Arab Barometer, 2020), shape the reach and credibility of official digital communication? These questions call for a review that draws together insights from public administration scholarship and the critical, language-focused tradition of discourse analysis.

This article addresses that need through a narrative literature review that synthesizes scholarship on e-government and citizen trust, critical discourse analysis as an analytical framework for institutional communication, and the specific empirical and policy context of Morocco's digital transformation. The review aims to map the current state of knowledge, identify where existing research is strong and where it is thin, and to propose a research agenda, which is grounded in critical discourse analysis. This takes the communicative and ideological dimensions of e-government seriously.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The methodology section describes the search strategy and inclusion criteria used to assemble the reviewed literature. The literature review itself is organized into four thematic sections: the theoretical relationship between e-government and citizen trust; critical discourse analysis as a framework for institutional communication research; the empirical and policy context of e-government in Morocco; and the ideological dimensions of digital



governance discourse more broadly. The discussion synthesizes convergences and identifies gaps across this literature, and the conclusion proposes directions for future research.

## Methodology

### Nature and Rationale of the Review

This article adopts a narrative literature review design. Narrative reviews, as distinct from systematic reviews oriented toward exhaustive, reproducible search protocols for meta-analytic purposes, are appropriate when the principal aim is theoretical synthesis and conceptual integration across fields that do not share a single methodological paradigm (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006). Given that the present inquiry spans public administration, communication theory, and critical discourse studies, which are considered to be fields with distinct methodological conventions and publication venues. This is in the form of a narrative approach which allows for the interpretive synthesis that the topic requires. The review is guided by the following question: How does the existing literature conceptualize the relationship between e-government communication and citizen trust, and what does this literature reveal about the specific case of Morocco?

### Search Strategy and Source Selection

Literature is identified through searches of Google Scholar, the Wiley Online Library, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, and the OECD iLibrary, using combinations of the following terms: 'e-government AND trust', 'e-government AND Morocco', 'digital government AND citizen trust', 'critical discourse analysis AND government communication', 'digital divide AND Morocco', and 'Fairclough AND discourse analysis'. Additional sources are identified through citation examining the reference lists of key retrieved articles and tracing subsequent citations of foundational works, including Fairclough (1992, 2003), van Dijk (1993), and Chadwick and May (2003).

The review prioritizes peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, and primary institutional documents directly relevant to Morocco's digital governance context, including the OECD's (2018) Digital Government Review of Morocco. Foundational theoretical works on discourse analysis that predate the main period of e-government scholarship are included as core theoretical references regardless of publication date, given their continued centrality to the field.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources are included if they firstly empirically or theoretically address the relationship between e-government, digital governance, or digital public communication and citizen trust or institutional legitimacy. Second of all, certain sources are taken into account which either introduce or apply critical discourse analysis as a method for studying institutional or governmental communication. Finally, certain sources provide documented and traceable information about Morocco's digital transformation policy context or digital access. There are certain sources that are excluded because their claims cannot not be independently verified through the search process, or if they address e-government exclusively from a technical or systems-engineering standpoint without engaging social or communicative dimensions, or if they lack identifiable peer review or credible institutional authorship. This verification step is treated as a strict

precondition for inclusion, given the importance of source reliability in academic literature review writing.

### Analytical Approach

The retained literature is analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach (Thomas & Harden, 2008), in which recurring concepts, theoretical claims, and empirical findings are identified, compared, and organized into the four thematic sections that structure the review below. This thematic structure emerges from sustained engagement with the literature as a whole rather than being imposed prior to the review process, consistent with standard practice in narrative literature reviews (Green et al., 2006).

## Literature Review

### E-Government Communication and Citizen Trust

The relationship between e-government and citizen trust has been studied extensively in public administration scholarship since the early 2000s. Tolbert and Mossberger (2006), drawing on Pew survey data, found a statistically significant relationship between use of government websites and trust in government, concluding that e-government can increase what they term process-based trust by improving citizens' perceptions of governmental responsiveness and the quality of their interactions with public institutions. Their study is among the most widely cited in this field and remains a touchstone for subsequent research on digital trust-building.

Welch, Hinnant, and Moon (2005) extended this line of inquiry by examining how internet use, satisfaction with e-government services, and trust in government are interrelated. Their analysis found that individuals who were more satisfied with e-government services and government websites also reported higher trust in government, and that this relationship likely runs in both directions; that is, citizens who trust government are also more inclined to be satisfied with its digital services. Welch et al. further argued that factors such as accountability and transparency may be as important to citizens as the technical functionality of e-government systems themselves, a point that anticipates much of the critical literature discussed later in this review.

A separate but related strand of scholarship has focused on the institutional design of e-government communication itself, rather than treating it as a uniform independent variable. Chadwick and May (2003), in a comparative analysis of e-government policy in the United States, Britain, and the European Union, proposed three heuristic models of state-citizen interaction underpinning e-government practice: the managerial model, which emphasizes a vertical flow of information from government to citizens and is primarily concerned with efficiency and cost reduction; the consultative model, which also flows vertically but is oriented toward eliciting citizen input; and the participatory model, the most interactive of the three, which aims for a horizontal, multidirectional flow of information. Chadwick and May found that across all three cases examined, an executive-driven managerial model had assumed dominance at the expense of consultative and participatory possibilities, a finding with significant implications for how trust can be communicatively constructed through e-government: a managerial communication model, by design, offers citizens limited avenues to question, contest, or shape governmental digital communication, and the trust it can plausibly generate is correspondingly narrower than the trust associated with genuine consultation or participation.

## Critical Discourse Analysis as a Framework for Institutional Communication Research

### *Foundations of CDA*

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary framework for examining the relationship between language, power, and ideology in social life, distinguished from purely descriptive approaches to discourse analysis by its explicitly critical orientation toward revealing how language use can reproduce and legitimize social inequalities (Fairclough, 1992). Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of discourse analysis is among the most widely applied frameworks within the CDA tradition. The model treats every discursive event as simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice. The textual dimension concerns close linguistic analysis including vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical structure. The discursive practice dimension concerns the processes by which texts are produced, distributed, and consumed, including the ways texts draw on and combine other types of discourse. The social practice dimension situates discursive events within the wider social and institutional context that they both reflect and help to reproduce (Fairclough, 1992, 1995).

In his later work, Fairclough (2003) developed this model further as a practical toolkit for social researchers in the humanities and social sciences with little prior background in linguistics, explicitly framing textual analysis as inseparable from general social analysis. This three-dimensional approach is well suited to institutional communication research precisely because it allows analysts to move between close attention to specific wording and a general account of why an institution might choose to communicate in that way.

### *Van Dijk's Contribution and Its Proper Scope*

Teun van Dijk's (1993) *Elite Discourse and Racism*, while focused specifically on the discursive reproduction of racism by political, media, and academic elites, introduced analytical concepts that have proven influential well beyond that specific empirical focus, most notably the idea that elite discourse tends toward a pattern of positive self-presentation of the in-group alongside a comparatively critical or dismissive framing of out-groups. Van Dijk situates this pattern within a socio-cognitive account in which shared social cognitions, rather than only explicit textual claims, mediate the relationship between discourse, ideology, and society. Subsequent discourse scholars have extended this self-presentational logic to a range of institutional and governmental contexts beyond its original application to racism, though care should be taken not to overstate the direct applicability of a study about racial discourse to unrelated institutional domains such as e-government; the present review treats van Dijk's general analytical insight about discursive self-presentation as a transferable conceptual resource rather than treating his specific empirical findings on racism as themselves about government communication.

### *CDA and Institutional Communication: A Caveat on the Existing Literature*

It is important to state plainly, as part of this review, that direct applications of CDA specifically to e-government communication remain limited in the verifiable scholarly record, and that this scarcity is itself a notable feature of the literature rather than a gap to be filled in with unverified claims. Jørgensen and Phillips's (2002) widely used methodological text, *Discourse*

*Analysis as Theory and Method*, brings together Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, critical discourse analysis, and discursive psychology as three approaches to social research, and remains a standard methodological reference for researchers seeking to apply discourse-analytic methods to institutional or political texts, including, in principle, government digital communication. However, the text itself is methodological rather than focused on e-government specifically, and the present review draws on it as a methodological resource rather than as a source of empirical findings about digital governance discourse.

## The Empirical and Policy Context of E-Government in Morocco

### *Morocco's Digital Government Trajectory*

Morocco's engagement with digital governance has shown over more than two decades. The OECD's (2018) *Digital Government Review of Morocco* commissioned to support the Kingdom in laying the foundations for digital transformation of the public sector. They document this journey in detail and note that Morocco has pursued a strategic digital government policy as part of its ambition to become a leading industrial and economic hub in Africa. The OECD review provides a structured framework for analyzing the governance, institutional, and cultural dimensions of digital transformation in the Moroccan public sector and represents one of the most authoritative documented assessments of Morocco's digital government progress and remaining challenges available in the public record.

Subsequent international engagement has continued to support this journey. In December 2021, the World Bank approved a substantial loan to support governance reforms in Morocco under its *Public Sector Performance* program, explicitly framing digital transformation, including the interconnection of government administrations and the promotion of open data, as a foundational enabler of citizen-centric service delivery. The World Bank's communication around this program is notable for explicitly linking digitization to trust; as the institution stated in its public announcement, digitization of public administration is considered key not only to improving service delivery, particularly in remote areas, but also to strengthening trust between the state and its citizens (World Bank, 2021). This statement is significant for the present review because it shows that the trust-building rationale for e-government is not merely a scholarly hypothesis but an explicit premise full of real digital governance investment in Morocco.

### *The Digital Divide as a Structural Constraint*

Any account of e-government communication and citizen trust in Morocco must contend with documented and substantial inequalities in digital access. The Arab Barometer's (2020) cross-national survey of the digital divide across twelve Arab countries found that over three in ten respondents in Morocco reported never using the internet, which places Morocco among the more digitally divided countries surveyed, alongside Algeria, and behind only Tunisia and Egypt in terms of offline populations. Crucially, the Arab Barometer's analysis found that this divide is not randomly distributed; women, older citizens, and those with lower levels of education and income are systematically less likely to use the internet than their male, younger, more educated, and wealthier counterparts, even after controlling for other variables. A related Arab Barometer (2020) report focusing specifically on Morocco similarly found that disparities in internet usage track closely with gender, income, and educational attainment.

This documented digital divide carries direct implications for the study of e-government communication and trust; any communicative strategy delivered exclusively or primarily through digital channels will, by construction, reach a population that is skewed toward already-advantaged demographic groups, while citizens outside this population, who may have the most to gain or lose from public administration outcomes, remain comparatively unreached. The existing literature on Moroccan digital governance, including the OECD (2018) review, acknowledges digital inclusion as a policy priority, but the question of how this structural divide specifically interacts with the discursive and communicative dimensions of e-government trust-building has not been directly investigated in the verifiable literature reviewed for this article, which represents an important gap discussed further below.

### **The Ideological Dimensions of Digital Governance Discourse**

A separate strand of critical scholarship, situated more in the sociology of technology than in public administration proper, has examined the ideological assumptions embedded in technocratic discourse about digital transformation more broadly. Morozov (2013) introduced the concept of 'solutionism' to describe a recurring tendency which is visible across technology policy discourse generally, not limited to any single country. It is also used to reframe complex social and political problems as technical problems that digital tools can resolve. Morozov's critique is aimed primarily at technology commentators and Silicon Valley discourse rather than at government communication specifically. However, his central argument that solutionist framing can obscure the political character of problems by treating them as matters of technical design rather than contested governance choices offers a transferable conceptual lens for examining how government strategy documents frame digital transformation.

Applied cautiously to the Moroccan case, this lens raises a question rather than asserting a settled finding; in fact, official strategy and policy language describe digital transformation as a driver of growth, inclusion, and improved governance. This is due to following Morozov's framework, as exhibiting solutionist characteristics, but confirming this would require direct discourse-analytic examination of Moroccan policy texts that, as noted above, has not yet been conducted in the verifiable literature. This represents precisely the kind of empirical gap that the present review aims to identify rather than to fill prematurely with unsupported claims.

## **Discussion**

### **Convergences across the Literature**

Several convergent findings emerge from this review. First, the public administration literature consistently finds a positive, if conditional, relationship between e-government engagement and citizen trust (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005), but this relationship appears to depend heavily on perceived responsiveness, accountability, and transparency rather than on digital access alone. Second, the comparative literature on e-government communication models (Chadwick & May, 2003) suggests that the structural design of government digital communication, specifically whether it follows a managerial, consultative, or participatory logic, is likely to mediate how much (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005), and that the design of government digital communication, whether managerial, consultative, or participatory (Chadwick & May, 2003), likely

trust digital engagement can plausibly generate, since a managerial, one-directional communication style affords citizens little basis for the kind of relational trust that participation and accountability are theorized to build. Third, Morocco's own documented digital governance progress (OECD, 2018; World Bank, 2021) explicitly treats trust-building as a policy objective of digitization, even as independently documented digital divides (Arab Barometer, 2020) raise open questions about how evenly that objective can be achieved across the population.

### **Gaps in the Existing Literature**

This review's most significant finding may be a negative one; despite the theoretical promise of critical discourse analysis for understanding how trust is communicatively constructed by institutions (Fairclough, 1992, 2003; van Dijk, 1993), no verifiable peer-reviewed study applying CDA directly to Moroccan e-government texts including policy documents, ministry websites, or government social media communication was identified in the course of this review. This is a substantial gap given how directly relevant such an approach would be to understanding the specific language Moroccan institutions use to construct citizen trust, and how that language might foreground certain values (efficiency, modernization) while backgrounding others (accountability, participation).

A second gap concerns the lack of integration between the digital divide literature (Arab Barometer, 2020) and the e-government trust literature (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Welch et al., 2005). These two bodies of scholarship have largely developed in parallel; studies of e-government trust generally study the population that already uses digital government services, while studies of the digital divide document who is excluded from that population, but few studies bring the two together to ask how the existence of a large excluded population might itself shape the character and credibility of official trust-building communication.

Third, while the OECD (2018) review and the World Bank's (2021) public communications provide valuable documentary evidence of Morocco's policy intentions, these are institutional and policy sources rather than independent scholarly analyses, and the review found a relative lack of independent academic studies that critically analyze Moroccan e-government communication as a communicative and discursive practice in its own right, as opposed to a technical or administrative one. Future researchers seeking to fill this gap should take particular care, in light of the verification challenges encountered in assembling this review, to rely only on sources that can be directly confirmed through accessible scholarly or institutional records.

## **Conclusion**

This narrative literature review has examined the relationship between e-government communication and citizen trust, which situates Morocco's digital transformation journey within the public administration literature on e-government trust and within the critical discourse analysis tradition associated with Fairclough (1992, 2003) and van Dijk (1993). The review finds reasonably strong and consistent evidence, from the international public administration literature, that e-government engagement is associated with increased process-based trust in government, conditioned heavily on perceived responsiveness and transparency shapes how much of this trust-building potential is realized in practice.

At the same time, the review finds that Morocco's specific digital governance context, which is documented through the OECD's (2018) review and World Bank (2021) program communications, and complicated by a substantial and demographically uneven digital divide (Arab Barometer, 2020), has not yet been examined through the lens of critical discourse analysis in the verifiable scholarly literature. This represents the clearest and most actionable direction for future research; a CDA-informed study of official Moroccan e-government texts, attentive to the theoretical resources offered by Fairclough's three-dimensional model and to the general question of technological solutionism raised by Morozov (2013), could meaningfully extend the present body of knowledge. Considering the importance of the subject, research in this area should be carried out with transparency and rigorous source evaluation. The review process has highlighted the necessity of basing academic arguments exclusively on independently verifiable claims.

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