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THE POTENTIAL OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN COMBATING CORRUPTION

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Abstract:
This thesis examines the potential of digital technologies in combating corruption in public administration and social governance. Corruption weakens public trust, reduces the effectiveness of state institutions, limits fair competition, and creates unequal access to public services. Digital technologies can reduce corruption risks by increasing transparency, improving accountability, simplifying administrative procedures, strengthening public control, and enabling data-based monitoring. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how e-government systems, open data platforms, electronic procurement, artificial intelligence, blockchain, digital public services, and citizen feedback mechanisms can contribute to anti-corruption policy. The study is based on comparative and analytical methods, using international experience and conceptual approaches proposed by the UNODC, OECD, and World Bank. The findings show that digital technologies are most effective when they are integrated with legal reforms, institutional responsibility, public integrity systems, and civic participation. Technology alone cannot eliminate corruption, but it can make corrupt behavior more visible, traceable, costly, and preventable.

Keywords: corruption, digital technologies, e-government, transparency, public administration, open data, electronic procurement, accountability, artificial intelligence, public integrity.

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Corruption is one of the most serious challenges to the development of democratic governance, economic stability, and social justice. It damages the relationship between the state and citizens because it creates the impression that public decisions can be influenced by private interests rather than law, fairness, and public benefit. In many countries, corruption appears in public procurement, licensing, tax administration, public services, education, healthcare, law enforcement, and local governance. Its consequences are not limited to financial losses; it also weakens moral values, reduces trust in institutions, and discourages citizens from active participation in public life.

In the contemporary world, digital transformation has become an important direction in anti-corruption policy. Information and communication technologies make it possible to reduce unnecessary direct contact between citizens and officials, automate administrative procedures, publish public information, monitor financial operations, and detect irregularities through data analysis. UNODC emphasizes that ICT can be a useful tool for citizen participation in anti-corruption efforts, while open and accessible data can strengthen transparency in public processes. The World Bank also notes that digital tools can contribute to transparency, accountability, detection, and service delivery in the public sector.

The relevance of this topic is determined by the need to move from reactive anti-corruption measures to preventive mechanisms. Traditional approaches often focus on punishment after a corrupt act has already occurred. Digital technologies, by contrast, can help identify risk factors earlier and prevent corruption before it becomes systemic. However, the success of digital anti-corruption mechanisms depends not only on technical infrastructure, but also on legal regulation, institutional capacity, digital literacy, cybersecurity, and political will.

This thesis uses an analytical and comparative research approach. The analytical method is applied to explain the anti-corruption functions of digital technologies in public administration. The comparative method is used to interpret international practices and identify common principles that may be adapted to national governance systems. The theoretical basis of the study includes concepts of transparency, accountability, public integrity, open government, digital governance, and risk-based corruption prevention.

The research also relies on institutional analysis. Digital technologies are examined not as isolated tools, but as components of broader governance systems. This is important because electronic platforms may fail if they are introduced without clear procedures, independent oversight, reliable data, and public access. Therefore, the study evaluates digital technologies in connection with institutional reforms and civic control.

The results show that e-government systems are among the most important instruments for reducing corruption risks. When public services are provided through digital platforms, citizens can submit applications, receive documents, make payments, and monitor the status of requests without unnecessary personal contact with officials. This reduces opportunities for bribery, informal negotiation, and administrative pressure. Digital public services also create electronic records, which make decisions easier to trace and verify.

Electronic procurement has significant anti-corruption potential because public procurement is one of the areas most exposed to corruption risks. Digital procurement platforms can publish tenders, register participants, compare bids, record decisions, and provide open access to contract information. The World Bank highlights that open contracting tools can increase transparency, help detect irregularities in procurement processes, and strengthen citizen trust. When procurement data are publicly available, journalists, civil society organizations,

businesses, and oversight bodies can analyze whether competition is fair and whether public funds are used efficiently.

Open data is another powerful mechanism. When government budgets, procurement contracts, licenses, property registers, court decisions, and public spending data are published in accessible formats, corruption becomes harder to hide. Open data allows society to compare information, identify suspicious patterns, and demand explanations. However, open data must be accurate, updated, machine-readable, and understandable. If information is published only formally but cannot be analyzed, its anti-corruption value remains limited.

Artificial intelligence and data analytics expand the preventive capacity of anti-corruption systems. They can detect unusual transactions, repeated contracts with the same supplier, conflicts of interest, abnormal pricing, and suspicious networks between officials and private companies. OECD materials emphasize the growing role of analytics and artificial intelligence in supporting corruption and fraud risk assessment. These technologies do not replace investigators or auditors, but they help them focus attention on high-risk cases and use resources more effectively.

Blockchain technology can also support anti-corruption goals because it creates records that are difficult to alter without detection. It may be useful in land registries, public procurement, customs, logistics, and public finance management. If transactions are recorded transparently and securely, the possibility of falsifying documents or changing records after the fact is reduced. Nevertheless, blockchain is not a universal solution. Its effectiveness depends on the quality of data entered into the system and the legal recognition of digital records.

Citizen feedback platforms and digital complaint mechanisms strengthen public participation. Through mobile applications, online portals, and social media channels, citizens can report bribery, poor service quality, abuse of power, or

bureaucratic obstacles. Such systems increase the visibility of corruption risks and help institutions respond more quickly. For these mechanisms to be effective, citizens must be protected from retaliation, complaints must be reviewed transparently, and responsible bodies must provide feedback.

Digital technologies create new opportunities for anti-corruption policy, but they should not be understood as automatic solutions. Corruption can adapt to digital environments if systems are poorly designed or controlled by the same actors who benefit from corrupt practices. For example, an electronic procurement platform may still be manipulated through artificial competition, hidden ownership, technical specifications written for a preferred supplier, or restricted access to information. Therefore, digitalization must be accompanied by strong integrity standards, independent audit, protection of whistleblowers, and public monitoring.

Another important issue is digital inequality. If citizens do not have access to the internet, digital skills, or trust in online systems, digital public services may exclude vulnerable groups. This may create new forms of inequality and even new corruption risks through intermediaries who offer paid assistance. Therefore, anti-corruption digitalization must include digital literacy programs, user-friendly interfaces, multilingual services, and offline support mechanisms.

Cybersecurity is also essential. Public digital systems contain sensitive data about citizens, companies, finances, and administrative decisions. If these systems are not protected, they may become targets for manipulation, data theft, or political misuse. Thus, digital anti-corruption policy must balance transparency with privacy and data protection.

The effectiveness of digital technologies depends on institutional trust. If citizens believe that online complaints will be ignored or that published data will not lead to accountability, digital platforms may become symbolic rather than practical.

For this reason, technology must be connected with real consequences: investigation, correction of violations, punishment of offenders, improvement of procedures, and public reporting.

Digital technologies have significant potential in combating corruption because they increase transparency, reduce direct contact between citizens and officials, create traceable records, improve public service delivery, and support risk-based monitoring. E-government, open data, electronic procurement, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and citizen feedback platforms can make corruption more visible and preventable.

At the same time, technology alone cannot defeat corruption. Its success depends on the rule of law, institutional responsibility, ethical leadership, independent oversight, public participation, and digital literacy. The most effective approach is the integration of digital tools with broader public integrity reforms. In this sense, digital technologies should be viewed not as a replacement for anti-corruption policy, but as a strategic instrument that strengthens transparency, accountability, and trust in public administration.

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